

Good News for Christmas !

In the name of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, dear rejoicing Christians:

If you are looking for pictures of “Christmas” on the Internet, you may be disappointed. Unless you know a specific image to search for by name, you’ll get many snowy scenes of Santa, idyllic small towns getting harder to find, lots of invitations to the Hallmark Movie Channel, the Grinch who stole Christmas and a popular president whose scowling face supposedly ruined it. You’ll find plenty of TV specials – new and old, maybe lots of hope for better times, family times, other times. But it’s shocking how hard some seem to be working to avoid the Christ of Christmas completely. All the more reason for heartfelt thanks to God gathering us tonight to hear this **Good News for Christmas!**

One targeted search for Noel Coypel’s 17th Century *The Nativity* shows Mary and Joseph with Baby Jesus and angels peeking inside the stable from above. As the Apostle Peter said years later in his first epistle: **“Even angels long to look into these things.”** (1 Peter 1:12 NIV84) Indeed! So do we!

If anything, Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus was seeking a secular “Christmas” like so many today. He just wanted a headcount of his entire empire and some coin from every man. Caesar August was just doing what rulers do to fill the government coffers. He had no idea God was in charge.

Caesar August did not care what hardship he brought on the poor by his imperial decree. A struggling carpenter in Nazareth of backwater Galilee, that trouble spot of Jews – of course the man had to travel back to his ancestral home. Wife expecting, near delivery – no concern. Let them deal with that. Riding a donkey over dusty rocks on paths few could call roads today? Pathways flocked with too many people on the move all to be counted and taxed? A tiny town of Bethlehem too crowded for the couple – except for a stable stinking of manure? These were problems that would never cross the mind of an emperor in far away Rome. Consequently, Caesar August would have no **Good News for Christmas!**

When we stop to consider why God moved an empire that first Christmas, you get a glimpse of how much love was lying there in the manger for you. God was working on **Good News for Christmas!**

Centuries earlier God had promised through His prophet Micah (5:2) that a Savior would be born in Bethlehem. He would be the Deliverer from all suffering not only for the poor, not just from slavery for the oppressed, but even relief from the burden of guilt that crushes the minds and hearts of the wealthy and powerful yet today.

Bethlehem the place, but why not just have the Virgin Mary and stepfather Joseph live there? At least they would not have to travel. In another prophecy well known among the Jews, God had said that His Son would **“be called a Nazarene.”** (Matthew 2:23 EHV¹) No one knows for sure why Joseph and Mary from the southern tribe of Judah were living up north in Galilee. A good guess is that their ancestors moved there centuries earlier when they returned from captivity in Babylon.

Bethlehem and Nazareth? No one could explain how both prophecies could be true, much less think of such an impossible scenario. And what human heart could imagine moving an empire by a taxation decree? All this is our assurance that Christmas was not some happy accident like so many Christmas movies portray. This was more than families getting together, far greater than estranged grownups being reconciled to a parent who abandoned them in youth. It’s better than the gift you always wanted. Better than that BB gun to put out an eye. Even better than a Christmas puppy!

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

One common theme in secular Christmas today is selfishness, as if it's better to think of yourself first – otherwise no one will. Some are even encouraging to be naughty, not nice. All too natural to the natural-born sinner in all of us too. Meanwhile, anger and strife increase. Division in our nation and in our homes digs deeper roots of bitterness. Rulers look for ways to secure more money for themselves while subject citizens do the same – all the time neglecting the poor around us. God sees it all – all the sin, the guilt, the shame – but He looks upon the lowly and the hurting. God looks for those who cry out to Him in their need.

“And so it was that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

To make sure you can look inside with the angels, God moved an empire to bring Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. To make sure you would see a welcome and room for you, God sent the angel armies to sing, *“Gloria in excelsis Deo,”* to lowly shepherds and send them to Bethlehem. To help you know there will always be room in God's heart for you, God let His Son begin to suffer in humility *“because there was no room for them in the inn.”*

Pictures can be a wonderful blessing to imagine how it might have been. But the greatest conveyor of **Good News for Christmas!** is still the music that sings God's love into sad hearts and lonely souls. *“A Savior born for you!”* the angel said.

So let your heart be light. Whatever else is wrong, whatever love is lost, whatever heartache can't seem to heal – you have a Savior, Christ the Lord. See the Baby wrapped *“in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger”* for you. Give thanks this night that what the world refuses to know is known and loved – Thank God! – by you. Who can you tell? Who do you know is hurting? Who can you think of who is lost and without hope in this world?

Say a prayer at the manger and run like the shepherds to spread throughout your corner of the world, **Good News for Christmas!** Glad tidings of great joy! Amen.