



AND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ² (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. ⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-7)

What majestic beauty there lies in these opening words of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke! They have always enjoyed a power that exceeds the written word. There is a mystery that we feel in our hearts as we read with our eyes. It is so very simple, yet so powerfully exalted in meaning.

There is expressed in these opening lines the power of the Roman Caesar yielding to the birth of a child – not just any child, but the very Begotten Son of God. Even Rome was forced to perform legalities to bring Mary to Bethlehem for the Lord's birth in fulfillment of ancient prophecy. So routinely comes the remark that *'while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered!* So casually expressed, but so potent with prophetic reality.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger. This flies in the face of the false Roman doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Yes, Mary was a virgin at the time of conception, but not following the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. She was in her innocent youth at conception, and the great Angel Gabriel paid her a visit in her solitude. He was Mary's firstborn Son. Implied in this remark is the fact that Mary had more sons and offspring later. This is evidenced in more than one passage of Scripture, but I will provide one which should be sufficient:

While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. (Matthew 12:46-50)

God often comes to us when we are all alone. By this we know that God is a PERSONAL God whose will is laid out for each of us in particular ways.

Joseph, Mary's husband (but not the father of our Lord) was a carpenter by trade. Jesus grew up following the trade of a carpenter. He was manly and strong in body, soul, and Spirit. Any fellow who could chase Jewish money-changers from their tables in the Temple must have presented a fearful physical strength.

Jesus built His life upon the Law and Love of His Father. He never drifted from that Plumb Line of Truth and the Way of Love. Every detail of His life fit snugly into every other aspect of His mission just as a carpenter builds a beautiful structure of wood and timbers – *Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.* Proverbs 24:27 (KJV)

It is amazing to me the shadow of the cross fell across that Manger from the moment of His birth until His last gasp from the cross at Calvary. Having been laid in a manger of wood at His birth, the Lord built His cross of the same wood upon which He would sacrifice His lifeblood for us. So must we follow Him in bearing our crosses from Christmas to Easter and beyond. *And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* (Luke 9:23) Have you?