



THEREFORE the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

AND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar 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 Judæa, 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)

NOW when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, ² Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. (Matthew 2:1-2)

This carol, taking from *The Oxford Book of Carols*, is of unusual scope in that it covers the biblical period from Advent to Epiphany. Like most older English carols and hymns, it is intended to open the eyes of the hearer to the wonderful truths and doctrines of the Gospel. The hymn is first recorded in 1734 and later published in *Some Ancient Christmas Carols* in 1822 by Davies Gilbert. The identity of the author is lost in antiquity – perhaps written before the founding of the worlds by the Author of all Truth. It is most often sung in acapella to a variety of old English chants and tunes.

A Virgin Most Pure

A virgin most pure, as the prophets did tell,
Hath brought forth a Savior, as it hath befell,
To be our Redeemer, from death, hell and sin,
Which Adam's transgression has wrappéd us in.

Refrain:

Rejoice and be merry, set sorrow aside,
Christ Jesus, our Savior, was born on this tide.

In Bethlehem city in Judah it was
Where Joseph and Mary together did pass,
And there to be taxéd, with many one more,
For Caesar commanded the same should be so.
[Refrain]

But when they had entered the city so fair,
A number of people so mighty was there
That Joseph and Mary, whose substance was small,
Could procure in the inn no lodging at all.
[Refrain]

Then were they constrained in a stable to lie,
Where oxen and asses they used to tie;
Their lodging so simple, they held it no scorn,
But against the next morning our Savior was born.
[Refrain]

The King of glory to this world being brought,
Small store of fine linen to wrap Him was sought;
When Mary had swaddled her young Son so sweet,
Within an ox manger she laid Him to sleep.
[Refrain]

Then God sent an angel from heaven so high
To certain poor shepherds in fields where they lie,
And charged them no longer in sorrow to stay,
Because that our Savior was born on this day.
[Refrain]

Then presently after the shepherds did spy
A number of angels appear in the sky,
Who joyfully talkéd and sweetly did sing,
"To God be all glory, our heavenly King."
[Refrain]

1 A virgin most pure, as the prophets did tell, Hath brought forth a Savior, as it hath befell, To be our Redeemer, from death, hell and sin, Which Adam's transgression has wrapped us in. As the reader will observe, the carol goes even before Advent to the Prophets of old. It should be noted that the Son of God was born of a young virgin and not of a young woman as some modern English translations try to aver in clouding the biblical account of the manner in which our Lord would be born. It introduces – not only the Christ Child as the babe of Bethlehem – but also as the Redeemer spoken of by poor old Job. (Job 19:25) We are also informed of the purpose of His coming in redeeming us from the blood disease of sin inherited from our primitive parents at Eden.

2 In Bethlehem city in Judah it was Where Joseph and Mary together did pass, And there to be taxéd, with many one more, For Caesar commanded the same should be so. The account of Joseph and Mary in their travel to Bethlehem as related in our principle account from Luke 2. My first speaking experience was to recite the first twelve verses of Luke, chapter 2 at Calvary Church in Dalton, Georgia. I was scared out of my wits and choked on the 5th verse. I was seven years old, but I have not failed in reciting those verses since. It was a significant emotional event I shall never forget. We note that not only did the heavens deign to set forth a sign of the birth of Christ, but even the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, was compelled to make the prophecy

complete in his ruling that Joseph must return to Bethlehem to be registered. This carol is especially profitable in teaching the children of the Church the Gospel account of Christmas.

3 But when they had entered the city so fair, A number of people so mighty was there That Joseph and Mary, whose substance was small, Could procure in the inn no lodging at all. No room in the Inn for our Lord! Is there room in the world today for our Lord Jesus Christ? Perhaps not in the main thoroughfares, but certainly in the hearts of the meek and lowly and in the hearts of those who are compelled to diligently seek Him.

4 Then were they constrained in a stable to lie, Where oxen and asses they used to tie; Their lodging so simple, they held it no scorn, But against the next morning our Savior was born. I am humbled to realize that the humble beasts of the field had the greater blessing to be the first witnesses of the birth of our Lord. Little lambs destined to be offered as Pascal sacrifices at the Temple scampered about the manger in awe of that time-splitting mystery.

5 The King of glory to this world being brought, Small store of fine linen to wrap Him was sought; When Mary had swaddled her young Son so sweet, Within an ox manger she laid Him to sleep. The purpose of the manger was to feed the beasts of the field. A crude bed for the Incarnate Word of God upon which the Elect would feed in time. Are we better than those beasts? Not unless we have fed upon the Word of God as they the provender of hay.

6 Then God sent an angel from heaven so high To certain poor shepherds in fields where they lie, And charged them no longer in sorrow to stay, Because that our Savior was born on this day. Who were the first men outside the stable to witness the birth of our Lord – was it kings or princes; priests or scribes; wealthy men of prominence? NO! it was poor Jewish shepherds “*keeping watch over their flocks by night.*” The news came from the High Court of Heaven via the Angel of the Lord and a Heavenly Host – first to the Jew, and then to the Gentile, as we have read in the coming of the Wise Men of the East.

7 Then presently after the shepherds did spy. A number of angels appear in the sky, Who joyfully talked and sweetly did sing, "To God be all glory, our heavenly King." Even the Wise Men diverted their attention from the Star as they drew near to Jerusalem (assuming the Child would be born in the King's Palace). But our Lord did not come according to the presumptions of men, but by a Heavenly Decree sounded by a Heavenly Clarion from the Ramparts of Glory. We might learn an important lesson from those lowly shepherds. “*And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.*” (Luke 2:16-18) Once the Word was given, they hurried to the scene of the stable. Once it was made known to them with of the glorious occasion, they again wasted no time in sharing the Good News – just as we are bound to do. One more point: when the shepherds shared the news of the birth of our Lord, although they were not men of any consequence to the public, all those who heard the testimony of the shepherds wondered at their witness. When the Light of Christ enters the heart of the believer, suddenly, he has credibility and authority to speak profound truth as we see exemplified here.

Do you enjoy such authority as a believer?