

## THE ARRIVAL OF THE ALMIGHTY

### Luke 2:1-7

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. <sup>3</sup> So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped Him snugly in cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough—because there was no room for them at the lodging place."

### INTRODUCTION

Calculations based upon the latest deep-field photographs by the Hubble Telescope that orbits our Earth suggest there may be far more than 200 billion galaxies, as astronomers had believed. The Universe may be home to two trillion galaxies! The Milky Way Galaxy in which we live contains over 200 billion stars. It's so vast that even if we could travel at the speed of light, at over 186,000 miles per second and nearly 6 trillion miles per year, it would take us nearly 100,000 years to cross the Milky Way! How awesome is the mind of our Creator to plan and to bring into existence all the physical bodies and laws of physics just to make the Milky Way Galaxy a reality? **Isaiah 40:13, 25-26** (NIV) proclaims, "Who can fathom the Spirit [mind] of the LORD, or instruct the LORD as His counselor? <sup>25</sup> To whom will you compare Me? Or who is My equal?" says the Holy One. <sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."

It's staggering to try to conceive of our Maker's limitless creative power! But do you have any idea what was the most difficult plan for Almighty God to execute? It was not creating the Universe and everything in it. Nor was it bringing into existence billions of people on the Earth who are made "in His own image" (**Genesis 1:27**). The most difficult of God's plans is one that put His love to an excruciating test: approving the sacrificial mutilation of the Son of God as the only remedy that could save any of the human race from everlasting destruction! How long did God wait to approve this plan after our first ancestors, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God's perfect love toward them and His magnificent plans for them? Our Creator knew His Son's perfect sacrifice would be necessary to save us from everlasting ruin, even *before* He created our world, as **I Peter 1:18-20** (NCV) discloses: "You know that in the past you were living in a worthless way, a way passed down from the people who lived before you. But you were saved from that useless life. You were bought, not with something that ruins like gold or silver, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, who was like a pure and perfect lamb. <sup>20</sup> Christ was chosen before the world was made, but He was shown to the world in these last times for your sake."

There were countless details to arrange or fall into place before the stage was finally set for the arrival of the Son of God on Earth. **Luke 1** presents proof God's plans and preparations for the past 4,000 years were ready to go into effect. First, John's miraculous conception and birth to Elizabeth, a godly woman past her childbearing years. The angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah, John's father, their son would "'go before Him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people'" (**vss. 11-19**). Secondly, Gabriel announced to a young virgin named Mary, "'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.'" "'And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end'" (**vss. 33-35**). **Luke 2:1-7** then describes the surprisingly humble Arrival of the Almighty on Earth that first Christmas Eve. **Jesus**, as the Christ (Messiah), then carries out to perfection God's gracious plan to save us from sin and from ourselves.

But all of God's efforts to provide us with a plan for our personal and eternal salvation from sin and sin's consequences would be for nothing if the Lord did not plan as carefully to bring us into His saving embrace. Can you not trace how God has been actively at work throughout your life, orchestrating the many details that needed to come together in the right timing or right way before you awakened to your need of **Jesus** as your personal Savior? We can also recognize how well God delivers on His promises to guide and bless us through life's many important decisions, when we are willing by faith to leave these matters in God's hands. **Isaiah 25:1** (CSB) testifies: "LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you. I will praise your name, for you have accomplished wonders, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness."

Are you a good long-range planner? Or are you more like the person who admits how easily he or she gets distracted and seems to accomplish little, despite the best plans and intentions? This person describes a typical day. "I decide to water my garden. As I turn on the hose in the driveway, I look over at my car and decide my car needs washing. As I start toward the garage, I notice that there is mail on the porch table that I brought up from the mail box earlier. I decide to go through the mail before I wash the car. I lay my car keys down on the table, put the junk mail in the rubbish bin under the table, and notice that the bin is full. So, I decide to put the bills back on the table and take out the rubbish first. But then I think, since I'm going to be near the mailbox when I take out the garbage anyway, I may as well pay the bills first. I take my checkbook off the table, and see that there is only one check left. My extra checks are in my desk in the study, so I go inside the house to my desk where I find the can of coke that I had been drinking. I'm going to look for my checks, but first I need to push the coke aside so that I don't accidentally knock it over. I see that the coke is getting warm, and I decide I should put it in the refrigerator to keep it cold.

"As I head toward the kitchen with the coke, a vase of flowers on the counter catches my eye: they need to be watered. I place the coke down on the work surface, and I discover my reading glasses that I've been searching for all morning. I decide I better put them back on my desk, but first I'm going to water the flowers. I set the glasses back down on the work top, fill a container with water and suddenly I spot the TV remote. Someone has left it on the kitchen table. I realize that tonight when we go to watch TV, I will be looking for the remote, but I won't remember that it's on the kitchen table, so I decide to put it back in the lounge where it belongs, but first I'll water the flowers. I pour some water on the flowers, but quite a bit of it spills on the floor. So, I set the remote back down on the table, get some towels and wipe up the spill. Then, I head down the hall trying to remember what I was planning to do. At the end of the day: The car isn't washed. The bills aren't paid. There is a warm can of coke sitting on the work surface. There is still only one check in my checkbook. I can't find the TV remote. I can't find my glasses and I don't remember what I did with the car keys. Then, when I try to figure out why nothing got done today, I'm really baffled because I know I was busy all day long, and I'm really tired. I realize this is a serious problem, and I'll try to get some help for it, but first I'll check my e-mail. PS— I just remembered, I left the hose running. . . ."

## **I. AN ALMIGHTY ARRIVAL**

He was born just over 2,000 years ago. He is not remembered for his natural father but for being the son of a "divine" father worshiped by millions, of whom he was the rightful heir. His public life took center stage while he was in his thirties. Soon, he began to be acclaimed as the "revered" or "exalted" one. An ancient inscription describes him as, "son of a god, . . . the benefactor and savior of the whole world." The calendar was changed to celebrate his importance in the history of the world. His birth was proclaimed as "glad tidings" for all "the world." He established the greatest reign of peace the world had yet seen, causing civilization to flourish wherever his wise laws and principles were followed.

Of whom am I speaking? The man known today as Augustus Caesar (63 B. C. - 14 A. D.). Julius Caesar, his great uncle, gave him the name Octavian and made him his heir and adopted son by his will. Seeking to avoid the power-grabbing mistakes that led to Caesar's assassination in 44 B. C., Octavian carefully portrayed himself as serving the good of the people and the Roman Republic. In January of 27 BC, he

even humbly resigned his powers after defeating all warring factions within the Empire. The grateful Roman Senate promptly restored his full powers and then bestowed upon him the title "Augustus," the "revered" or "exalted" one. The Senate also renamed a month of the Calendar for him, August, even as July had been renamed for Julius Caesar. But Octavian was careful not to refer to himself by the title "Augustus" at any time in public, simply calling himself "First Citizen." During his 40-year reign, he nearly doubled the size of the Empire, adding territories in Europe and Asia Minor and securing alliances that gave him effective rule from Britain to India. This established what is known historically as the *Pax Romana*, a 200-year period of unprecedented peace and economic prosperity throughout the Empire. Law-abiding citizens were relatively secure, and the government generally maintained law, order, and stability.

At the time of **Jesus'** birth in a small country on the eastern fringe of the Roman Empire, most of the 70 million people within the Empire officially recognized Augustus as a "son of a god," and the one who had brought peace to their often troubled, war-torn lands. This is why they celebrated his birthday each year as a time of "glad tidings" for the almighty arrival of "the savior of the whole world." They thought anyone claiming to be a god or a king would need to exceed Augustus in power, grandeur, and authority; and in his ability to bless people with peace and prosperity. Does this describe **Jesus'** at His birth? Yes, and no!

## II. THE ARRIVAL OF THE ALMIGHTY

There's a story of an arrogant, prideful lion of Africa who wanted to remind other the animals how great he was. He went to the gazelle and roared, "Who is the king of the jungle?" The gazelle answered with trembling, "Why, you are, mighty lion." He went next to the giraffe, roaring, "Who is the king of the jungle?" Fearful, the giraffe answered, "Why, you are, mighty lion." Next, he went to a gorilla and roared, "Who is the king of the jungle?" The powerful gorilla was so startled he meekly answered, "Why, you are mighty lion." Finally, he went to the elephant and fiercely roared, "Who is the king of the jungle?" The elephant reached out and grabbed the lion with his trunk, slammed the lion to the ground several times, and flung him at last into a large boulder. After the lion lay there a few moments, quite crumpled, he said to the elephant, "Just because you didn't know the answer, you didn't have to get that upset."

"The Lion from the tribe of Judah," as **Jesus** is called in **Revelation 5:5**, will appear as one who "cried out with a loud voice like a roaring lion" (**Revelation 10:3**) at His Second Coming to Earth as the "King of kings and Lord of Lords" (**Revelation 19:16**). But when He Returns to Earth He comes as the Judge who will put down all evil. At His First Coming, He assumed the humble role of the harmless "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (**John 1:29**) by the sacrifice of Himself, receiving upon Himself the punishment our sins deserve in the eyes of our Holy and Perfect Creator (**Isaiah 53:5-10**). Yet, despite all outward appearances of Him being nothing more than a peasant child, Jesus still arrived on earth as a King!

"In those days," Luke tells us, "a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered.<sup>2</sup> This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria." Augustus seated on his throne, possessing more wealth and power than anyone else then on earth, still yielded to the direction of the one who is truly Almighty. As **Proverbs 21:1** reminds us, "A king's heart is like streams of water in the LORD's hand: He directs it wherever He chooses." As an excellent administrator, Augustus instituted a census be taken of the Roman Empire every 14 years to provide accurate numbers for the taxation and military conscription he could expect from each Province. Israel was included in the Roman province of Syria. **Acts 5:37** mentions the second "census" that historians know with certainty took place in A. D. 6. This means God moved upon Augustus to issue the decree for his first census in 8 B. C., precisely when God ordained the Messiah to be born in "Bethlehem," fulfilling **Micah 5:2**.

<sup>3</sup> So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was

pregnant." Another peasant girl who'd gotten pregnant out-of-wedlock, clinging to side of the man who agreed to marry her, though pregnant by another, while he went to Bethlehem, a poor town of but 300 residents, which allowed Mary to escape the hostility of the people of Nazareth for her shamelessness; this is how Joseph and Mary appeared in the eyes of the world. Not very fitting parents, outwardly, for the Son of God. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped Him snugly in cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough—because there was no room for them at the lodging place." Bethlehem was too small to have an "inn." Luke used a different Greek word than the one for the "inn" where the Good Samaritan took the wounded traveler in **Luke 10:34**. The word in **2:7** means "guest room." Joseph undoubtedly had relatives in Bethlehem, but the census had filled up the "guest room" in the homes of his family or close friends, so they settled for manger safely housing a family's animals, off to the side of the main room of a typical peasant's home in Biblical times. The first earthly throne of the Son of God, heir to the King David's crown, was the "feeding trough" of a manger.

## CONCLUSION

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) rose from the ranks of African-Americans who were born into slavery. As an educator, author, orator, and advisor to Presidents of the United States, Washington became the dominant leader of the African-American community from 1890 to 1915. He mobilized a nationwide coalition of middle-class Blacks, church leaders, and white philanthropists and politicians, with a long-term goal of building the Black community's economic strength and pride by a focus on self-help. He believed education and promoting the entrepreneurship of forming and owning their own businesses, would do more in his time to elevate the lives of African-Americans than trying to force integration in the South. At the same time, he secretly funneled money to the NAACP to challenge segregation laws on key issues.

After working in salt furnaces and coal mines in West Virginia for several years to earn money for school, young Booker began to love and understand the Bible while at Hampton College (now Hampton University, near Norfolk, VA). He then spent a year at Wayland Seminary, where the "high Christian character of" a "Dr. King" made a strong impression on him. At age 25, he became the first leader of the Tuskegee Institute of Alabama, located about 25 miles east of Montgomery, which he and the first students then built. Men and women had to learn trades as well as academics. He also sought to build Christian character in the students by attendance at Sunday School and church services, participation in the YMCA and missionary organizations, Friday evening prayer and worship meetings that became the soul of the college, and an annual January revival. The 150 or so students embracing Christ as Savior each year were asked to sign a pledge card stating, "I thank God that I was led by the Spirit to accept Christ. I am glad I am a Christian, and I promise: 1. That, as soon as I can, I will join the church of my choice, and by word and deed help to build up the kingdom of Christ on earth. 2. That I will, daily, think of, or read some portion of the Bible, and will pray, in private each day of my life, closing each prayer with this verse: 'Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole; I want Thee forever to live in my soul; Break down every idol, cast out every foe: Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.'—Amen."

In his lifetime, Washington helped raise funds to establish and operate hundreds of small community schools and institutions of higher education for African-Americans. His name also carried more respect than that of most non-African-Americans in this country. Yet, one incident from his early years as President of the Tuskegee Institute reveals the depth of his Christ-like humility. Booker T. Washington understood better than most people of the past 2,000 years how much **Jesus** turned upside down the world's values about who and what is most important in life. This gave him a confidence in his worth in God's eyes that no one could deny him. He understood that no one is truly a slave who serves Christ as master, and no one is truly free who is mastered by any sin, as taught by **John 8:31-34, 36** (NCV): "So Jesus said to the Jews who believed in Him, 'If you continue to obey My teaching, you are truly My followers. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' <sup>33</sup> They answered, 'We are Abraham's children, and

we have never been anyone's slaves. So why do you say we will be free?' <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, everyone who lives in sin is a slave to sin. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son makes you free, you will be truly free.'

As Booker T. Washington walked in an exclusive section of town one day, he was stopped by a wealthy white woman. Not knowing him by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Having no pressing business at the moment, he smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she'd requested. When finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. If Christ had not mastered his pride, he would have reacted far differently.

A schoolgirl in the home recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady. Next morning, this greatly embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute. She apologized profusely for demeaning him. "It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend." She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. She soon showed her admiration for his demonstration of Christ's character by persuading wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute. To this day, Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University, seeks to elevate the lives of African-Americans by training them to elevate themselves. To the extent it seeks to build Christian character in the students that they might be liberated from slavery to sin, Tuskegee University most remains true to the vision of Booker T. Washington.