

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,  
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,  
Within my heart that it may be  
A quiet chamber kept for Thee. *Amen.*  
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #123, v. 13)

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**I. And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)**

Caesar Augustus was powerful. He decreed that everyone needed to return to their hometowns to be registered, so they could be taxed. And everyone obeyed. One man spoke, and the whole Roman world started moving. No one in our country has that kind of power, and we are thankful for that! But Caesar was a man under authority, whether he knew it or not. He was an instrument of One much higher and more powerful than he. Caesar was focused on taxes and revenue, but his decree set events in motion that irreversibly changed the course of human history, events that have led to our gathering together in this place on this day.

Caesar couldn't have known and wouldn't have cared that his decree caused a poor man from Nazareth and his pregnant fiancé to set off on the several day journey to Bethlehem where Joseph's family was from. Many passed by them along the way. Probably few noticed them. Maybe some felt compassion for the pregnant mother. They did not know who she carried in her womb. Mary and Joseph and perhaps a few others knew, but they didn't *really* know. How could they?

How could anyone comprehend that God had become incarnate through Mary? How could they guess that the eternal Son of God now had a human brain and heart and a soul? How could they understand what He came to do for the world of sinners? This is what God brought to pass "*in those days.*" Caesar's part in it was small. This was God's plan. He chose this point in history. He chose this time. Galatians 4:4-5: "*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*"

Hymn: #127.1-4 – "I Am So Glad When Christmas Comes"

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**II. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)**

When the angel Gabriel visited the virgin Mary, he told her that she would conceive and bear a son. *"And," he said, "the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David" (Luk. 1:32).* So it was fitting that Jesus was born in Bethlehem where David had been born 1,000 years earlier. Jesus was the son of David through the blood line of Mary and through the legal line of Joseph. But as great as David was, Jesus would prove to be much greater.

Jesus was not just the child of Mary and a descendant of David. He is true God, begotten of His Father from eternity. He put David in his position as king to prepare for the time when many years later He would take on flesh through David's line. Yes, Jesus was David's son, but He was also David's Lord (Mat. 22:41-45).

This is just how the prophet Micah said it would be some 700 years before the birth of Christ: *"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (5:2).* Jesus would be *"ruler in Israel,"* but not of a temporary kingdom on earth. As Gabriel announced, *"he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luk. 1:32).*

Hymn: #137 - "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

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### **III. To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.**

When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he was understandably distressed. He loved Mary. They had agreed to be husband and wife. But the child in her womb was certainly not his. She had betrayed his trust! She had cheated on him! His heart broken, he resolved to end their marriage plans. But as he was preparing to do this, *"an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins' (Mat. 1:20-21).*

But what would everyone think? If Joseph tried to explain Mary's pregnancy and the dream he had, who would believe it? If he said nothing, what would they say about his and Mary's character? The Jewish people all knew from the Sixth Commandment that sexual relations were to be reserved for marriage. In fact, there were strict penalties for those who broke this commandment. But Joseph obeyed what God told him to do. He did not let a potential scandal stop him. He honored his promise to Mary. He stayed by her side and was very likely the first to lay eyes on the Christ-Child at His birth.

The baby in Mary's womb was conceived by God the Holy Spirit. Jesus had no biological father. That is why He was able to be born without sin. That is why He was able to take our sins on Himself and to offer Himself as a pure sacrifice to God in heaven. Isaiah foretold this by the power of the Holy Spirit long before it took place: *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).* And what does "Immanuel" mean? Immanuel means *"God with us" (Mat. 1:23).*

Hymn: #113.1-2, 4 - "A Great and Mighty Wonder"

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**IV. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son,**

*"Firstborn son"* emphasizes that Mary had no children prior to Jesus. But it also points to something more. Jesus is referred to as "firstborn" in several other passages in the New Testament. Colossians 1 says, *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created.... And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together"* (vv. 15-16,17). The Son of God is the source of all life. All things were created through Him at the direction of the Father.

And now, the Son of God entered His creation. He took on the flesh that He created for Adam in the beginning. He came to do something new for mankind, something that had not been done before and would not need to be done again. He came to draw all sin to Himself, so that payment could be made for all of it. He came to enter death, so that death could be conquered. None of the people who gathered around His manger could imagine what He would do or how He would do it.

But God in His heavenly council knew. The plan was set. This newborn baby, the firstborn, would one day climb the hill to Jerusalem and offer His life there as the atonement for all sin. Then He would be laid in the grave for a short rest before rising from the dead in victory on the third day. His death was the atonement for your sins. His resurrection was the victory over your death. This *"firstborn of all creation"* is also *"the firstborn from the dead"* (Col. 1:18). Because He rose from the dead, all who trust in Him will also rise to eternal life (Rom. 8:29).

Hymn: #145.1-2 - "What Child Is This?"

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**V. and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.**

Because of Caesar's census, Bethlehem was a little more full than usual. Joseph and Mary had to make do with a stable, even for the delivery of a baby. For baby's first bed, they laid Him in a manger. It was enough out of the ordinary that the angel gave it as the sign for the shepherds, *"Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger"* (Luk. 2:12). Martin Luther includes several stanzas in his Christmas hymn about the humble birth of the Christ-Child and what that means to us: *"Thus hath it pleased Thee to make plain / The truth to sinners poor and vain, / That this world's honor, wealth and might / Are naught and worthless in Thy sight"* (ELH 123, v. 12).

When we see how our Savior arrived so humbly for our sakes, "this world's honor, wealth, and might" should seem worthless to us. This is how much God valued you and me. The Son of God was willing to *"make himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant"* (Phi. 2:7). He came to endure every sort of temptation, mockery, and abuse. He came to suffer and die for the world that hated Him.

He did all this out of love, out of love for you. He took on your sin, so you would have salvation. He received hell, so you would have heaven. 2 Corinthians 8:9: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."*

Hymn: #119 - "Away in a Manger"

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