

# SAVIOR, CHRIST, AND LORD

*Luke 2:1-11*

## A CENSUS ACCORDING TO PLAN

*Luke 1:1-3*

**1** Now it happened that in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus for a census to be taken of all the inhabited earth. **2** This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And everyone was going to be registered for the census, each to his own city.

The census was not a coincidence. It took place by the providence of God. God had promised that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23) but would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Caesar Augustus ruled over a vast territory. He exercised tremendous power. And yet “the king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of Yahweh; He turns it wherever He pleases.” (Proverbs 21:1). The Lord reigned over the heart and mind of Augustus to bring out His specific purpose. Did Augustus make a free choice? Yes, of course. He wasn’t a robot. But his free choice was nevertheless utterly governed by his Creator so that it was exactly what the God of the Universe wished.

At the end of His earthly life, Jesus would stand before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Pilate thought that he held Jesus’ life in his hands, but he was wrong:

**10** So Pilate said to Him, “You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?” **11** Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given you from above; for this reason, he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.” (**John 19:10–11, 2022 LSB**)

The truth of God’s sovereignty over every event and every person brought tremendous comfort and peace to the earthly church. Jesus’ apostles prayed to the Father,

**27** “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.**” (**Acts 4:27–28, 2022 LSB**)

In exactly the same way, Caesar Augustus did exactly what God’s hand and God’s purpose predestined to

occur. It could not have been otherwise.

What is the point of the predetermined plan of God? Why was Caesar Augustus like water in God's hand to order a census of the Roman empire at just that point in time? For the same reason that Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the peoples of Israel did exactly what God had determined they would do in eternity past: to magnify His glory by the salvation of sinners through His Son, Jesus Christ.

While God's purposes were determined before creation, and the promises were made through the prophets of the Old Testament, His plan of salvation began in the world with the birth of His Son. He had already promised that His Son would be born in Bethlehem.

2 “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from everlasting, From the ancient days.”  
(Micah 5:2, 2022 LSB)

Joseph and Mary were residents of Nazareth in Galilee, not Bethlehem. The Father exercised His power over Caesar Augustus, Herod, and countless others to bring them to Bethlehem.

## A JOURNEY ACCORDING TO PLAN

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and was with child.

Men were not required to return to the town of their *birth* but to the town of their *ancestry*. Joseph was descended from David and so had to return to David's city, Bethlehem. As far as Augustus was concerned, he wanted a census of the Roman world for the sake of taxation. But Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem was due to the sovereign purpose of God.

## A BIRTH ACCORDING TO PLAN

6 Now it happened that while they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger because there was no place for them in the guest room.

It's sometimes intimated that Mary was right on the verge of labor when they left Nazareth, and they barely made it to Bethlehem. According to Luke's Gospel, there was a little more time to work with. It happened that "while they were there" in Bethlehem, the days were fulfilled for her to give birth. They might have been there for weeks.

There was no room for them in the guest room, the *kataluma*, so Mary gave birth in a shelter for sheep and laid Jesus in a manger. That's a little unusual; we might think that a woman in labor would be given preference, but it was a different time. We really can't understand how primitive their lives were.

All these events took place according to plan; what WAS the plan?

## WHAT WAS THE PLAN?

The shepherds are the first to hear the plan of God.

**8** In the same region, there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terribly frightened. **10** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people. **11** For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be the sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14** "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

**The angel comes to bring good news.** "Good news" is the word *euangelizō*; we get the word evangelism from it. "Good news" in Old English was "*gód spel*," and that became "Gospel" in modern English.

**This is good news of great joy.** Joy is the experience of gladness or delight, an inner state of well-being. The Oxford English Dictionary defines joy as "a vivid emotion of pleasure arising from a sense of well-being or satisfaction; the feeling or state of being highly pleased or delighted; exultation of spirit; gladness, delight." That's wonderful all by itself, but the angel brings good news of GREAT joy, magnified joy, intensified joy. It's really the best joy anyone has ever heard. There has never been news this good, and so there has never been joy this extreme.

**This good news of great joy is for all the people.** This good news of great joy is for all the people. It isn't just for the shepherds; they are just the first ones to hear it. It's for everyone: shepherds, priests, tailors, farmers, olive growers, fishermen, men, women, children, kings, peasants, Jews, Gentiles – everyone.

**The good news of great joy for all the people is that a Savior has been born.** A Savior, not surprisingly, brings salvation and deliverance. In Scripture, spiritual salvation always means deliverance from the judgment of God. The moment Adam sinned, he was condemned by God. He was under the judgment of God from that moment on. He experience temporal judgment on earth and faced eternal judgment in hell. Part of God's temporal judgment on sinners is lifting His restraining hand and giving them the freedom to commit even more sin. Three times in Romans 1, the Scripture says that God gave men and women over to their sinful nature. He gave them over to impurity. He gave them over to dishonorable passions, which means homosexuality. And He gave them over to their unfit minds to do improper things: all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. As a result, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, violent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. Beyond all that, in spite of knowing the righteous requirement of God, that those who do such things are worthy of death, they not only do them, they give hearty approval to others to do them. Just to repeat, part of the judgment of God is giving people over to their own sinful natures so that they sin even more and earn even more judgment.

**What does the Savior save us from?** The judgment of God. Our sinful nature makes us enemies of God. When we don't know what He requires, we violate His law in ignorance. When we do know what He requires, we will violate His law in spite of the threat of His judgment.

**The Savior was born.** The Savior was born. He is a human being, conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born.

**The Savior is Christ.** The Hebrew word is Messiah. Both words mean anointed or ordained one. From the very beginning, Jesus was the one God anointed and ordained to save sinners from the judgment of God.

**Lord.** To be Lord is to be God; it's that simple. In the New Testament, "Lord" is used of God about 700 times and of Jesus about 300 times.

## BRINGING IT HOME

Jesus didn't come to be our friend or helper or sidekick or biggest fan. He came to save us. Most people don't want that to be true. We want to be ok without a Savior. We don't want to be helpless. We don't want to need salvation in the first place and resent the truth of our own guilt. We don't want there to be 'sin,' only mistakes and accidents and "I-didn't-mean-its" and "I-couldn't-help-its." But there IS sin, and we are ALL guilty. No one is "more" guilty than anyone else. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23).

What's more, Jesus didn't come to save us from other people; He came to save us from God and His judgment. People frequently say that other people are too judgmental, especially Christians. Christians just love to stand in judgment of other people. But there is no one as judgmental as God. "I don't care what you think; God understands me!" I've heard people say. Yes, He does. He understands the depth of our sin. He sees the things that we try to hide. He sees the things we pretend we didn't do or think. And He condemns every last sin that we commit. He doesn't leave anything out.

God is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11). All mankind is under His eternal judgment. Jesus came to bear the judgment of God against sinners, satisfying God's wrath and providing forgiveness and new birth for those who trust in Him. This was not contrary to the will of God, as though Jesus found a loophole that God didn't expect. It is all according to the predetermined plan of God.

So let's review. The angel says to the shepherd that he brings them good news of great joy for all the people. The good news is that a Savior has been born, and that Savior is both Christ – chosen by God to be the Savior – and Lord – God in human flesh.

This is for all people without distinction: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free people, rich and poor. This is wonderful news because all people, without distinction, are sinners under the judgment of God. Let's be clear. We are born already convicted of sin.

There is only one hope for anyone: salvation through Jesus Christ. There is good news

There is good news of great joy for all the people, but only those who actually believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and follow Him as Lord will be saved.

Believing in Jesus Christ as Savior means accepting your own helpful guilt before God and trusting that

Jesus, and only Jesus, can satisfy the wrath of God that you deserve.

Following Jesus Christ as Lord means repenting of your sin and turning to Him for eternal life.

Salvation doesn't come to us passively; we must believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, which brings about justification – we are declared right with God – regeneration – we are born again spiritually as children of God – and adoption – we are brought into God's family for the first time.