

*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.*

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In those days a decree went out from the Emperor Augustus that all the world should be enrolled.

Augustus, first emperor of the Roman Empire, the most powerful person that part of the world had ever seen.

Augustus spoke and the whole empire obeyed – even far from Rome in a tiny village in Galilee named Nazareth people obeyed. Mary and Joseph, an engaged couple, set out together on a sixty-mile journey to go to Bethlehem, the city of Joseph's ancestor, King David - the city where Joseph and Mary would be counted by the servants of the Augustus.

Mary and Joseph were little people – never give them a moment's thought people. The history books tell about the great kings and emperors that win the wars but never mention the people in whose yards the battles were fought or whose crops were destroyed or taken by soldiers passing through. Little people whose jobs disappear when the profits need to be higher – who receive no medical benefits for their part time jobs. The emperor decreed – Mary and Joseph journeyed even though Mary was pregnant for they were little people.

While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem the time came for her to deliver her child. 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.

Mary's child would sleep his first night where cattle fed. No splinters there for the tongues of cattle and donkeys surely had worn the wooden planks smooth. But now the cattle's feast was pushed aside to make a bed for this newborn child. There was no other place for him for like his mother he was not counted very important in Bethlehem that night. But Mary did what she could – wrapped him in bands of cloth just as this night in refugee camps and homeless shelters mothers who are little people are doing what they can for their newborns.

In the fields nearby there were shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night, little people guarding their animals against the attacks of predators. Stars – the breeze – the bleating of the sheep – the crackle of a fire were suddenly interrupted by a visitor from heaven – an angel and brightness.

“Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

To you – that is what the angel said to the shepherds – “to you is born a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.” Was it only to those shepherds that this child was given or to all the little ones the earth has ever known? To you who are gathered here tonight? Yes, this Savior, Messiah, Lord is born for you.

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom God favors!” All along we might have thought it was the emperors that God has favored, and superstar athletes and movie stars and rock stars – the rich and the famous. But angels came to shepherds and in our hearing their message this night, come to us. .

“The shepherds went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. And they made known what had been told them about this child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.”

It is a shame that the Emperor Augustus could not be among us tonight. Would not he be amazed to hear his name mentioned after thousands of years. Oh, he changed the name of the eighth month to August so that his name might always be spoken but tonight we remember him not for that but because he is part of Jesus' story. We do not remember him for the good or evil he did – nor for his power and majesty or riches. His name has been spoken all around the world this night because he is part of Jesus' story.

The same will be true of us. We might like to think we will be remembered for what we do in this world – we think we can make a name for ourselves. But the truth is in eternity we will be remembered because we are part of Jesus' story. Not your accomplishments nor your failures but Jesus' love – that is what will be remembered about you for all eternity. That Jesus treasures you, gave his life for you, was raised from death for you that is what God will remember forever. God's Son, Jesus, became a little one that every little one who believes in him might have an honored place in the presence of God forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.