

# THE FIRST CHRISTMAS: THE POLITICS

## (Advent 2018)

In those days **Caesar Augustus** issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup>(This was the first census that took place while **Quirinius** was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to his own town to register. <sup>4</sup>So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup>He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. (Luke 2:1-5)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of **King Herod**, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup>and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

<sup>3</sup>When **King Herod** heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied...

<sup>7</sup>Then **Herod** called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

<sup>13</sup>When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for **Herod** is going to search for the child to kill him." <sup>14</sup>So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup>where he stayed until the death of **Herod**. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." <sup>16</sup>When **Herod** realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. <sup>17</sup>Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: <sup>18</sup>"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." (Matthew 2:1-7, 13-18)

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among the nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then we will see the Son of Man coming..." (Luke 21:25-27)

### THE EXAMINATION

- \_\_\_ 1. Caesar Augustus was the emperor of the entire Roman world
- \_\_\_ 2. Caesar Augustus is better known in history as Octavian
- \_\_\_ 3. Caesar Augustus is usually credited for initiating the *Pax Romana*
- \_\_\_ 4. Censuses were fairly common in the Roman Empire
- \_\_\_ 5. The reason(s) for the census was/were:
  - a. To gauge the success of Augustus's program to raise the marriage/birth rates
  - b. To provide correct information for the Roman taxation
  - c. To identify potential candidates for inscription into the Roman Legion
- \_\_\_ 6. Mary and Joseph were both from the tribe of Judah and therefore both were descendants of David
- \_\_\_ 7. Herod was an Edomite - a descendant of Esau
- \_\_\_ 8. Herod the Great was a close friend of Caesar Augustus

- \_\_\_ 9. Herod murdered his mother, his wife and three of his four sons
- \_\_\_ 10. Herod had all the children in Bethlehem less than two years killed

### THE EXPLANATION

#### A. Caesar Augustus

1. Born Gaius Octavius, Caesar Augustus is best known as Octavian
2. Julius Caesar, before he died, adopted him as his son
3. When Julius Caesar was killed, Octavian shared power with Marcus Lepidus and Mark Antony
4. The Roman Senate recognized him as Supreme Ruler (i.e., Caesar Augustus) in 27 BC

#### B. Quirinius

1. Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was a career politician
2. A census while he was governing Syria offers some problems

#### C. Herod the Great

1. An exceptionally gifted leader with major accomplishments
2. He was loved by Rome; generally hated by the Jews
3. During his later years, he became extremely paranoid, killing family, subjects and even babies in Bethlehem

### THE ELUCIDATION

#### A. Herod's plans came to an end; God's plans continue to occur

*"The house of Jacob will be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame, [but] the house of Esau will be stubble..." (Obadiah 18)*

#### B. Changing the dating of our calendar from to A.U.C. (ab urbe condita) to A.D. (Anno Domini)

#### C. The Herodian (a major fortress) or a Manger (a major humiliation)

#### D. The peace (Pax Romana) or the (Prince of) Peace (Luke 2:14)

*"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14)*

*"The peace of God which transcends all understanding..." (Philippians 2:7)*

#### E. Your choice: An empire in shambles or one that will stand forever