



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V22 N48 December 13, 2020

## WONDER

“The Wonder of Bethlehem”

Luke 2:1-7

### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

#### Jesus Christ

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners, and rose from the dead.

*“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”*

Hebrews 1:3



Was Jesus  
really human?

The birth narrative in Luke 2:1-7 focuses on the humanity of Jesus Christ, the God-man. After all, it tells of his birth! Luke says while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem registering to be taxed, “the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son” (vv. 6-7a)—a truly historic event that fulfilled the angel’s earlier words to Mary, “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus” (1:31).

On the humanity of Jesus, one theologian writes: “The topic of the humanity of Jesus Christ does not, in some ways, arouse quite the attention and controversy that his deity does. It seems on first glance to be something of a self-evident matter, for whatever Jesus was, he most surely must have been human” (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2:705).

This means that contrary to Docetism, which held that Jesus only *appeared* to be human, the man Jesus had a fully functioning physical body or *material* part. His body was no hollow shell; like every human body, it was made up of trillions of cells, creating different types of tissues, forming the typical collection of vital organs and their interrelated circulatory, respiratory, digestive, immune, and nervous systems. And although his conception was unique, the process of gestation that followed was identical to that experienced by every human fetus. And although his birth in Bethlehem occurred under somewhat unusual circumstances, his was nonetheless a normal delivery. The same theologian above adds: “Jesus also had a typical family tree, as is indicated by the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. He had ancestors and presumably received genes from them, just as every other human being receives genes from his or her forebears” (707). He developed physically like other humans do, nourished

by food and water. What’s more, he was subject to the same physical limitations as other men, seeing that he had the same physiology. At times he was hungry (Mt 4:2), fatigued (Jn 4:6), and needed to sleep (Mk 4:38); he felt pain, suffered, and died (Jn 19:28-30). Hear the words of the apostle John, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1Jn 1:1).

It also means that contrary to Apollinarianism, which held that Jesus had a human body but not a human soul, the man Jesus had a rational soul and mind or *immaterial* part. Another theologian writes: “We see several indications that Jesus had a human soul (or spirit). Just before his crucifixion, Jesus said, ‘Now is my soul troubled’ (John 12:27). John writes just a little later, ‘When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit’ (John 13:21). In both verses the word *troubled* represents the Greek term *tarassō*, a word that is often used of people when they are anxious or suddenly very surprised by danger. Moreover, before Jesus’ crucifixion, as he realized the suffering he would face, he said, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death’ (Matt. 26:38). So great was the sorrow he felt that it seemed as though, if it were to become any stronger, it would take his very life. Jesus had a full range of emotions. He ‘marveled’ at the faith of the centurion (Matt 8:10). He wept with sorrow at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). And he prayed with a heart full of emotion, for ‘in the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear’ (Heb. 5:7)” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 533-34).



## EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

### READ in another translation

1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. 2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. 4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. 5 He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. (NLT)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "Caesar Augustus" in v. 1.
- Underline "Quirinius" in v. 2.
- Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 4.
- Bracket "of David" in v. 4.
- Circle "house" in v. 4.
- In the margin of v. 4 write: "See 2Sa 7:11, 16."
- Box "because" indicating *reason* in vv. 4, 7.
- Circle "pledged" in v. 5.
- Underline "baby," "born," "birth," "firstborn," and "son" in vv. 6-7.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_."



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Explain the *relationship* of Luke 2:1-7 to 1:30-35.
2. Nowadays the nativity narrative has a sentimental, rather romantic, not the least bit scandalous air about it. What do you think?
3. What does the fact that Mary and Joseph traveled *together* to Bethlehem suggest to you?
4. You're Mary; how does traveling nearly 90 miles just before your first child is born strike you? Why would you do such a thing?
5. Describe the setting, the *when* and *where*, of the story.
6. How come the repeated reference to "the town of David;" wouldn't a simple "Bethlehem" do?
7. What do you make of the fact that the nativity narrative is all *setting* and *no plot*?
8. What evidence of *divine providence* do you see in the story?
9. Luke zeros in on the *humanity* of Jesus. How so?
10. **Discussion:** Talk about Luke's *purpose*. What was he trying to accomplish by telling the story Jesus' birth the way he did?

### Commentary On The Text

*First*, regarding the yuletide holiday in general, contemporary images of Christmas and today's traditions surrounding the season retain only a faint semblance of the historic event—too bad. What's more, that semblance grows dimmer with every passing celebration—again, too bad. Philip Yancey writes: "Christmas art depicts Jesus' family as icons stamped in gold foil, with a calm Mary receiving the tidings of the Annunciation as a kind of benediction. But that is not at all how Luke tells the story. Mary was 'greatly troubled' and 'afraid' at the angel's appearance, and when the angel pronounced the sublime words about the Son of the Most High whose kingdom will never end, Mary had something far more mundane on her mind: *But I'm a virgin!*"

"In a closely knit Jewish community in the first century, the news an angel brought could not have been entirely welcome. The law regarded a betrothed woman who became pregnant as an adulteress, subject to death by stoning.

"Matthew tells of Joseph magnanimously agreeing to divorce Mary in private rather than press charges, until an angel shows up to correct his perception of betrayal. Luke tells of a tremulous Mary hurrying off to the one person who could possibly understand what she was going through: her relative Elizabeth, who miraculously got pregnant in old age after another angelic annunciation. Elizabeth believes Mary and shares her joy, and yet the scene poignantly highlights the contrast between the two women: the whole countryside is talking about Elizabeth's healed womb even as Mary must hide the shame of her own miracle.

"In a few months, the birth of John the Baptist took place amid great fanfare, complete with midwives, doting relatives, and the traditional village chorus celebrating the birth of a Jewish male. Six months later, Jesus was born far from home, with no midwife, extended family, or village chorus present. A male head of household would have sufficed for the Roman census; did Joseph drag his pregnant wife along to Bethlehem in order to spare her the ignominy of childbirth in her home village?" (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, 30, 31). The nativity event was a scandal in its day. We've sanitized it and miss the point entirely.

*Second*, regarding the Christmas story in general, plot, characters, and setting are the building blocks of narrative. Put differently, something happens to someone somewhere in every story. Luke's story of the birth of Jesus told in Luke 2:1-7 is surprisingly all about *setting*. Apart from the baby Jesus, only two characters are mentioned, Joseph and Mary (vv. 4-5). And the plot is reduced to a single clause, "she gave birth to her firstborn, a son" (v. 7). Contrariwise, the first paragraph devotes three verses to the *temporal* setting and the second paragraph four verses to the *physical* setting. By the way, "physical setting is the environment in which the characters move and the action occurs. Temporal setting is the time in which action takes place, either the time of day or year or the historical era" (Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 54). Clearly,

Luke zeros in on *when* and *where* Mary gave birth to the baby Jesus. It appears that Luke is following the documentary impulse he alluded to in his introduction to his Gospel. "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (1:1-4). So what are readers to make of Luke's emphasis on historical and physical setting?

According to verses 1-3, Jesus was born *when* Caesar Augustus was emperor of Rome between 27 B.C. and A.D.14, at the time Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to register for tax purposes. According to one writer, "Roman law states that the property owner had to register for taxation in the district in which his land was situated. But there is a papyrus of A.D.104 where the prefect of Egypt ordered Egyptians to return to their home so that the census might be carried out. Since the Jews' property was the property of the fathers' estates the Romans would comply to the custom of laying claim to one's family estate in order to assess it for taxation. Every person needed to appear to be questioned so as to make a proper assessment of his property. Because of this Mary would have needed to go" (Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 15). Luke tells us this registration occurred *before* the census taken in A.D. 6 when Quirinius was governor of Syria (v. 2, see note). This would narrow the time of Jesus' birth to between 27 B.C. and A.D.6. However, we know that Jesus was born before Herod's death in 5/4 B.C., so it appears that "although the exact date of Christ's birth cannot be known, either December, 5 B.C., or January, 4 B.C. is most reasonable" (Hoehner, 27).

According to verses 4-7, Jesus was born in humble circumstances either in a stable or a cave exactly *where* the prophet predicted. Luke makes it clear that God providentially arranged for him to be born in "the town of David" because Joseph "belonged to the house and line of David" (v. 4); God did this by using the decree of a pagan king to compel Joseph and Mary to "go up" from Nazareth to Bethlehem some eight-five to ninety miles away—and that shortly before Mary delivered. After all, it was only appropriate that David's messianic descendant be born in David's city in fulfillment of the words of the prophet: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times" (Mic 5:2). Luke's emphasis on the *when* and *where* of Jesus' birth underscores its historicity. Luke is telling his readers that the birth of Jesus is no myth; it's fact, not fiction! Not only does his account stress the historicity of Jesus' birth, but it also stresses his humanity. Note the words in verse 6: "baby," "born," "birth," "first-born," and "son." Surely, Jesus was a fully human being who came to earth in the usual way.

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *Caesar Augustus* Caesar Augustus ruled the empire from 27 B.C. to A.D.14. "After he had, by political astuteness and military strength, put an end to the terrible civil wars which had raged for many years throughout the Roman world and to all resistance that was offered to him, he reigned for forty-four years as absolute monarch over the Roman Empire. Through a peaceful and mild rule he gave to the world a period of unprecedented outward calm and to his huge empire a permanent organisation [sic] which afterward facilitated the spread of Christianity" (Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, NICNT, 99-100). "It was Augustus, in fact, who first borrowed the Greek word for 'Gospel' or 'Good News' and applied it as a label for the new world order represented by his reign. The empire declared him a god and established rites of worship. His enlightened and stable regime, many believed, would last forever, a final solution to the problem of government" (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, 33). Augustus was followed by Tiberius who ruled Rome from A.D.14-37. In his fifteenth year John began preaching in the desert (Lk 3:1).

v. 1 *decree* "Just as the edict of the Persian king Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple accomplished God's plans (see 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; Isa. 44:28-45:1), so Augustus' order that a census should be taken played an important part in God's redemptive plan" (Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, NIBC, 35). It prepared the way for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem as the prophet had predicted (see Mic 5:2).

v. 2 *census* "The census was to ascertain the income, property, and wealth of the inhabitants for purposes of taxation. Since everyone was to register in his own town (v. 3), Joseph went to Bethlehem (v. 4)" (Evans, 35). We register to vote; they registered to pay taxes! "There is sufficient evidence of a census being taken periodically under the Republic and by Augustus in 28 B.C. and on subsequent occasions . . . What is meant is that censuses were taken at different times in different provinces—Augustus being the first one in history to order a census or tax assessment of the whole provincial empire" (Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 14, 15).

v. 2 *Quirinius* Luke's timing of the census is problematic since Quirinius was not governor until after Herod died and Jesus was born before Herod died. The best possible solution to the problem, which involves the meaning of the Greek word translated "first," is mentioned by many commentators. Since the word can also be translated "before" (cf. Jn 15:18), verse 2 means that this census took place "before" Quirinius was governor of Syria (Hoehner, 11-23; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC, 104). "The exact date of the census cannot be

determined with precision. However, it is reasonable to think that the census would have been after Herod came into disfavor with Augustus in 8/7 B.C. More specifically it was probably after Herod's execution of his sons Alexander and Aristobulus in 7 B.C. when there was an intense struggle for the throne by his other sons which resulted in Herod's changing his will three times before his death in the spring of 4 B.C. With such instability and such a bad state of health, it would have been an opportune time for Augustus to have had a census taken in order to assess the situation before Herod's death. The exact year of this census, which would mark the *terminus a quo* of Christ's birth, is difficult to pinpoint but it was probably taken sometime between 6 and 4 B.C." (Hoehner, 22-23). "Another possibility is that the word 'first' (v. 2, Gr. *prote*) means 'prior' or 'former' here (cf. John 15:18). Luke's meaning would then be that the census that took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem was the one Augustus made prior to the one he took when Quirinius was governor of Syria (in A.D. 6). This seems to be the best solution. All the evidence points to the birth of Jesus in late 5 or early 4 B.C (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Luke," 2020 ed., 57-58, [planbiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/luke.pdf](http://planbiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/luke.pdf)).

v. 5 *pledged* The relationship of Mary to Joseph is somewhat different from either wife or fiancée. The Greek term has been variously translated "engaged" (NASB, NRSV), "betrothed" (RSV, NEB, cf. "betrothed wife" NKJV), "espoused wife" (KJV), and "fiancée" (*The Message*). "This is an unusual way of expressing a journey made by a husband and wife. Luke may have been suggesting here what Matt 1:25 states explicitly, that the marriage had not yet been consummated, although Mary was living as a wife with Joseph (as her going to Bethlehem with him suggests)" (Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC, 107). "Even if Luke meant that Mary was now married to Joseph, the advancement of her pregnancy far beyond the time that had elapsed since their marriage would have been obvious to all in Nazareth and possibly, if not probably, would have led to harsh criticisms and insults. (That such may have been the case in the years following his birth may be in view in the critical remarks found in John 8:41). Whether Mary was married or still engaged, it is not difficult to understand why she, despite being near to giving birth, would have preferred to accompany Joseph" (Evans, 44).

v. 5 *expecting* Eugene Peterson exposes the scandal of the incarnation in contemporary terms. "He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant" (*The Message*).

v. 7 *firstborn* "Firstborn son" implies that Mary had other children (cf. Matt. 1:25; 13:55; Mark 3:31-35)" (Constable, 59).



## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

In accordance with the scriptures, Jesus, the fully human and yet divine son of Mary, was born in Bethlehem in the usual way.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



## 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## FAMILY TALK

I love a good road trip and some of my fondest family memories involve exploring Texas with kids in tow! When our children were elementary age, my husband traveled on business, so one summer we packed up and went with him every week. We listened to books all the way to our destination, and even though there was considerable grumbling and complaining as we left, every time we hit a pit stop, we had to wait for the chapter to end. Every child had a special snack and I survived drowsiness one salt-and-vinegar chip at a time. We might have only been in Austin for two days, but between the air mattresses, special pillows, stuffed animal collection, and bags filled with groceries, it looked like we were moving in for a year. I wonder if Joseph and Mary considered this trip to Bethlehem with anticipation or dread. It's not like they could load up the Suburban and watch movies the whole way. What was it like being great with child and walking or riding a donkey for the 90-mile trip? Do you think Mary and Joseph had the traditional "road trip fight?" How disappointed were they when they arrived only to find no place to stay? I bet all the hardship and stress was immediately forgotten the moment they set eyes upon their newborn Son. Jesus makes our momentary troubles worth it. He makes the struggles bearable and the tears and trials pure joy. What are you wrestling with this season? Take your struggles, your weariness and your burdens to Him, He is gentle and promises you rest (Matthew 11:28-29).

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Luke 2:1-7.

1. Why did Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem?
2. Where did Mary and Joseph stay in Bethlehem?
3. Why was Jesus born in a manger?

### What Do You Think?

Read Micah 5:1-2. Why do you think Bethlehem is important?

### What Do You Do?

Go on a family walk. How far did you go? Find Nazareth and Bethlehem on a map and see how far apart they are. How many days would it have taken you to walk there based on your family walk?

## CORE COMPETENCY: Jesus Christ

I believe Jesus Christ is fully God/fully man and died for my sins.

## MEMORY VERSE: Isaiah 9:6

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

## KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)  
*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)  
*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)  
*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)  
*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)  
*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)  
*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)  
*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)  
*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)  
*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)  
*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)  
*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)  
*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)  
*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)  
*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)

*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)

*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)

*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)

*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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