

SIX SCENES FROM THE TRUE CHRISTMAS:
Scene #4: Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:6-7)

OBSERVATIONS:

On Bible Study & Bible Interpretation

- People have followed culture and myth rather than what the Bible says about Jesus' birth, the circumstances surrounding His birth, the inn, and the manger (to name a few). [If we are lax here, then where else are we wrong?]
- Accuracy in Bible study is essential at every level. (The TRUTH sets us free. Not what we THINK is the truth.) 2 Tim 2:15

On Jesus' Birth

- Jesus' birth was like any other birth.
- Jesus was born in humble circumstances (but likely much different than most Christmas plays present!)
- Mary and Joseph had at least 6 children after Jesus was born. (Jesus had half-brothers & half-sisters.)

"The cultural assumptions of this text are particularly critical because the story comes to us through a long Church tradition. Most modern versions of that story are as follows: the Holy Family arrives late in the night. The local inn has its "no vacancy" sign clearly displayed. The tired couple seeks alternatives and finds none. With no other option, wearied from their journey, desperate for any shelter because of the imminent delivery, they spend the night in a stable where the child is born. But the cornerstone of this popular pageantry is flatly denied in the text of Luke. Popular tradition affirms that the child was born the night the family arrived. But in 2:4 we are told that Mary and Joseph "went up" to Bethlehem. The verse assumes their arrival. Then in verse six we are told, "And *while they were there*, the days were fulfilled for her to be delivered." Thus the text affirms a time lapse between the arrival in Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus. Mary "fulfilled her days" in Bethlehem. We can easily assume a few weeks, perhaps even a month or more. Thus the birth took place in shelter found by Joseph during those weeks. Was Joseph so totally incompetent that he could provide *nothing* by way of adequate housing after a significant number of days of searching? Was Bethlehem so hardhearted that, after days and days of intense negotiation, a man with a pregnant wife is turned out by everyone?" (Kenneth Bailey, *The Cultural Background of Luke*)

⁶ So it was, that while they were there,	Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοῦς	Indeterminate amount of time in Bethlehem before Jesus was born. • The text neither affirms nor denies the popular image of the couple arriving in Bethlehem just as the baby was about to be born. Luke simply states that the birth took place "while they were there" (v. 6). Since she had stayed three months with Elizabeth, Mary was at least three months pregnant. It is possible that they went down during her last trimester of pregnancy, when the social relationships in Nazareth would have grown more difficult. (Leifield, <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>)
the days were completed	ἐκεῖ ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι	Normal <u>pregnancy</u> process. 9 months with all of the normal circumstances of pregnancy. No indication of urgency
for her to be delivered.	τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν,	Date? – Likely around the time of the traditional "Christmas." • We may never know the exact day of Jesus' birth until we get to heaven. However, a day in late December or early January is likely. The traditional date of December 25 goes back at least as far as Hippolytus (c. 165–235 A.D.). Probably Jesus was born in the winter of 5-4 B.C. (<i>Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible</i>)
⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son,	καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον,	"she brought forth" – Normal <u>delivery</u> process. No indication that Mary had anything but normal, painful delivery. "Son" – As prophesied (Is 9:6) and promised (Luke 1:31; Mt 1:21) • <i>For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given" (Is 9:6a)</i> • <i>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. (Luke 1:31)</i> • <i>"And she will bring forth a Son" (Mt 1:21a)</i> "firstborn" – (1) legal & regal rights of firstborn; (2) born before any others; Jesus was first of several children. Jesus was the only child of Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit (and thus the Son of God). After Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph had at least 4 sons and 2 daughters. They had the same mother, but not the same father: • <i>and did not know her <u>till</u> she had brought forth her firstborn Son. (Matt 1:25a)</i> • <i>"Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His <u>brothers</u> James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His <u>sisters</u> [plural – 2 or more], are they not all with us?" (Matt 13:55-56a)</i> • <i>Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and <u>brother</u> of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His <u>sisters</u> here with us?" And they were offended at Him. (Mark 6:3)</i> • <i>Then His mother and <u>brothers</u> came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. (Luke 8:19)</i>

		• After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His <u>brothers</u>, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days. (John 2:12) • His <u>brothers</u> therefore said to Him, “Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.” (John 7:3) • For even His <u>brothers</u> did not believe in Him. (John 7:5) • But when His <u>brothers</u> had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. (John 7:10) • These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His <u>brothers</u>. (Acts 1:14) • But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's <u>brother</u>. (Gal 1:19)
and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths,	καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν	Normal <u>newborn</u> process (for example, Ezek 16:4) • [As for] your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse [you]; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. (Ezek 16:4) Alone without help? • Does this mean that Mary, having just given birth to her firstborn, now immediately with her own hands swaddled her babe? Not necessarily! No more than Herod's statement, “John I beheaded” (Luke 9:9), means that he in person had wielded the executioner's ax; and no more than Pilate's declaration, “I will therefore punish ... him” (Luke 23:16), means that he intended to do this himself. If we assume that Mary gave the directions, and Joseph (or anyone else) carried them out, we have probably done full justice to the passage. (Kistemaker, <i>Commentary on the Gospel of Luke</i>, Baker)
and laid Him in a manger,	καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ,	Humble origins – divine condescension Both “swaddling cloths” and “manger” were given as signs to the shepherds (Luke 2:12): • “And this [will] be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” Animals? – No mention of the presence of animals which would have normally used it. • Some have inserted this thought from Isaiah 1:3: “The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; [But] Israel does not know, My people do not consider.”
because there was no room for them in the inn.	διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.	No indication of a desperate search for a place to stay, or of an innkeeper (good or evil). “Room” literally the word “place” This states a fact. There is no evidence of anyone being displeased. What about “the inn” and the supposed innkeeper? • In any case no private room was available for the birth, and Mary and her child were deprived of normal comfort. • The Christmas associations of an inn and an innkeeper, however, do not reflect the language of Luke's text. Rather, κατάλυμα [kataluma] seems to refer to either some type of reception room in a private home or some type of public shelter. Since this place was full, refuge was sought elsewhere. (Bock, <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary</i>) • The Lucan text does not specify that the animal room used for the birth was a cave, but it is possible that the traditional cave site is correct and that the traditional association between Jesus' birth and a cave is accurate. The Lucan text and first-century customs do not prevent the association, but it cannot be regarded as established. (Bock, <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary</i>) • They may have stayed in a crowded room in the home of some poor relative till the birth of the baby necessitated their vacating it for privacy and more space. Any such reconstruction is, however, merely speculative. (Leifield, <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>) • Many Palestinian homes consisted of one large room that contained an elevated section and a lower section. The elevated section was the family's living quarters, while the lower section housed the family's animals. Usually a manger, in the form of a masonry box or a stone niche, was located in the lower section. Mangers were also put in cave stables or other stalls. The manger referred to in our text-verse may have been in a cave stable or other shelter. (Freeman, <i>Manners and Customs of the Bible</i>) • In addition to referring to a public inn or lodging place, the same Greek word, <i>kataluma</i>, used in our text-verse, at times refers simply to a guest room in a private home (Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11). The reference in Luke 10:34 is to a <i>pandocheion</i> or a public lodging-place, clearly a public place where the wounded could be fed and cared for by the innkeeper. (Freeman, <i>Manners and Customs of the Bible</i>) • The meaning may be, not that there was absolutely no room for Joseph and Mary there, but that the place was too crowded for a <i>birth</i>, and that therefore they retired to a stall or cave, where there was room for the mother, and a crib for the babe (vide ch. 22:11). (A. B. Bruce, <i>The Synoptic Gospels</i>)

Phil 2:5-7 ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.