

# Secrets of the Christmas Story in Luke

William Loader



## Stories with Secret Meanings

Most people do not know that our Christmas stories are different from other stories about Jesus, what he said and did. We have two sets of Christmas stories, one in Matthew and one in Luke, and they are different except for a few details.

In those ancient times people loved to make up stories, legends, about famous people, especially how they were born. They told stories about famous Roman emperors and people like that. Often the stories they made matched something that happened to the person when they grew up.

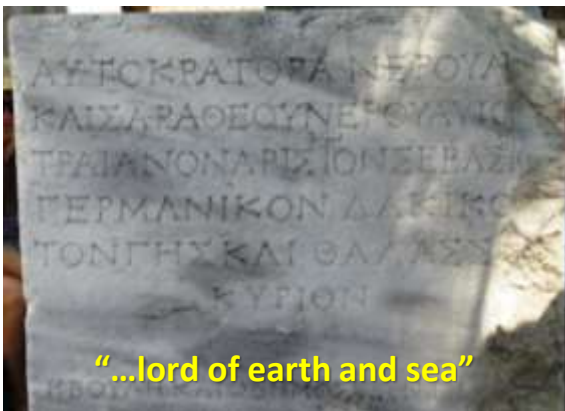
So they told a story about Moses as a baby being put in a floating basket and left to float on a river because the ruler of Egypt wanted to kill all the baby boys born among the people of Israel who were living in Egypt at the time. He was rescued. When people heard the story, they recognised its meaning. It pointed to what Moses did as a man when he grew up. He rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, sometimes called the land of the river.



## Luke's Story and the Roman Empire

Let me tell you about the secret meanings in Luke's story of how Jesus was born. Luke gives us some clues because he introduces his story by referring to Augustus, the ruler of the Roman empire. He also refers to a census which the Roman government was carrying out in the land to find out how many people lived there and so how much tax they should be paying. The emperor was called "The Son of God" and "Lord" and "Saviour" or "Liberator". People praised him for bringing "peace" to their world by making the roads safe against attacks by bandits and the sea routes safe from attacks by pirates. They claimed he was "good news".

Rome had a big army. It was alright if you did everything that the Romans wanted, but you were in trouble if you did not. They could be very cruel and mean and make people pay very high taxes. And if they thought you were against them they might even kill you by hanging you on a cross to die a terrible death. Many people where Jesus grew up were poor.



The Romans, themselves, thought they were great and used to erect stone monuments in cities which often read something like this: "We praise our emperor, the Lord and Son of God. He is good news because he has brought peace to the world".



When Luke created his story about Jesus, he must have had all this mind. He must have also been thinking of the kind of ruler they really wanted, someone like King David, who was a shepherd in Bethlehem who had looked after sheep and cared for people in the same way.

## Reading Luke's Story for Clues

So let's read Luke's Christmas story with these clues in mind. Here is the story. As you read it, listen for the hidden clues in the light of what I have written above. You can then check your findings with my brief comments which follow the story. Here is the story:

*Joseph travelled down from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David, called Bethlehem, because he belonged to the family that had David as its ancestor. He went there to register for the census along with Mary who was very pregnant.*

*When they got there it was time for her baby to be born. So she had her first baby, a boy, and wrapped him in cloths and put him down to sleep in an animals' feeder-box, because there was no room in the overnight shelter.*

*Now there were shepherds out in the countryside looking after their sheep that night. And an angel of the lord appeared to them and God's glory lit up where they were. They were very scared and the angel said to them: "Don't be scared. Look, I have good news for you which should make you and all your people very happy, because today in David's city someone has been born who will be your saviour or liberator, your anointed king (like David) and 'Lord'. And this is the sign to prove it: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in an animals' feeder-box. Then suddenly a whole crowd of other angels joined this one and they sang: "Glory to God in the highest and peace in the land for all people who please him".*

*So when the angels went away the shepherd said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem to see what the Lord has told us had happened." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the feeder-box. When they saw it they reported what had been told them about the child and everyone who heard what the shepherds reported was amazed. And Mary noted everything that happened and thought about it a lot. (Luke 2:4-19)*



# Clues in Luke's Story 1

Luke begins his story. Mary and Joseph have to go to register their details for the *Roman census*. (Rome is in charge!).

They go to *Bethlehem* (so he's just like .....)

Mary gives birth to a baby, wraps him in cloths, and puts him to rest in an animals' feeder-box.

(The Son of God, the emperor, sits on a throne and lives in a palace.

This Son of God lies in a feeder-box! What a contrast!)

There was no room in the overnight shelter.

(The emperor and his soldiers would not stand for that. They would take over people's houses and make room for themselves.)



Luke wants us to remember that Jesus' approach was not to make himself great, but to care about people and be humble. There was a very big difference between the kingdom or empire of Rome and the kingdom or empire of God which Jesus talked about.





## Clues in Luke's Story 2

There were shepherds looking after their flocks. This is reminding us of David, who was a much better king.

An angel appears. This was a favourite way in story telling of telling people that something important is about to be said.

The angel announces “good news”, one of Rome’s favourite terms to describe their rule. Their “good news” was very different from the “good news” which the poor people of Jesus’ community wanted.

The angels praise God (“Glory to God in the highest”) and sing about “peace”, another one of Rome’s favourite terms. “Peace” by killing all your opponents and peace by bringing people together in harmony are two very different things..



Off they went and found the baby and his parents. Luke says that Mary thought about this a lot, because he wants the people of his time also to think about this story a lot and understand its secrets.

Luke’s Christmas story is not really about a baby at all when you see the clues. It was a way of talking about Jesus and what he said and did. He is the true Saviour and Lord. He taught us that the true way to peace is never to hate, but to care about other people, the way God cares about us. That is true good news for everyone. In God’s kingdom/empire love rules and that helps set people free from being poor and being treated badly.