

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 2:1-7

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we will read Luke chapter 2. Today, we will read verses 1-7.

Verse 1: "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered."

In this very brief verse, Luke includes a great deal of Roman history. When was this? It was during the time of Caesar Augustus. Caesar Augustus was the first emperor of Rome. His original name was Gaius Octavius. "Caesar" was an honorific title, and "Augustus" was his imperial title. Before his reign, Rome was a republic, governed jointly by rulers and the senate. Augustus was a man of extraordinary ability and great ambition, somewhat like China's First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang. He was not satisfied with being called a magistrate, because that implied his authority would one day end. He was also not satisfied with being called a king, because a king merely ruled over human affairs.

Therefore, he consulted with the senate to find a suitable title for himself. Eventually they adopted the title "Augustus." The word "Augustus" comes from the Greek word *augur*, which refers to divination or astrology; the English word "astrology" is also derived from this root. In other words, through this title, he elevated his status—not only as one who ruled among the people, but as one who possessed a kind of divine authority, demanding worship as though he were a god. This is similar to what happened after Qin Shi Huang in China, when emperors were called "Sons of Heaven," requiring people to worship them as they worshiped heaven itself.

From Augustus onward, Rome became a dictatorship, bringing with it oppressive rule. Under such high-pressure governance, there were usually no wars within the empire; the people could not truly live at ease, yet they also could not resist. It was in this background that he ordered all the people of the world to be registered—that is, to conduct a census. Generally, the purpose of a census was twofold: conscription or taxation. It enabled the empire to control the population more effectively, to draft soldiers when needed, and to collect taxes from the people's income during times of peace.

Verse 2: “This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.”

According to Roman history, fourteen years later there was a second registration, and in both instances Quirinius was governing Syria. This decree from Caesar Augustus affected everyone under Roman rule—whether rich or poor, powerful or powerless. Everyone had to return to his own city, his ancestral home. This decree also affected Joseph and Mary, who were living in Nazareth of Galilee.

Verses 3–4: “So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David.”

Nazareth was near the Sea of Galilee, while Bethlehem lay south of Jerusalem, west of the Dead Sea. The distance between them was likely sixty to seventy miles. Because of this single decree from Caesar Augustus, Joseph and Mary were compelled to leave Nazareth and return to Judea, to the city of David—Bethlehem. On the surface, this appeared to be nothing more than the action of a tyrant seeking to control his people, issuing an order that caused massive population movement. Yet Luke shows us that behind everything stood God as the sovereign ruler.

Many times, God even uses authoritarian, despotic, and violent rulers who issue unreasonable decrees. Within such decrees, God's people may suffer hardship, yet in the end, God's will is accomplished.

Joseph was a descendant of David. By that time, both the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah had long since fallen, and the descendants of David were scattered everywhere. Because of Augustus's decree, they had to return to Bethlehem. This action was precisely the fulfillment of the prophecy spoken by the prophet Micah in Micah 5:2–4.

Micah 5:2 says, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me, The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” David was a Bethlehemite, yet the prophet Micah said that from this place One would come forth to rule in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. This was, in fact, a complete prophecy that one day Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:3, “Therefore He shall give them up, Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; Then the remnant of His brethren Shall return to the children of Israel.” When Micah wrote the book of Micah, it was about 650 years before the time when Joseph would be required to return to the city of Bethlehem. Six hundred and fifty years in advance, God allowed the prophet Micah to see beforehand what He was going to do.

Micah 5:4, “And He shall stand and feed His flock, In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth.” The prophecy of Micah was fulfilled through the decree of Caesar Augustus for the registration, which required Joseph to return to his ancestral home, Bethlehem. Under this single command, people throughout the empire were moved on a massive scale. Many had to travel at the same time, returning to their own tribes and families. Among this great migration was Joseph.

Verse 5: “To be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.”

A single command from a tyrant forced a great migration across the whole land. Joseph and Mary were also constrained by this decree and had to return to Bethlehem. They came from a poor family, and such a long journey would not have been easy for them. Unlike the wealthy and powerful, who could travel by carriage or on horseback, they most likely made the journey on foot, traveling long distances. At this point, Scripture adds a particularly striking phrase: “who was with child.” We can easily imagine the hardship of their journey.

Bethlehem is a mountain town. Standing at the foot of the hills, looking west one sees the Mediterranean Sea; looking east one sees the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is the lowest place on earth, a land entirely devoid of life—barren and lifeless. To the west, toward the Mediterranean, lie the plains that serve as Israel’s granary. After this long and arduous journey, Joseph brought his heavily pregnant wife Mary up into the hill country, to the town of Bethlehem.

Verse 6: “So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.”

They lived in Nazareth, but the prophet Micah foretold that the Messiah must be born in Bethlehem. God therefore allowed this tyrant, Augustus, to issue a decree that compelled Joseph to bring Mary on a long journey to Bethlehem. And when they arrived in Bethlehem, the time came for her to give birth.

Verse 7: “And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

The birth of a child should be a time of great joy. Every family would prepare the best conditions so that the child could be born safely and peacefully. Yet Jesus, the Savior of mankind, was born after Mary had traveled a long distance to Bethlehem, at a time of mass migration. As a result, there was not a single room available in the inn.

The word translated “inn” is the Greek word kataluma, used by Luke. In the Greek of the New Testament, there are two different words for an inn. The more common word is pandocheion, which refers to a managed inn—a place with lodging and food, a relatively comfortable establishment for travelers. In those days, travelers often brought their animals with them. The other word, kataluma, which Luke uses here, originally means an “upper room.” It refers to a simple two-level structure, with people living upstairs and animals kept downstairs.

Notice that Luke says the kataluma was unavailable—that is, the upstairs living space was already full. When Mary’s time came to give birth, they had no other choice but to stay in the lower area where the animals were kept. After Mary gave birth, verse 7 records: “she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger.” The subject of all these actions is Mary herself. Today, which mother, after giving birth, would have to do all these things by herself?

They came from a poor family. After a long journey, they arrived in a city where they had come to register, yet there was no place to receive them. When the time came for the child to be born, there was no one to help. Mary herself had to wrap the child in swaddling cloths and lay Him in a manger. And this child was the Messiah—the Son of God—the One who would save mankind from sin and bring deliverance. Yet His birth was not in a Roman palace, not in Jerusalem, the city of the Jews, not even in a home or an inn, but in the open country, in a place where animals were kept. His bed was a manger. Luke’s wording is deeply moving: “because there was no room.”

Jesus Christ’s birth was more humble than that of almost anyone else. Why? Because there was no room. Brothers and sisters, this situation is still repeated today. How many times do we share the gospel with others, only to find that in their hearts there is no place for Jesus Christ to dwell, no place for Him to be born? Yet on the other hand, He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the One who saves mankind. Those of us who have received grace and salvation, who have received the grace of Jesus Christ, should have a deep appreciation of Luke’s words. How often are our

hearts so busy, so crowded, that there seems to be no room for Jesus within us? May God help us.

Let us pray together: Lord, yes, when You came to this earth, there was no place for You. But Lord, we are willing to say to You that we, who have received grace and salvation, desire always to have a place in our hearts where You may dwell. You had no place to dwell on earth, but may every one of Your children prepare a place in our hearts for You to abide, to reign, and to lead. Bless my life today, so that in everything I do and every decision I make, it may allow You to make Your home in my heart. Thank You, We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.