

NOTES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Supplemental Texts

1 Sam. Pss. 89:27; Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; Mic. 5:1-4; Matt. 2:5-6; 22:15-22; 24:14; Luke 5:23-38; John 7:40-43; Rom. 8:28-30; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20

Study Summary

After the miraculous birth of the prophet John, Luke jumps into the even more miraculous events of the birth of Jesus. The story begins with the mundane and disruptive decrees of earthly governments, but behind the movements of nations is the sovereign hand of God fulfilling His promises to Israel in bringing the Savior of the world. In this passage we come to see the lasting joy God offers us in spite of difficult and inconvenient circumstances, a joy that transcends all that we face in this suffering world for it rests in the God who is over and above it all.

Historical & Theological Background

History: Caesar Augustus is the title of the first Roman emperor: Gaius Octavius Thurinus. He ruled from 31 BC to AD 14, ending a long period of civil wars and bringing peace across the Roman Empire. While no records remain of a law from Augustus requiring a universal census, he did reform the administration of the empire and censuses were carried out in various provinces. Therefore, the decree of verse 1 may not have been a universal law, but a general administrative direction that set in motion the events of Jesus's birth as well as an accurate description of Augustus's intention that the whole empire pay taxes. The Jewish people required to obey this decree very likely saw it as a form of oppression, as can be seen in the Zealot revolts of AD 6 (Acts 5:37) who opposed a different census conducted by Rome under the governor Quirinius (it is uncertain whether this is the same Quirinius of verse 2 or a different governor with the same name).

Teaching Notes

The Discussion Primer could fit within the group's time together at different moments, depending on preference: as an opener, an activity to close with, or as a response to the initial textual investigation questions. If someone in the group has a prayer request unrelated to a thanksgiving, take time to prayer for that as a group as well, but try to remain in a thankful posture as you pray together. Use this time to encourage one another, recognizing the ways God is working in the lives of others in the group and thanking God for these evidences of grace.

DISCUSSION PRIMER

How often do we take time to thank God for his provisions and blessings in community? Take some time to do just that with your group this week. As you share evidences of grace in your life or in the lives of those around you, spend time in prayer thanking God for His faithfulness.

TEXTUAL INVESTIGATION

LUKE 2:1-7

Big Idea: The Joy of Jesus transcends inhospitable circumstances

Fallen Condition Focus: Inhospitable Circumstances

- What precipitates Joseph and Mary's travels to Bethlehem (v. 1-4)?
 - Why does Luke stress Joseph's lineage (v. 4)? (See Jer. 23:5-6; Luke 1:30-33)
 - Why is it important that Jesus be born in Bethlehem (v. 6)? (See Mic. 5:2-4; Matt. 2:5-6)
 - What are the conditions of Jesus's birth (v. 7)?
 - How do the various inconvenient circumstances of Jesus's birth fulfill the prophecies and promises of God?
- **Gospel Connection:** Read Isaiah 9:6-7. How does the rule of King Jesus invite a joyful response no matter the circumstances?

TEXTUAL INTERSECTION: How does the text intersect with our lives?

- What frustrating and inconvenient circumstances have you faced in your life? How has God worked through these circumstances for His glory and your good?
- How is God working through the challenges you are currently facing?
- Have you allowed the disruptions and obstacles of the pandemic to steal your joy? Why or why not?
- What would it look like for you to rest in the sovereignty of God in your own life? In the life of our church? Our city? The World?
- How does our world define joy? How do you define it?
- Considering the humble circumstance of Jesus's birth, how does our culture's consumeristic mindset make it difficult to maintain joy?
- What would it look like for you to remain in the joy of Jesus? (See John 15:9-12)

REPLICABLE QUESTIONS

Read **Luke 2:1-7** and explore together what the passage reveals about:

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| 1) The character and purposes of God? | 4) Our identity in Christ? |
| 2) The fallen human condition? | 5) Our obedience to Christ? |
| 3) The gospel of Jesus Christ? | 6) Our relationship to others |

TEXTUAL APPLICATION: "So, what now?"

Have each participant identify a personal take-away in light of this study. Is there . . .

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| • a command to obey? | • a beauty to behold? | • a mission to fulfill? |
| • a promise to claim? | • a truth to believe? | • an example to follow? |
| • a sin to repent of? | • a service to render? | • a person to tell? |