

Nativity of Our Lord (I)/Christmas Eve, Gospel, Year A

ONE

Luke 2:1-20

Nativity of Our Lord/Christmas Eve

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

1In 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.]

DIAGNOSIS: Just a Number

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): One among Many
Mary and Joseph must have felt like just another number being forced to return to Bethlehem to be registered for taxes. The emperor couldn't have cared less about them—except for how they could benefit him. The couple would pay their obligation to the occupying government, and remain obscure and impoverished, while the empire remained strong and indifferent to their needs. This was the world into which their child would be born—where he would be just one among many small, insignificant children in a vast, uncaring empire.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): (Pre-)Occupied
The more pressing issue for Mary and Joseph was that they had to be registered in the midst of their own family crisis. Joseph couldn't possibly leave Mary in Nazareth when she was about to deliver the child. But traveling to Bethlehem would not only be an uncomfortable journey, but a dangerous one. The Roman occupation and its requisite registry were not just interfering with the child's birth, it was endangering it.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Yelling into the Void

Mary and Joseph can't have been immune to the strain of this situation. No doubt the stress of the journey, and of living in a world that demanded obedience despite its consequent hardships, took its toll on them. Perhaps it even made them question the divine mandate that now consumed their imaginations and lives. Could God really be at work through them in this dark world? Could a world that demanded such blind loyalty and servile obeisance accommodate the tender mercies of God born in this infant?

PROGNOSIS: At(one)ment

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): One with Us
Ready or not, this child did come. "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (v. 11). He was born into a world gripped by power, preoccupied with greatness; and the only witnesses to his birth were servile shepherds, who had no transferable skills, and no hope for promotion. While emperors vied for thrones and ordered minions to do their will, while inns were over-filled with nervous guests who wondered how they would pay for their lodging, this child was born in a Bethlehem stable. Powers and principalities still prevailed, citizens still reluctantly paid their taxes, and the earth continued to spin on its axis.

But this frail child, with divine power at his fingertips, grew into man who would not exploit his power, but use it to bring the world mercy. He peered into the heart of humanity and was determined to see it through. He comforted the sick and healed the powerless. He declared freedom in the midst of lock-step religious and political systems, and those who listened were transformed. He touched hearts, opened eyes, knelt in humility to serve the servile, and when the time came, he gave away his life. And his heavenly Father, proud of his only begotten Son, raised him from death. This one who was born for us, to be with

us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): One with Him
Even after his resurrection Jesus lives as one “born for us.” He establishes his throne not in palaces, but in our hearts. He rules not with a clenched fist, but with mercy and forgiveness. He kneels in lowliness that we might rise in faith. And we, who cannot draw near to God, find that God has drawn near to us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves kneeling again and again at the manger and the cross, where God loves the world fully. And we trust God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): One for the Many
But we would be remiss if we thought that our meeting Jesus at the manger (and cross) is the end of the story. Instead, trusting the one who shows us the tender compassion of our God, we step into a sometimes-heartless world, to show the world God’s heart. Like the shepherds we carry the message of Jesus, lowly though we may be, not to the halls of power, but out into the streets. There people who have feared that they might just be another number, find themselves lifted up by the good news that God has been born into the world for them. And in our compassion they discover that God cares more than they ever realized.