

• *A fifth story – the birth of Jesus*

Luke presents us with a selection of stories coming from the time of Jesus' infancy. He has told us of the announcement of John's birth and the announcement of Jesus' birth, the visit of Mary to Elizabeth and the birth of John. Now there comes a fifth story. In a few verses we are told of the birth of Jesus.

1. Luke has a special interest in history

1. **Luke has a special interest in history.** We can see this partly in the way he presents stories and lets them speak for themselves, but also he emphasises the dates of certain key events. The story he is about to tell took place in the days of Caesar Augustus ^{☞1} at a time of a census when Quirinius was governor ^{☞2}. The mention of the Roman officials is Luke's way of locating the event in history.

☞1 2:1
☞2 2:2

2. God's rule of the world ensures that prophecy is fulfilled

2. **God's rule of the world ensures that prophecy is fulfilled.** Luke is specially drawing attention to the fact that Jesus is to be born in the house of David ^{☞1} in fulfilment of God's promises. The prophecy of Daniel also foretold that God's kingdom would be set up in a time of a 'fourth empire'. In Daniel's own lifetime the Babylonian empire came to an end, and the Medo-Persian empire began. After his death there would be the Greek empire. Then there would be a fourth empire; it turned out to be the Roman rule. Micah 5:2 predicted that Israel's ruler should come from Bethlehem.

☞1 1:27, 32, 69

• *Census*

Quirinius was a Roman official during AD 6–9, and there was a census in AD 6, when the emperor Augustus reduced Judea to a Roman province. But this is not the census that Luke has in mind here. Possibly Luke 2:2 should be translated 'This enrolment was **before** that made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ...'. Or if the traditional translation is right ('This enrolment was **the first...**') it must refer to something that happened in about 4 BC. There were various censuses during Augustus' rule. Tertullian said there was one in Judea in the days when a Roman official Saturninus was ruling Judea.¹ Since Saturninus' work in Judea finished in 6 BC it is likely that Quirinius his successor took over the work and the census was being completed during about 4 BC when Jesus was born. Luke seems to mean that the work of registering the citizens of the empire was at that time being extended to Judea

• *Mary brought to Jerusalem in God's plan!*

What is certain is that it was Roman rule that brought Mary to Bethlehem in fulfilment of Micah 5:5. In the midst of the 'fourth kingdom' God was setting up His kingdom!

3. Fulfilment in some surprising ways

3. **God's plan gets fulfilled in some surprising ways, often amidst sufferings and troubles.** What happened to Mary and Joseph was not pleasant. Mary was nine months pregnant. She had no choice but to go to Bethlehem ^{☞1}. It was not easy for her to travel when she was just about to give birth. When they arrive there

☞1 2:3-5

• *A difficult situation*

are hundreds of people who have also had to go to Bethlehem for the same reason at the same time. There is no room for them anywhere. There was no room for them in the local lodging. There would have been stables for the asses, camels and oxen. Finally they have to make use of one of these. Jesus was born and was allowed to sleep in a 'manger', a large feeding-place, which was (one imagines) made clean

enough for Mary to use. There were no special clothes prepared for Him. There were no relatives and friends nearby. Mary had to wrap the baby herself. The situation was obviously difficult. Jesus has to be wrapped in some pieces of cloth that happened to be available ^{□2}.

□2 2:6-7

• **God's plan moves forward amidst many troubles and tribulations**

God gets His will done in an amazing way. It gives no glory to any man or woman. Jesus was not born in a palace with admiring attendants and servants. Mary was not some beauty queen whose daily activities were reported to the world. But amidst many troubles and tribulations the plan of God was going forward. There was a kind of publicity. In a lodging place crowded with travellers everyone must have heard about the baby who had been born in the stable where the animals were kept. But it was not the kind of publicity that anyone would have wanted.

• **Surprising circumstances**

The first admirers of the new baby were shepherds! Jesus was born in a surprising country – despised Israel. He was born in surprising circumstances. Mary was not the kind of person you would expect God's Saviour to come from. She was an obscure girl living in despised Nazareth. The method which God used to introduce His Saviour was startling and unexpected. And it was announced first to shepherds of all people! Nearby in the open fields around Bethlehem were shepherds looking after their sheep. Rulers and kings were unaware of what was happening. Historians and writers were kept uninformed. No one told the Roman governor. The high-priest was not let in on the secret. The scribes and Pharisees had no idea of what was happening. But shepherds were visited by angels to be told the news! *'Has not God chosen the poor ... to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom...?'*^{□1}.

• **Startling and unexpected methods**

□1 James 2:5

4. Angels attend this highly significant occasion

4. The angels come to mark out a great occasion in God's plan. Whenever God does something highly significant, angels come to attend the occasion. It is a sign that Jesus is no ordinary baby. He is a real human being, yet He is 'the Lord' whose way John the Baptist prepares ^{□1}. He is 'Son of the Most High' ^{□2}, the 'Son of God' ^{□3}. Now the shepherds are told: He is 'a Saviour, Christ the Lord'. He is 'good news', a Saviour for everyone who will have Him.

□1 1:16, 17,76
□2 1:33
□3 1:35

Note

1. Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem 4:19.

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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