

Series: Christmas 2023 –

Title: The Bethlehem Candle: Love for Your Life

Text: Luke 2:1-7

The Bethlehem Candle: Love for Your Life

Introduction

I heard about a guy who went away to New York for a couple of weeks and when he came back home to the little town where he lived and he came across a stranger in the street. He asked, “Did anything happen while I was gone?”

Nothing happened?	He said, “Can’t say. Don’t think so.”
My <u>dog</u> died?!	Well, he says, <u>Duke</u> died.
Well, what happened to him?	Yeah, he did die.
Where did he get burnt horse flesh?	It was the <u>burnt horse flesh</u> he got to eating.
What?! How did the barn catch fire?	Well, when your <u>barn caught fire</u> ... most the horses didn’t get out.
From the house?! What happen to the house?	Well, the fire marshal said he thinks it was <u>sparks from the house</u> . Yeah it burned downed.
How did that happen?	Can’t say but they think it was when the <u>candles on the coffin</u> fell over and caught the drapes on fire
The coffin, what coffin?	Yeah. Your <u>mother died</u>
What happened to Mom?	Well, I think it was a heart attack when she saw your <u>wife run off with the hired man</u> .

There are times when circumstances in life begin to compound upon you and it is almost all you can handle.

These struggles, trials, and afflictions bring your spirit low. Life itself feels as though it has hit bottom.

It is in these low estates where the power of God can manifest in your life.

It is in these low estates where the presence of God can sustain you through the storm.

It is in these low estates that the Love of God can and will shine in your midst.

God desires for you to KNOW and Experience HIS Love.

Today we look at the Bethlehem candle on the second Sunday of Advent.

- Remember that Advent means arrival and we look to the Scriptures of the narrative of the Arrival of the Messiah into the world.
- This candle is called the Candle of Love.

Luke 2:1-7

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

⁴ And 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, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ 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.

Background on verse 1 and 2

- Two points some may bring up to you to challenge the narrative of Jesus birth and the validity of the Gospels
 - Two points
 - The Census
 - The Governor
 - Their claim
 - Census is dated in AD 6 – Josephus mentioned it
 - Quirinius is governor in AD 6 – Josephus
- The answer to these skeptics

The Census - both

- They are correct in that there was a census in AD 6. But it is the **SECOND** census.
- Luke mentions here that it was the **FIRST** census.
 - Luke 2:2 says that the census taken around the time Joseph and Mary went down to Bethlehem was the **FIRST** census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.
- Luke: “was therefore well aware of the second census, taken by Quirinius in AD 7, which Josephus alludes to...”
 - We know this because Luke (who lived much closer to the time that Josephus did) also quotes Gamaliel as alluding to the insurrection of Judas of Galilee “in the days of census taking” (Acts 5:37)
 - So when he says it was the first census, he knows about the one in AD 6, and that was not the first.
- The census was the new taxation process set up by Gaius Cesar Augustus Octavius. It was a regional scheduled census and taxation system that had not been in place prior.
 - Some provinces through negotiation were on extended schedules i.e. Egypt 14 years.
 - Other troublesome provinces had shorter intervals.

The Governor - twice

- Yes, Quirinius was governor in AD 6.
 - 16 BC – testifies for his relative Libo Drusus in a case which led to suicide of the accusedⁱ
 - 12 BC -History tells us that he was consul until 12BC and held it for seven months
 - 11 BC- Horary duoviri of Antioch
 - 10 BC – 6 BC - He conducted the war against the Homanadenses, governed the province of Asia as proconsul.
 - Earned the insignia of triumph
 - Had litigates run domestic provisional affairs while at warⁱⁱ
 - 7 BC – 6 BC - 1st Governorship of Syria
 - 6 BC – war is over and freed to attend to affairs in the region
 - AD 2 - AD 3 – advisor to Gaius Caesar in Armenia
 - AD 6 - AD 7 – 2nd Governorship of Syria
 - AD 21 funeral – Tacitus § 520
- Yet He served twice as governor.

- In 1784, a Latin inscription was discovered near Tivoli, located about twenty miles east of Rome.
- It is known as the Lapis Tiburtinus inscription, and according to Jack Finegan it...
 - "...contains the statement of a high Roman official that when he became governor of Syria he entered the office for the second time (Latin, *iterum*). It has even been thought that this personage might have been Quirinius..."
 - The famous Tiburtine fragment, recording parts of the career of a Roman officer whose name is lost, belongs to Sulpicius Quirinius and was probably placed on his tomb. This officer twice governed the province of Syria. Zumpt is the champion of a different view, that the fragment speaks of Sentius Saturninus, governor of Syria, 8-6 BC.
- Caesar had befriended Herod and allowed Herod to draw his own taxes...thus the wealth to build the second temple.
 - The brutality and mass murder of Herod's family by Herod's hand took him out of favor from friend to subject.
 - Judea had to be subjugated and dealt with by a stronger hand 6 BC.
 - So he ruled over the area and brought on the called-for census and taxation.

OUR LOWLY STATE IS NOT A SIGN OF THE LORD'S DISFAVOR

A Lowly Region 2:1-2

- Not even a major province. Judea and Galilee are listed in the governorship of Syria.
 - Didn't have their own designation.
 - It was seen as troublesome area by Rome.
 - There had been many revolts and so thought very poorly of.
 - When the world empire (Rome) sees you as the worst.

A Lowly Town 2:3-4

- Bethlehem
 - **Micah 5:2** *But thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*
 - "though thou be little among the thousands of Judah..."
 - out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel"
 - five miles south of Jerusalem
 - first mentioned in the Bible as the place near where Rachel passed away (Gen 35:19)
 - It is the setting where most of Ruth takes place and is the place where David was born
 - A captive region, an obscure little town, a stable ----love would come down

A Lowly Couple 2:4-5

Joseph

- A carpenter in Nazareth – "no good comes from Nazareth"
 - The Greek word for "carpenter" could also be translated as "stonemason" or "metallurgist."
 - He was a tradesman.
 - He worked hard for his family.
 - likely poor – circumstances of Jesus' birth and the minimal sacrifice they could afford when attending the temple -

- Righteous - Just man - Matt 1
- True follower of God – Faithful to the law
 - Going to the census count
 - Forty days had him dedicated at the temple
 - Attended the Passover in Jerusalem every year
- Merciful and self-sacrificing
 - could have stoned Mary at this “evidence of adultery”- (M1:19)
 - could have obtained a divorce, but he remained married to her- (M1:19)
- Obedient to God’s word
 - In not divorcing
 - In naming the child
 - In going to Egypt
 - In returning to Nazareth
- Self-controlled - he was married to Mary, but did not sleep with her until after Jesus was born- (M1:25)
- Humility doesn’t need to be noticed and admired for things that are done. It is perfectly happy to be in a supporting role.

Mary

- Pure – she remained a virgin
- Betrothed to be married – Lk. 1
 - Married stage one – this is not modern engagement – they were married
 - 1st year – married yet in preparation
- Favored by God – Lk. 1
- Potential scandal in place

A Lowly Bed 2:6-7

- A manger in a stable instead of an inn
- One humorist suggested that due to the lack of securing reservations at the inn, Mary was not happy and that was the true reason for a Silent Night
- One person suggested that others from the family may have been in Bethlehem at the same time and they chose not to let them come in and stay.
 - How sad would that be if family won’t even take you in.
- From the lowliest of places the greatest Love of all time was brought into this earth to bring peace, comfort, and salvation to all who would believe

YOUR LOWLY STATE IS NOT A SIGN OF THE LORD’S DISFAVOR

- Not your ethnicity
- Not your citizenship
- Not the state or town you are from
- Not the government that is in power
- Not your family background
- Not your means of employment
- Not your marital status
- Not the amount of money in your account
- Not what others may think of you
- Not your health status

THE LORD'S FAVOR SHINES LOVE ON YOU

His Favor Shines - **Psalm 5:12**

*For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O Lord,
You surround him with favor as with a shield.*

Noah - **Genesis 6:8**

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Abraham – **Gen. 18:3**

...and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant..."

Joseph - **Genesis 39:21**

But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

Israel - **Exodus 3:21**

I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed.

Gideon - **Judges 6:17**

So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me.

Samuel - **1 Samuel 2:26**

Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men.

David - **Acts 7:46**

David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

Daniel – **Daniel 1:9**

Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials...

Mary - **Luke 1:30**

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

Jesus - **Luke 2:52**

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Luke 2:14 – peace to those on whom His favor rests

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Luke 4:19

To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.

His Love Gives Life

His Love Is His Nature

1 John 4:8

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

His Love Is Given, Not Earned

Rom. 5:8

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

His Love Is Revealed Through His Son

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

His Love Is Offered In Salvation

Eph. 2:8

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...

His Love Sustains Us in Life

Psalms 136:23

It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever...

BUT...There was no place for Him there

Is there place in your heart for Him today?

- No matter how low you may consider yourself or your state of being...God is calling to you and is shining His favor on you to give you love, grace, and peace.
- This is the day of His Favor.

1 John 3:1

See what kind of love the Father has given (lavished on) to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Eph 1:7

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us...

ⁱ The Annals of Tacitus published in Vol. III of the Loeb Classical Library edition of Tacitus, 1931

ⁱⁱ Study in the Roman Province Galatia, W.M.Ramsay, Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 7 (1917) , pg. 272