

***FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA***

**What If Christ Had Not Come?**

By

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Luke 2:1-7 <sup>1</sup>Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all <sup>□</sup>the inhabited earth. <sup>2</sup>This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. <sup>4</sup>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, <sup>5</sup>in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:1-7 (NASB)

God had foretold through Isaiah the prophet the forth-coming birth of a Messianic Son through a virgin mother. And she would call His name Immanuel, which means God with us. Isaiah further prophesied that He would have the government on his shoulders and that he would sit as an everlasting King on the throne of David. His Name would be wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace, and His kingdom would be a kingdom of righteousness and justice, which would last forever.

Last Lord's Day we thought together about the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary that she was chosen of God to be that virgin mother of this Messianic Son of God. He told Mary that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and conceive in her womb this holy offspring.

When Joseph learned that his wife to be was with child he, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her for what he supposed was going to be an illegitimate birth, was going to privately break their engagement. He loved Mary and really felt bad that she had gotten herself pregnant, but he really didn't feel right about going through with their marriage under the circumstances. So as he considered in his mind what to do, how to handle this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said to him "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been <sup>□</sup>conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." <sup>22</sup>Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." Matt. 1:20-23 (NASB)

The circumstances of the birth of this most illustrious of all Persons who have ever been born are briefly given in the passage we have read this morning. Providence had arranged for the Son of God to be born in Bethlehem, as had been prophesied by Micah. It was only because a census had been ordered by Caesar Augustus to be taken of all the inhabited earth that Joseph and Mary had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered as descendants of David in the family birthplace. Augustus had no idea that he was fulfilling the plan and purpose of God for the birth of the Son of God when he issued that decree. But he was.

God's Word is always fulfilled, though it be by the means of unbelieving agents. And there can never be any doubt of the human genealogy of the Messiah seeing as how it was publicly and legally certified at the very time of his birth that he was the offspring of David as God had said he would be. These details may mean nothing to the unbelieving world that pays no mind to God's Word in the Bible, but for those of us who take scripture seriously and believe it to be the very Word of God we know that every detail of the coming of the Son of God is true to God's holy Word and a confirmation to us of its accuracy and perfect fulfillment.

Both Matthew and Luke give detailed information of the genealogy of Jesus, tracing back through David, to Abraham, even to Adam, although because of his unique conception in the womb of Mary he bypasses the imputed sin of Adam, which all men inherit.

When Queen Victoria resided at Bal moral Castle she sometimes enjoyed a walk in the district incognito. On one occasion she slipped out by a side gate, accompanied only by her faithful servant John Brown, who followed behind. Along the road she came on a flock of sheep being driven by a boy, who shouted "Keep out of the way, old woman!" The queen smiled, but said nothing. When her servant came along he informed the lad that she was the Queen. "Ump, well," said the boy, "She should dress like a queen."

When Jesus came to this earth it was in the form of a servant and he came incognito. We see in this the humble character of our God and King and yet He is the One whom all the angels of God worship, who laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the works of His hands. As Paul records for us in Colossians, 15 **And He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup>For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, <sup>20</sup>and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Col. 1:15 -20 (NASB)**

This is an amazing thing, that the Son of God should clothe Himself with human flesh and dwell among us as He did, making Himself of no reputation, humbling Himself, laying aside the garments of praise for swaddling clothes in a stable at his birth.

But his lowly birth shows forth the greatness of his humility, that He who is greatest of all emptied Himself and took the form of a bondservant, a man with a flesh and blood body that was made to be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of men who have rebelled against Him, their Creator.

He must hide Himself from the wrath of man until His mission is complete. Did you ever stop to think that only a very few people knew who He was before he was born, and even after He was born His identity was revealed only to a few more. Mary knew. Joseph knew. Elizabeth knew. No doubt Zechariah knew. But nowhere do we read that they went about telling people that the Christ was to be born to Mary. They kept these matters to themselves. And you can understand why. What do you think Herod would have done if he got word that a potential rival to his throne would be born? We know that when the wise men came looking for the one born under that star Herod wanted to know too; he said so that he could come and worship Him. But we know that was a lie. He wanted to know so that he could put him to death. And Joseph was warned to flee to Egypt after Jesus was born to evade the murderous jealousy of Herod.

Yes, Jesus came incognito because for a holy God to come among men is to become a target for Satan and all his evil brood to try and kill. This eventually was allowed to take place according to God's plan and purpose for the salvation of all whom the Father has given him. But all of his movements were timed and executed to preserve the lives of those around him and to not allow Himself to be taken until His hour had come.

When they came for him in the garden he asked them whom do you seek? <sup>5</sup>**They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said\* to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. <sup>6</sup>So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. <sup>7</sup>Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." <sup>8</sup>Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," <sup>9</sup>to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one." John 18:5-9 (NASB)**

God's protection of His people meant that Jesus in his glory had to remain hidden. When he manifested his glory on the mount of Transfiguration to Peter, James and John he told them to tell no man what they had seen until he would rise from the dead.

So we see him on that first Christmas morning, lying in a manger in a stable, without any royal apparel, with no trumpet sounding, only his mother and Joseph tending to him. Later he was relocated in a house somewhere in Bethlehem, and that is where the wise men found him by a celestial light. But they were warned in a dream not to return by the way they came, not to tell Herod where they had found him, for that would have meant death to the child and no doubt his mother too.

God still does not call men to Jesus by the open manifestation of his glory. He calls men to himself by the Word and Spirit of the Lord. The Word that became flesh in the long ago has ascended back to the glory from whence he came. He is calling men by his gospel to Himself today, to save them from their sins and give to them his gift of life. The gospel reveals the truth about who Jesus is, what he came to this earth to do and how believing in Him as Savior and Lord men are saved.

The gospel is going forth today as it has for many hundreds of years, and Christ is still being born, not in Bethlehem in a stable, but in the hearts of those who receive him as their Savior and Lord. We don't see

Him in the flesh but we can see Him in the flesh of those who trust in Him. We can see it in their devotion to Him and their love for one another.

Some years ago a group of distinguished historians amused themselves by writing a book called *If, or History Rewritten*. Among these historians were Van Loon, Maurois, Melloc, Chesterton, and Ludwig. Some of the "Ifs" which they discussed were these: If Lee had not lost the Battle of Gettysburg; If the Moors in Spain had won; If the Dutch had kept New Amsterdam; If Louis XVI had had an atom of firmness; If Booth had missed Lincoln; If Napoleon had escaped to America.

The attempt to reconstruct the past on the ground of these hypotheses and to imagine what might have been was indeed an interesting intellectual enterprise. But there are no "ifs" in history.

The greatest fact of history is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and therefore the greatest "if" the greatest possible imagination would be "IF CHRIST HAD NOT COME." Such an "if" is almost too staggering for our minds. It is like imagining the world without a sunrise, or the heavens without a sky. Yet one of the best ways to get at the value and importance of the incarnation and experience the true meaning of Christmas is to try to think of the world without Christ. Try to think of your own life without Christ. Christ says to you and me that one of the ways we ought to answer it is as He did. He said in John 15:22, <sup>22</sup>**"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. John 15:22 (NASB)**

Who can estimate the value of God's gift, when He gave to the world His only begotten Son? It is something unspeakable and incomprehensible. It passes man's understanding. Two things there are which man has no arithmetic to reckon, and no line to measure. One of these things is the extent of that man's loss who loses his own soul. The other is the extent of God's gift when he gave Christ to sinners. Sin must indeed be exceeding sinful, when the Father must needs give His only begotten Son to be the sinner's Friend! -- J. C. Ryle in Foundations of Faith. Christianity Today, Vol. 38, no. 7.

We have no excuse for our sin since Christ has come. He has come to save us, and if we be not saved, we are told by Christ that we have no excuse for our sins because He came to save us from our sins. May Christ be born in you today! Let your prayer be...O come to my heart Lord Jesus -- There is room in my heart for Thee!

And if you have done that we are to go and tell others. The world needs to hear that Jesus Christ the Savior has come to save us from our sins and that apart from him a person's soul is lost and doomed forever.

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