

AND ALL THEY THAT HEARD IT WONDERED

TEXT: LUKE 2:1-20

Introduction:

1. The Bible teaches that God moves people.
2. For example, we read in Genesis 12:1, "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee."
3. God moved Abraham. Abraham obeyed God, and the Lord Jesus Christ is descended from Abraham.
4. The very first verse in the New Testament says, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1).
5. In the lineage from Abraham to King David is a Moabite woman named Ruth. God moved Ruth from Moab to Bethlehem.
6. The LORD brought Ruth and Boaz together, and they became the grandparents of David.
7. And over a thousand years later, God moved Joseph and Mary, both descendents of Abraham, and both descendents of Ruth and Boaz, and of King David.
8. The Lord moved Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, and it was there in Bethlehem that Jesus was born (Luke 2:4-7).
9. "There's an unseen hand to me
That leads through ways, I cannot see
While going through, this world of woe
This hand still leads, me as I go

I'm trusting to, the unseen hand
That guides me through, this weary land
And some sweet day, I'll reach that strand
Still guided by, the unseen hand" -- A. J. Simms
10. G. Campbell Morgan said, "Things are oftentimes not what they seem, if we can only climb high enough to look down on this world from heaven's vantage point."
11. Let us pray and ask the Holy Spirit to take us high enough to see this beautiful Christmas story from His vantage point.

I. GOD MOVED CAESAR AUGUSTUS

II. GOD MOVED JOSEPH AND MARY

III. GOD MOVED THE SHEPHERDS

I. GOD MOVED CAESAR AUGUSTUS

1. Only Luke gives us this part of the Christmas story.
2. Over seven hundred years before, the prophet Micah had predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
3. However, Joseph and Mary were living in Nazareth, a town about 70 to 80 miles north of Bethlehem.
4. So God moved Caesar Augustus to send out a decree (Luke 2:1). John Phillips said, "Jesus was born amid a world movement of international dimensions. One word from a pagan emperor in Rome, and, throughout his vast domains, people began to move" (*Exploring the Gospel of Luke*).
5. One word from Caesar and people began to move. Caesar moved Mary and Joseph. But God moved Caesar!
6. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."
7. Caesar Augustus was a great-nephew and the adopted son of Julius Caesar.
8. Because Julius Caesar had no legitimate children, he adopted Caesar Augustus and put it in his will that he would be his heir.
9. Caesar Augustus' name was actually Octavius, and it was the Roman Senate that gave him the name *Caesar Augustus*.
10. This title "Augustus" had a religious significance, and by accepting this title, Octavius was attempting to deify himself.
11. And after his death, the people of the Roman Empire worshipped Caesar Augustus as a god.
12. Our month of August is named after Caesar Augustus.
13. July is named after his uncle Julius Caesar.
14. By the way, some people object to any recognition of Christmas because they say the name "Christmas" has pagan origins.
15. So does July and August and all the months.
16. So does Sunday -- named after the sun god, Monday the moon god, and all the days, etc.
17. Caesar Augustus signed a tax bill that the whole world (Roman Empire) was to be taxed. He needed money to maintain his large army, and to control his vast empire, and to continue to live in luxury.
18. Many books have been written about Caesar Augustus. Many historians consider him the greatest of all the Roman emperors. Indeed, Rome achieved great glory during his reign.

19. He restored peace after 100 years of civil war. He maintained an efficient government and a sound currency system; extended the highway system connecting Rome with its far-flung empire; developed a postal service; fostered free trade among the provinces; and built many bridges, aqueducts and buildings adorned with beautiful works of art created in the classical style.
20. Literature flourished with writers including Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Livy, all living under the emperor's patronage.
21. The empire expanded under Augustus with his generals subduing much of Europe, including Spain, and Gaul (now France).
22. Caesar Augustus annexed Egypt and most of southwestern Europe up to the Danube River.
23. When researching the fascinating life of Caesar Augustus, you can read much about the Triumvirate he formed with Marc Antony and Marcus Lepidus.
24. You will read how in 40 B.C., Marc Antony married Octavia, the sister of Caesar Augustus, and how Antony later deserted her for the beautiful Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt.
25. When Antony gave Roman provinces to his children by Cleopatra, Caesar Augustus declared war on Antony. In 31 B.C., the Roman Navy defeated the combined fleets of Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium.
26. Within a year both Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide.
27. Much has been written about the great achievements of Caesar Augustus, but interestingly this wonderful little story recorded by Luke is usually overlooked (Luke 2:1-5).
28. This little story seems very insignificant to worldly scholars. In fact, some have even dared to question its accuracy.
29. But the hand of God moved Caesar Augustus. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Proverbs 21:1).
30. The Westminster Confession of Faith says that God upholds, directs, disposes and governs all creatures, actions and things by His most wise and holy providence. This is what we mean when we say God moved Caesar Augustus.
31. Caesar Augustus was the tool in God's hand to bring to pass the prophecy "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel..." (Micah 5:2).

32. Caesar Augustus thought of himself as the most important person in the world. He even thought of himself as a Roman god.
33. But Caesar Augustus was not the most important person in the world, and certainly he was not a god.
34. The most important person in the world at that time was an obscure young Jewish woman, who was carrying within her womb the son of God, the Saviour of the world.
35. And God was moving her and her husband.

II. GOD MOVED JOSEPH AND MARY (2:4-7).

1. "And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city" (Luke 2:3).
2. Joseph and Mary came out of Nazareth in Galilee, and went to Judea to Bethlehem, the city of David.
3. Joseph did this because he was of the house and lineage of David.
4. Mary was also was of the lineage of David. In the Gospel of Luke we have our Lord's genealogy through Mary.
5. Matthew gives the genealogy through Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus.
6. Luke 3:23 says Joseph "was the son of Heli." However, Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli.
7. "There was no room for them in the inn" (2:7), so our Lord was born in a stable. Back in those days, stables were usually caves cut in the limestone. They were usually dark and dirty.
8. The King of glory left the beauty and splendor of heaven to be born in a stable! And cradled in a manger where the animals would eat (2:7).
9. God moved Joseph and Mary several times. After the birth of the baby Jesus, Joseph was warned by an angel to flee from Herod and to go to Egypt.
10. So Joseph and Mary and the young Jesus departed into Egypt, where they remained until the death of Herod (Matt. 2:13-15).
11. God is still moving people. I just received a phone call the other day from a young man who told me God is moving him and his wife and their four children to Kazakhstan.
12. I admit I know very little about Kazakhstan. But there millions of people there who need the Lord.
13. Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world, and it is also the world's largest landlocked country.
14. God moved Caesar Augustus. God moved Joseph and Mary. God is in the business of moving people.

III. GOD MOVED THE SHEPHERDS (2:8-20).

1. Our Christmas story would not be complete without mentioning the shepherds (2:8-20).
2. Shepherds were held in low esteem by people of that day, but it was to these humble shepherds that the divine proclamation came (2:8ff).
3. Shepherds were considered outcasts in Israel. Their work made them ceremonially unclean and kept them away from the temple weeks at a time. But God in His matchless grace reached out to these shepherds.
4. In the Jewish Talmud it is written that shepherds are not trustworthy witnesses, but God chose them to be witnesses of the birth of His Son (2:16-18).
5. By the way, when the angels told the shepherds where to find Jesus, the Bible says "they came with haste" (Luke 2:16).
6. When God moves you, move "with haste."

CONCLUSION:

No beautiful chamber, no soft cradle bed,
No place but a manger, nowhere for His head;
No praises of gladness, no thought of their sin,
No glory but sadness, no room in the inn.

No room, no room, for Jesus,
O give Him welcome free,
Lest you should hear at Heaven's gate,
"There is no room for thee."

A. L. Skilton; refrain by R. Kelso Carter