

2024 12 01/ Luke 2:1-3
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Jesus and the World

Today is the first Advent Sunday. During this season, we will visit several geographical places related to the Advent season and its spiritual meaning. Today we will talk about the first place: Rome. Symbolically, it signifies the most powerful place in the world, and spiritually, Rome represents the world that is against Jesus.

Evil Spirit knew about Jesus, and the war between angelic beings and evil spirits was constant and will be continued until set time by God. This is very clear to them, and it is far more than we can understand about the spiritual matter. When nobody knew who Jesus was, the evil spirit was the first to recognize Jesus as the Son of God (Mk 3:11, Matt 8:28-34). Jesus commanded them not to reveal who he was.

Even before Jesus was born by a virgin birth, the evil spirit copied the virgin birth far ahead of time by creating similar myths around the world. The concept of the "virgin birth" of Jesus appeared in various ancient mythologies across different cultures, including the births of figures like Horus (Egyptian), Perseus (Greek), and even some Chinese mythological figures. It is said that they were born to a virgin mother through miraculous conception. Actually, it is very different from Jesus' virgin birth.

When I studied Asian Philosophy, there was a famous professor in Korea, Kim Yong-Ok, who brought that issue to the students: "Christianity is copying ancient mythology. Why? The father has always greater authority than the child. People removed the father by creating the virgin birth to deify the baby as a god." What is your opinion? Behind those mythologies, the enemy worked. Our enemy knew Jesus would come to the world through a virgin birth and already started to play that idea in human history through mythology. If you truly want to follow God, the truth always touches our hearts. We know what is true and what is fake only through a study.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was prophesied in **Micah 5:2: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past."** This prophecy was made 700 years before Jesus was born. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. The decree of Caesar Augustus required them to travel to Bethlehem to register in their ancestral town. How far is Rome from Bethlehem? Very far. Around the Mediterranean Sea, Rome had a vast territory. After the decree was proclaimed, it took far more than one year until all the registrations were completed and the results gathered.

It is amazing to think about the prophecy! How God weaves human histories, events, time, and people and fulfills the prophecy exactly at the right place 700 years later. This way, the Roman Empire is integrated into Jesus' birth narrative in Luke's Gospel."

The decree of Caesar Augustus was to count all the world to tax the people with greater accuracy. He used the money to fund his military, for building expansion projects, and for overall imperial control. Taxation was part of a system designed to maintain the security of Pax Romana. The more

revenue the Empire could take in through taxation, the more Augustus was able to make life pleasant for the citizens of Rome (upper classes) and ensure his favorable status among the Senate. Of course, it was not the story of the occupied countries at all. Roman taxation was very heavy, almost 50% of life's earnings. People in the occupied lands suffered from poverty and sickness. They were treated as second-class citizens or non-citizens.

The way the enemy used Jesus' title before Jesus was born is also interesting. The title "Augustus" conveyed power far beyond political power. It was a title given to Octavian, which meant absolute authority over humanity and nature. Augustus was a divine title. Before Jesus was born, the world had already been established by deified Caesar Augustus. He was called the "**son of god**" and the great "**savior**" of the whole earth for bringing "**peace**" to Rome by ending the disastrous civil war by his military power. He was the savior who set all things in order. The announcement of this oppressive peace through military power was called Pax Romana. The military power was very cruel.

Interestingly, the divine Caesar's birthday was adopted as the new beginning of the year, a new era. The birthday of the god Augustus became for the whole world the beginning of good news, **gospel** (euangelion). The spirit of the world already knew to whom this title would be given. The enemy had already given the title to Caesar Augustus, the absolute power of the Roman Empire.

But God works regardless of what the enemy does. When the angel Gabriel visits Mary to tell her that she will give birth to Jesus, the child is proclaimed as the "**Son of God**" (Luke 1:35) – the same title Augustus claimed for himself. The angel said to them, "**Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace..."**" (Luke 2:10-11, 13-14 NRSV).

That language was what people must have heard and understood about Caesar Augustus. However, an absolutely different world filled with supernatural peace and joy started to open. The same language revealed the totally different reality between God and the enemy! What is the real truth about Augustus? Augustus was called a savior who brought peace to the Roman Empire through military power. The divine title Augustus was given after killing countless people in wars.

Who is Jesus? He is God who gave His life for all humanity on the cross with the aggressive love of God. Jesus endured the cross for the joy that lay before Him, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Bring your burden to Jesus; He will give you peace! Just yoke with Him; He will carry all your burdens. Jesus restored God's shalom — harmony, meaning, purpose, beauty, and wholeness — to a world suffering under the chaos of sin. The Holy Spirit lives in us as peace and shalom, and will relentlessly make us like God, little Jesus!

The enemy still has the power of the air in our age and is in constant battle against those who love God. Sundar Singh wrote an impressive story about the worldly spirit that leads to death.

In the deep Himalayan Mountains, there was a mysteriously large, beautiful flower that had a strong fragrance. Enchanted by its beauty and fragrance, passers-by approached the flower. The flower possessed a mysterious power that caused people to lose their sense of thirst and hunger. The longer people lingered around the flower, the more paralyzed they became by its strange intoxication. It caused people to fall into a deep sleep. People eventually died of hunger and thirst next to the flower while feeling no pain from their thirst or hunger at all.

What does it mean? The spirit of the world still deceives people with fake beauty and fragrance, enticing them to come to the flower. People come, they are paralyzed by the intoxicating fragrance, and they die of hunger and thirst without knowing death is coming. What is the beauty and fragrance of the symbolic Himalayan flower that entices the people of the world? **1 John 2:15-17 states, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.”** The pleasure of the world, power, and wealth; the false promises of fulfillment in life.

The world never satisfies you but deceives you. Research shows that when asked, “How much of an increase in your salary would make you happy?”, people at all income levels answered a 10% increase monthly. This means you are never satisfied with what you have, regardless of how much you earn. Happiness is not related to wealth, power or pleasure. Joy cannot be purchased or gained through material possessions. It is the deception of materialism. God calls us to come out of the world before eternal death in Rev 18:4, “Come out of her (Babylon, the world), my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”

We are living in the world. We are deeply influenced by worldly ways, even as Christians. God understands that we live on Earth and that we humans easily fall. We need to focus on God in every detail of our lives. Still, God is very joyful to watch over us and walk with us. God is like parents watching a little child as they start to walk and fall. There is only love and joy of God toward us. God calls us to be passionate lovers of Him.

Jesus wants to give you a faith that is limitless - a faith that can come only from God. Let Him flood you with love so magnificent and fulfilling that you never question it again. His love will wash away the discontentment you’ve experienced in this world. It will set you upon a foundation that cannot be ravaged by storms. If you walk in His ways, the higher ways of heaven, He will help you interpret situations rightly and give you the wisdom you need to navigate every situation. Tap into His eternal ways and allow Him to satisfy the yearning of your soul. It is a world free from the logic of cause and effect. True power, true pleasure, and true wealth are in God, who is inside you.