

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

He was born belonging. He belonged to an empire that claimed people from what is now Great Britain, to the Middle East, and across the North Coast of Africa. He was born a subject of the emperor Augustus.

He was born belonging. He was born to a people known as the children of Israel. They were all the descendants of one man and woman, Abraham and Sarah. Though political boundaries changed, this people remained the chosen people of Yahweh, the Lord.

He belonged to one line of descent within this people. His ancestor had been the great king David. Like hundreds of thousands of others he was of the royal blood of David's line. .

He belonged to a smaller family, to Mary and Joseph. He would be known as their son, they would care for him, provide for him.

He belonged to God. Certainly we all do, but with him the belonging to God was as a Son belongs to a Father.

But when angels spoke to shepherds, they announced good news of great joy to all the people. Not just to Israel, not just to the rich or the poor, not just to the especially religious. I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people, for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Outwardly all of your belongings are so different from his. The nation to which you belong could not have been imagined the night he was born. The time to which you belong is separated from his time by two thousand years. The way of living and thinking has changed far beyond my understanding. But the angels words will not be limited by any of these: To you is born this day in the city of David, A Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord.

He belongs to you. In your life in this world he belongs. His world is not just the world of camel and donkey and manger. His world is world of jet plane, and stock market, and shopping mall.

He belongs to you. His belonging is not only to Jewish people of the first century, but he belongs to Hispanics and Native Americans, and Caucasians whose ancestors were from Eastern Europe and Germany.

He belongs to you. His closest family was not just Mary and Joseph, but now includes everyone who will gather around this table this day. You are his brothers and sisters and mother, that is what he has promised.

And you belong to him. He is your Lord as angels announced, Your Savior. You belong to him more than you belong to this time or place or family or race. You belong to him.

The fragil child of Mary holds onto you now with an embrace that will not be broken by anything or anyone. Not by your weakness nor strength, not by your sin nor accomplishments, not by your living nor by your dying. Nothing in all creation shall be able to break the embrace of his love.

He belong to you, and you belong to him.

A final word, in him we belong to one another. No differences are greater than the belonging to one another we have in him. The good news of great joy is for all the people. And so we join the angels in singing, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to all.