

## The Eve of the Feast for the Nativity of the Christ

Luke 2:1-14

It came to pass in those days, actually, that *two* decrees went out; although, at the time, it would seem that only one would be known to everybody, and the other only to the few.

One decree went out from *Caesar Augustus*, or the *exalted one*, as the name *Augustus* means. He was ruler of what was at the time considered *all the world*, for those parts of the world that were not part of the Roman Empire were not quite considered part of the *real world*, and they did not quite matter, and the people who lived there were not quite considered *people*, either, at least not *civilised* people, for their cultures were different from the Greek culture commonly considered the *only* culture in the Roman Empire, so that those people who were not of this culture were considered *uncultured*. They were called *barbarians*, referring to the Greek word for the barking of a dog, because they supposedly did not speak Greek, which was the common language of the civilised world in those days, which is, by the way, also the reason the New Testament was written in Greek.

The decree that went out from the one called *exalted* was that all over whom he ruled were to be registered. All who *belonged* to him, you might even say; for he who was in those days called *exalted*, he was the absolute authority, and his rule was unrestricted. And the purpose of having all registered who were under his rule was for him to do *inventory*, so to speak, to have all who owed him taxes written into the books, so as to make sure that he would receive all that was due him, or in other words: all that was his.

And a such decree going out from him who was called *exalted* would indeed attract a lot of attention. It would effect the lives of all the world; or rather, again, of all people who belonged to those parts of the world considered part of the *real world*, all who were really considered real people. As we hear it: *All went to be registered, each to his own town.*

It might seem a bit surprising, then, that outside of Holy Scripture there is no record of a such registration taking place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. But then, much happened in those days of which there is no historical record. Records from that time are generally sparse; even significant events would often not be written into history until a long time later, and not in much detail.

So it is really not all that surprising that even a significant event such as a such census would not be documented quite as minutiously as the random twitters of a ruler in our day and age.

And while little is on record with regards to the decree which had such an impact on the lives of everybody in the whole world, or rather, of everybody in those parts of the world that were *considered* part of the *real* world in those days, it is nevertheless on record how it affected one particularly little family; that *Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.* It is interesting, in fact, is it not, and almost ironic, that not only is it only from what we hear tonight that we know about a census taking place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, it is also only from what we hear tonight that most people today even know about him who was called *exalted*, who was at that time the absolute ruler of all the world, or rather, again, of those parts of the world that were *considered* part of the *real* world - only from the words so well known, that *it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus.* Otherwise, he who was called *exalted*, and who ruled all those parts of the world that were considered part of the real world, well, he is largely unknown, except to those with a particular interest in history; whereas to most people in our part of the world, at that time not considered part of the world, and not even known about, it is well known that *Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, as we hear, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child, and that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

At the time, though, it was known to only a few, and those few would at the time seem to be rather insignificant people at that, unknown to most.

And yet, to Him who is truly exalted, and the real Ruler of all the real world, they were not at all insignificant, as nobody is, in any part of the world, for what came to pass in those days was the fulfilment of the decree that went out from Him before time began, that *all the world* be written into His Book of Life, *really* all the world.

And this He made known as it came to pass in those days, although, again, only to a few, and to rather insignificant people at that, it would seem, although not to Him: *in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said unto them: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*

To these insignificant people God had found it worthwhile to have a Saviour born; and these tidings of great joy was to be for all people; for however insignificant some might seem to the world, no human being is insignificant to God, in whichever part of the world he or she may live, in which position he or she might find herself. *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be for all people.*

Even the Saviour Himself would seem but insignificant: *You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.* Not much to see here. Nevertheless, the Saviour born that day, He is *Christ the Lord.*

He is *the Christ, the Anointed One*, that is: He is the Saviour sent from God, in accordance with His promises, given ages ago to the fathers. More than that, He is *the Lord*, He is God Himself, the eternal Son of God, the Holy One of God, and the Father's Beloved from eternity, anointed and appointed Crown Prince of Heaven, Heir to all things, and to all heavenly glory.

He it is that is born unto all people, and to you, however insignificant you might seem to yourself, and however insignificant it might seem to you that you must seem to everybody else. He it is that has left His heavenly home in glory for you to spend a lifetime in this world of suffering and sorrow and sin. He it is that would make Himself one with all sinners and have Himself born into our kind and baptised into our sin to make us one with Himself in His goodness and holiness, who would bear for us sinners the fullness of suffering and sorrow, His own judgement against all sin, against all evil and impurity and ungodliness in our lives, and in our hearts and minds, that we might be set free from the power of the evil one, and free from sharing the eternal fate of the evil one, of eternal death and damnation, prepared for the devil and his angels, which would otherwise also be the eternal fate of all who joined the evil one in his rebellion against God.

For you He has come, who says in the Psalm: *I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me: "You are my Son; today have I begotten You. Ask of me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession."*

For you He has come, who is forever the exalted One, in order for you to be written into His Book of Life and belong to Him, and belong in His Kingdom of heavenly glory and eternal life.

For you He has come, and He has won you for His heavenly Kingdom. The Father has given you to Him, and He has won you for Himself, with the holy and innocent life He has lived for you in this world, the life that you owe it to God to live, and do not, in full and complete love for God, and trust, and obedience, and with the death He has suffered for you, for your failure to live that life yourself. He has come to have you written into His Book of Life.

This is the decree that went out from God in those days, and still does: *Glory be to God on High, and on earth peace, good will toward men!* So good is God that He who is Himself God from eternity has exchanged His heavenly glory and the blessed presence of the Father with the deepest humility and the most severe sufferings to take His judgement upon Himself, and away from you, and turn His good will upon you.

It came to pass in those days that this decree went out from Him who is truly the Exalted One. And He still has this decree go out. Still He has His servants proclaim it, and His Church. Still He declares you to be His own, and claims you as His own. Still He has His promise proclaimed to you, that on account of what He has done, you shall not perish and die forever in His wrath on account of what you have done, rather, you shall live and be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. And with His promise, all that He promises is given, really given, to all who hear His promise in faith, and take it to heart. So hear it, then, tonight, and take it to heart. Hear His Word of His love and what His love has done for you. Hear His promise of full forgiveness for all your sins and shortcomings, of rescue from eternal death and damnation, of eternal life with Him in His Kingdom.

Hear His Word, and take it to heart, and give Him glory. Live in the Word and worship of His salvation, in which His salvation is given to you, fully and for real. For this is the glory He seeks above all else, that His good will for you be brought to completion, so that you belong to Him, and always shall, and shall rejoice with Him in glory forever.

*Glory be to God on High, and on earth peace, good will toward men! Amen.*