**Unique Childhood, Part Three**  January 15, 2017

**Coffee/Question:** what for you was the best thing about being a kid?

The previous two Sundays, we have studied what Matthew 2 and Luke 2 have said about Jesus’ unique childhood. Today we finish our study of Jesus’ early years.

**Matthew 2:16-18**

The fact that God through Jeremiah had prophesied of what Herod would do, didn’t mean God approved. What the text shows us is just how dangerous Herod was.

Some of the Life groups may want to explore this topic this week. If so, I’ve posted on the church Facebook page and have included in some notes here on the table, an article entitled **“The Problem of Evil is a Problem for Everyone.”**

It is a good article, and I think it will help to both stimulate and direct your thinking.

How long did the toddler Jesus live as a refugee in Egypt?

In the notes, I’ve placed several articles, which you can reference.

I’m not going to work through the details of that information - only to say that I believe Jesus was in Egypt, living as a refugee for approximately 1-2 years.

**Matthew 2:19-23**

Just as an angel had told Joseph to flee to Egypt, so an angel told him to return home.

But when Joseph reached the land of Israel, and learned that Herod’s son, *Archelaus,* was

reigning in place of his father, Joseph was afraid to return to Bethlehem.

Why? Because Archelaus was just as vicious as Herod. **See article in notes.**

Through a dream God confirmed Joseph’s reservations about returning to live in Bethlehem, and instead directed him to go to the Galilee – specifically to Nazareth.

Nazareth was approximately 90 miles north of Jerusalem.

The city is situated on a large hill (Luke 4:29) overlooking the plain of Esdraelon, with the Carmal mountains and the Mediterranean Sea off in the distance.

Why did they go to Nazareth?

1. It was home.

Remember Luke 1:26? *“…God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to*

*a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph.”*

1. The Lord directed them to go to Nazareth because of what the prophets had said (note the plural) – *“He will be called a Nazarene.”*

Which OT prophet predicted this?

Wayne Jackson writes:

“*The plural form “prophets” suggests that no single Old Testament reference is in view,*

*but rather a general “theme” reflected in numerous prophecies, that the Messiah would be a despised person, rejected and scorned by many of his contemporaries - Psalm 22:6-8,13; 69:8,20-21; Isaiah 11:1; 49:7; 53:2-3,8; Daniel 9:26.*

**Psalm 22***: “****6****But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.****7****All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.* ***8****“He trusts in the Lord,” they say, “let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.”*

*”* ***13****Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.”*

**Psalm 69***: “* ***8****I am a foreigner to my own family, a stranger to my own mother’s children;*

***20****Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none.* ***21****They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*

*It is readily acknowledged that the term “Nazareth” was used in a derogatory sense*

*in the first century. When Nathanael heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, he asked:*

**“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”** *John 1:46.*

<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/573-was-matthew-mistaken-in-the-nazarene-prophecy> (edited)

Is it not remarkable to see the hand of God using (1) political intrigue and (2) healthy parental fear to guide the decision made, as to where his Messiah would grow up?

Out of all the places Jesus’ family could have gone to, God led them to Nazareth, to live in a town, among a people who were despised and rejected by the rest of Israel.

The majesty of God’s sovereignty is seen in the details, of how our Savior completely identified with and took on himself, not only Israel’s, but humanity’s shame, sorrows, sufferings, and iniquities.

Let’s turn our attention now to **Luke 2:39-52:**

What stood out to Luke about the child Jesus?

At age 3-4, v.40 says that Jesus grew and became strong.

In other words, Jesus was a healthy child.

The fact that he “grew,” tells us he experienced every aspect of human development.

Every skill he acquired, he learned as we learn - by repeated practice.

Luke also comments that as a child, (1) Jesus was filled with wisdom; and (2) the grace of God was on him. How many 4 year olds do you know who are filled with wisdom and the grace of God is on them?

In v.52, Luke gives another summary statement about Jesus, but here he makes an intriguing switch in the order of what is emphasized.

v. 40 - Jesus grew and became strong, he was filled with wisdom and grace was upon him. At age 4, what Luke emphasized first, was Jesus’ physical growth.

v. 52 - Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

At age 12, it was Jesus’ spiritual growth that was first mentioned.

What does it mean to have favor with someone? **gotquestions.org** explains:

“*The best definition of the word favor is “demonstrated delight.”*

*The favor of God can be described as “tangible evidence that a person has the approval of the Lord.”* [*Isaiah 66:2*](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2066.2)*says, “These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.”  https://www.gotquestions.org/favor-of-God.html*

We are familiar with what God the Father said at Jesus’ baptism:

*“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased.”* Matthew 3:17.

Luke wants us to know that as a child Jesus enjoyed the demonstrated delight of God.

All who knew him delighted in him.

Jesus was an amazing kid.

Both summary statements made by Luke in v.42 and v.50, speak of Jesus “being filled with…” and “growing in....” wisdom.

Where did Jesus gain this wisdom, because he was not formally trained.

John 7:15: *How did this man get such learning without having studied?*

There are two things I put before you.

\* Jesus gained wisdom because of the spiritual influence his parents had upon him.

\* Jesus grew in wisdom because of his own relationship with God the Father.

The Influence of His Parents

Mary and Joseph were devoted to God - that is seen in the dedication to God of their son at 40 days of age; their obedience to God in following his directives to flee and then to return; their commitment to ongoing spiritual practices - they went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover every year - see v.41.

I realized this week that they’re going to Jerusalem was also an act of courage.

Both Mary and Joseph knew well the danger that existed there.

Think about it, if Simeon and Anna had been able to recognize the infant Jesus as being the Messiah, when Mary and Joseph had come to present him to the Lord at the Temple, then who was to say that someone wouldn’t have recognized their young boy in the same way; or remembered them.

And if they talked about Jesus to others, like Anna and Simeon had done, what danger might they have put their child in, if the wrong person heard?

**Healthy/unhealthy fear**

God can use healthy fear to guide us - as he did with Joseph regarding the decision to go to Nazareth. But unhealthy fear can hold a person back from pursuing after God.

We see as Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year, them choosing to trust God, regardless of the risk, rather than to play it safe.

I am confident their gutsy faith influenced their boy.

In light of what we’ve already noted about them, I am also confident Mary and Joseph daily practiced what Deuteronomy 6:6-9 told them to do as parents:

 *These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.* ***7****Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* ***8****Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.* ***9****Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

To “impress” upon; to “talk about” the commands of God with one’s children requires a deliberate intentionality.

And everything indicates that this was how Jesus’ parents spiritually influenced him.

And as they did all of these things and more, they helped their son “gain wisdom.”

\* Jesus grew in wisdom because of his own relationship with God the Father.

Psalm 111:10: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts*

*have good understanding.*

There is a wisdom that develops and is evidenced within a person who rightly fears God; regardless of their age.

As a child, Jesus grew in wisdom because?....he rightly feared God, and followed his precepts.

Though it was the practice of Joseph and Mary to go to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover, Luke writes of only one trip - the trip when Jesus was 12 years old.

Luke doesn’t tell us anything about that year’s Passover celebration.

Instead, he focused on what happened after Passover ended, when Jesus made the decision to remain in Jerusalem.

Jesus’ doing so, wasn’t a response of defiance to his parents, because the description in v.51 - *he was obedient to them* - describes how the boy Jesus acted all the time.

Jesus stayed on in Jerusalem, at the Temple, because of an intense spiritual desire, and because of the call of God on his life that was growing ever stronger.

As Jesus listened to the teachers of the law, did he do so from the back of the room; was he like a wallflower?

Look again at v.46 - he was seated among the teachers.

Jesus was there... among them... as an active participant.

And not only did Jesus listen, he asked intelligent questions.

And furthermore, he answered the questions posed to him.

This was highly unusual, which Luke communicated by saying, *“Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”*

People are amazed by kids… when they do things unexpected.

- musical ability

- singing voice

- artistic ability

- math or science ability

With Jesus, it wasn’t just that he was a smart kid.

What amazed people was that they’d never heard a 12 year old, with such understanding.

Jesus was on a par with, and possibly even exceeded the wisdom of the teachers of the law he listened to and talked with.

Jesus wasn’t being a smart-aleck when he answered his mother, *“Why were you searching for me?”* His identity was so solid and his purpose so clear that he thought it would have been obvious to his parents that he *“had to be in his Father’s house.”*

What stood out about the child Jesus was his wisdom and understanding; the obvious favor of God upon him; the certainty of his identity – he knew who he was; the call of God on his life; his boldness and humility; his obedience to his parents.

As a child, Jesus was unique.

**How does this connect to us as parents and as a church?**

**Parents.**

1. You are helping to shape the character of a person who will live forever.

God specifically chose you to parent the child/ren you have.

Press on.

Parenting is a marathon task.

 Do not become weary.

If God has entrusted you with children, his grace is yours to access - in those moments of exquisite joys and in those moments of discouragement.

1. Take heart. Do not fear. The Lord is with you. He is greater.

The Lord protected and was strong in Jesus’ life.

He was the same in many others when they were children/teenagers.

Think of Daniel going to Babylon… remember, he was a teenager.

He was selected by the Babylonians to be trained in the occult practices of that nation, and was totally immersed in its sensuality and perversion.

Did Babylon corrupt Daniel, or his friends?

No. Why not?

Because Daniel’s God was greater.

Instead of Babylon dragging Daniel down, Daniel’s faith profoundly influenced the whole dark perverted spirituality of Babylon with the righteousness of God.

Be encouraged by the power of God to keep and to protect your kids, and expect that through them God will push back the darkness.

1. Learn from Joseph and Mary’s example. Let them inspire you. Are there spiritual practices which they did that God’s Spirit is impressing upon you to likewise do, or to start doing again?

Carey Nieuwhof writes that he has found conversations about God and life happen best in the flow of everyday life – just like God said in Deuteronomy 6.

Ask God to help you see and seize the opportunities as they come along, as you eat supper together, as you travel in the car, as you read together, as you play board games, as you go for walks; as you help with homework, etc.

**Church**

Just how important is the spiritual influence and training of children? Consider these stats. Ages at which Americans say they accepted Christ and became a Christian

The data in the pie graph comes from the **Nazarene Church Growth Research**.

Another survey by the **International Bible Society** confirms the Nazarene Research -- indicating that 83% of all Christians make their commitment to [Jesus](https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/dept.htm#rose) between the ages of

4 and 14, that is, when they are children or early youth.

Because the 4-14 age period slice of the pie is so large, many have started referring to it as the "4-14 Window." https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/ages.htm

We must pass on the faith to the generation that follows us.

Just as there were those who invested time and effort, to teach, to train and to disciple us, so we as a church must make similar investments in the generation that follows us.

If we don’t, we have failed.

It is that black and white.

To that end, I believe we must be a church, where children and youth are able to interact with and learn from adults who are living a gutsy, bold, all-in, no holding back faith.

The kind of faith in God that inspired Jim Elliot to write: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

What ISIS mockingly calls Christians is who we are.

We are the people of the cross.

There isn’t anything we wouldn’t lay down or do for Jesus, because he gave it all for us.

May we never become a faith community where what we offer to Jesus is the bare minimum. He is worthy of our very best!!

We learn from Jesus that:

…at 12 years of age a child can know God profoundly.

…at 12 years of age, a child can experience the call of God on their life.

…at 12 years of age, a child can have their identity firmly rooted in Jesus, and possess a

wisdom beyond their years.

This is why we must and will pray for and influence and equip our children and youth to be strong in the Lord.

I realize you can’t make a kid love God.

But we can give then every opportunity to do so.

And the example of Jesus says to us it is of the utmost importance that we do so.

**The Blessing**

2 Timothy 1:7

# The Problem of Evil Is a Problem for Everyone

[*Gavin Ortlund*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/author/Gavin-Ortlund)*/ January 13, 2017*

If God is all-good and all-powerful, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?

This question, the age-old “problem of evil,” is probably the greatest argument of all time against the existence of God. And the question has both a “global” and a “local” presence—it’s a logical dilemma puzzled over by philosophers, and an emotional struggle every sufferer will face. It’s both academic and everyday.

When we are with someone who is suffering, it’s often best to avoid words altogether and stick with tears, silence, and prayers. In my pastoral role I often have the privilege of sitting with people in deep grief. In those moments, it usually does more harm than good to offer encouragements, or even interpretations. The best thing is simply to sit with them in the darkness. As my brother Dane [puts it](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/encourage-another/), “That [Romans 8:28](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.28) comes before [Romans 12:15](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%2012.15) in the canon doesn’t mean it should in our counseling and friendships.”

But sometimes, either for someone else or for ourselves, we must provide an answer to the “why?” question. When we see deep suffering, does it mean God doesn’t care, or can’t help it, or isn’t there at all? One of the best strategies for responding to this question, rather than meeting it head on, is to come alongside it and draw attention to a clue in the question itself.

### ****Crooked Lines, Straight Lines****

Richard Dawkins, after recounting the abundance of cruelty and suffering in the natural world, provides an [eloquent expression](https://www.amazon.com/River-Out-Eden-Darwinian-Science/dp/0465069908/?tag=thegospcoal-20) of the problem of evil:

On the day I originally wrote this paragraph, the British newspapers all carried a terrible story about a bus full of children from a Roman Catholic school that crashed for no obvious reason, with wholesale loss of life. Not for the first time, clerics were in paroxysms over the theological question that a writer on a London newspaper (The Sunday Telegraph) framed this way: “How can you believe in a loving, all-powerful God who allows such a tragedy?” The article went on to quote one priest’s reply: “The simple answer is that we do not know why there should be a God who lets these awful things happen. But the horror of the crash, to a Christian, confirms the fact that we live in a world of real values: positive and negative. If the universe was just electrons, there would be no problem of evil or suffering. On the contrary, if the universe were just electrons and selfish genes, meaningless tragedies like the crashing of this bus are exactly what we should expect, along with equally meaningless good fortune.

This passage has a strong rhetorical effect. But then there are some puzzling vocabulary choices as well. What does Dawkins mean by calling school bus crashes “meaningless tragedies”? Dawkins is appealing to more than his mere personal dislike of crashing school buses. Calling them “terrible” and “tragic” appeals to a broader standard. On what basis does Dawkins smuggle in these essentially moral, evaluative terms? Dawkins dismisses the answer given by the priest, but he seems to miss the point: The issue the priest raises isn’t whether we can expect tragedies to occur, but why they constitute a problem.

C. S. Lewis gave [classic expression](https://www.amazon.com/Christianity-Amplified-Introduction-Broadcast-Christian/dp/B000OESR7K/?tag=thegospcoal-20) to this difficulty: “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”

You cannot get an ought from an is. A school bus crash is not a “tragedy” unless a school bus shouldn’t crash, any more than a crooked line isn’t crooked unless a straight line exists. But if there’s nothing beyond nature—if the strong devouring the weak is how we all got here, and thus the world has always been—then why shouldn’t school bus crashes occur?

Or take a more horrific example of evil, like genocide. Every reasonable person acknowledges such events aren’t simply painful or unpleasant but actually wrong. But if blind processes within a closed system are the sole cause of our existence, such events are not qualitatively different from a shark eating a seal, or a Venus flytrap liquidating a bug. That is simply the universe doing what it’s always done. Such a universe can be disliked, but we have no grounds to see a “problem” with how it’s operating. As the poet Stephen Crane put it:

A man said to the Universe, Sir, I exist!

Nevertheless, replied the Universe,nthat fact has not created in me

the slightest feeling of obligation.

### ****Live and Die on this Day****

This point recently came home to me with force as I watched the 2011 film The Grey, which narrates a number of oil men trying to survive against a pack of wolves after their plane crashed. The film, as I take it, is an exploration of nihilism and death: the dialogue, the plot, even the very setting (the harsh Alaskan wilderness) all emphasize the crushing inevitability of death. The basic message seems to be: “Death is all there is, so go out with the bang.” The poem recited throughout the movie and during its climax reminds me of Dylan Thomas’s “[Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Do_not_go_gentle_into_that_good_night)”:

Once more into the fray into the last good fight I’ll ever know

Live and die on this day, live and die on this day

Liam Neeson’s character recites this poem throughout the movie, and then one final time at the end in the wolf den. In a touching moment just before his climactic death, after all of his friends have died, he cries out to God, pleading for a sign, and he hears nothing in return.

It is touching and (to use Dawkins’s vocabulary) tragic. But then it strikes me: Why is it sad? Within the boundaries of nihilism, it is not easy to see why the depiction of death should have such emotional force.

On terms of pure nihilism, why should Neeson’s character expect to hear anything from God? If death is truly all there is, why do we long simply to “live and die on this day”? Or, if “that good night” is all there is, and it is indeed “good,” why not go gentle into it? The very fact that nihilism is so bracing and disturbing makes us wonder if it’s the whole answer. Crooked lines beg for explanation.

### ****Problem of Good****

The problem of evil is a problem for everyone. If God exists, we have to explain why evil is here. But if God does not exist, we have to explain why we find “evil” objectionable. The Christian can struggle with evil; the skeptic must also struggle with good. The Christian can weep over crooked lines; the skeptic must explain what makes them crooked.

The Christian can struggle with evil; the skeptic must also struggle with good. The Christian can weep over crooked lines; the skeptic must explain what makes them crooked.

For the Christian, the explanation for evil comes through the notions of createdness and fallenness, and then ultimately through the cross—through the “why have you forsaken me?” which is the ultimate “terrible tragedy,” the ultimate crooked line, the ultimate “last good fight.”

In the meantime, these answers don’t remove the mystery and sting of evil. The Christian can enter into the skeptic’s struggle with evil; we feel that evil is staggering, unthinkable, blinding, oppressive; we can admire the grim determination with which Liam Neeson walks into the wolf den; we can appreciate the sentiment, “Do not go gentle into that good night.”

But we also have some sense as to why death is so tragic; we know why we are all rooting for Neeson against the wolf; we are able to affirm both the chilling darkness and also the aching beauty of the world. And beyond that, in the empty tomb we have hope that one day evil will be put down forever, and every crooked line made straight.

https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/problem-of-evil-is-problem-for-everyone

**How long did the toddler Jesus live as a refugee in Egypt?**

I’ve placed a footnote at the end of the teaching notes, which you can reference.

I’m not going to work through the details this morning - I’m only go to say that I believe he was in Egypt, living as a refugee for approximately 1-2 years.

Let’s attempt to work with what details are available to us.

Let me say upfront that while there is no question regarding the fact that Jesus was born,

it is difficult to determine precisely his birth date.

Luke 2:1-2*: In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken*

*of the entire Roman world.* ***2****(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)*

There is significant on-line debate, whether or not the census which Luke wrote of,

actually happened, and if it did, when.

But I want to be clear - if Luke invented details pertaining to the birth of Jesus, as some critics charge, this immediately discredits him and makes his gospel unreliable.

Furthermore, because many of the incidents Luke refers to are corroborated by the other

gospel writers, this means, if Luke is fudging details, then, all of them are fraudulent.

However, after reading a number of articles regarding the historical details provided by Luke, I believe Luke to be a good historian. I further believe his details to be both accurate and trustworthy.

Let’s lay out some dates, working backwards.

**#4**. The best historical evidence places the death of Herod in 4 BC, between Sunday, March 12, and the Passover of Wednesday, April 11.

**#3**. A number of Bible scholars, using historical events spoken of by Luke, conclude that Jesus was born in 7 BC

**#2**. Assuming that Herod was erring on the side of caution, Jesus would have been 12-18

 months of age when his family fled with him to Egypt – sometime in late 6, or early to mid 5 BC.

**#1.**  Jesus lived in Egypt as a refugee for approximately 1-2 years.

<http://www.historian.net/NTHX.html>; http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/11/01/Once-More-Quiriniuss-Census.aspx#Article

<http://crossexamined.org/really-census-time-caesar-augustus/>

**When did Caesar Augustus issue a decree for a census to be taken?**

When was Quirinius governor of Syria?

Wikipedia says this:

The **Census of Quirinius** was a census of [Judaea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judea_%28Roman_province%29) taken by [Publius Sulpicius Quirinius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quirinius), Roman governor of [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Syria), upon the imposition of direct Roman rule in 6 AD.[1] The Jewish historian [Josephus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus) portrays the annexation and census as the cause of an uprising which later became identified with the [Zealot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zealots_%28Judea%29) movement.

The author of the [Gospel of Luke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke) uses it as the narrative means by which [Jesus was born](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nativity_of_Jesus) in [Bethlehem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethlehem) (Luke 2:1-5),[2] and places the census within the reign of [Herod the Great](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great), who actually died 10 years earlier in 4 BCE.[3] No satisfactory explanation has been put forward so far to resolve the contradiction,[4] and "most critical scholars think that the author of the gospel made a mistake" (Raymond Brown).[5]

Did Luke make a mistake? We need to know.

Quirinius was Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, Roman soldier, senator and consul under Augustus. In 6 AD Quirinius was sent to Syria as legate along with Coponius who would be the first prefect of Judea and a predecessor of Pontius Pilatus.The registration and census taken in 6 AD did not include the Galilee. This has long been a stumbling block in the determination of the date of Jesus' birth and many scholars merely assumed that Luke had made a mistake.

In 1912, however, the discovery by W. M. Ramsey of a fragmentary inscription at Antioch of Pisidia established Quirinius was in Syria on a previous occasion. His role was more military to lead a campaign against the Homanadenses, a tribe in the Taurus Mountains. This is confirmed by Tacitus.

This means that Quirinius would have established a seat of government in Syria, including Palestine, from the years 10 to 7 BCE. In this position, he would have been responsible for the census mentioned by Luke. This census of 7 BCE would therefore have been the "first" census taken when Quirinius was governor (Luke 2:2) and the historically documented census of 6/7 AD was the second.

There is further evidence of this first census of 7 BC in the writings of Tertullian who records the census "taken in Judea by Sentius Saturninus." Sentius Saturninus was Legate of Syria from 9 to 6 BC. Another inscription, the Lapis Tiburtinus, was found in 1764 near Tivoli (Tibur). The inscription names an unknown personage who was legate of Syria twice. The man is described as having been victorious in war.

Scholars have debated about the historicity of this first census since there is no record of it in the Roman archives. Their chief argument is that Augustus would not have imposed a census for the purpose of taxation in the kingdom of a client king like Herod. Herod had his own tax collectors and paid tribute to Rome from the proceeds. They further pose that the census in 6 AD was imposed because Herod's nutty son Archelaus had been deposed and Judea was placed under direct Roman rule. These are good arguments.

But it must be asked, why would Luke record an event that never took place? Luke was well educated with diversified talents. He gives every indication of being careful in his historicity. He knew and interviewed those who were closest to Jesus.

Some scholars think that the story of the first census and the birth in Bethlehem is *theologoumenon*. This is a term scholars use for that which expresses an event in language that may not be factual but supports, enhances, or is related to a matter of faith. In other words, a "white lie." I don't buy it in this case. There is no advantage to matters of faith in the invention of a census of 6 BC. Some scholars argue that the early census was invented to support a mythological birth in Bethlehem in support of Messianic prophecy.

As for the early census, I am inclined to believe Luke and Tertullian. I can think of a number of reasons based on the history of the time. Lack of records is not evidence for or against an historical event. Records are lost and destroyed, particularly those that are two millennia old. Rome burned in 64 CE and there have been numerous conflagrations and sackings of the city over the centuries. Could Augustus had deviated from convention and imposed a census in Syria/Palestine in 6 BC? Of course, he could. He was the Emperor. Herod the Great was ill and, by all accounts of the time, nuttier than a fruitcake. He who had once been an able and effective administrator and builder, was now paranoid and vicious. He had murdered most of his family, including his sons and the wife he loved most. The joke in the Roman court by Caesar himself was that one was safer being Herod's pig than Herod's son. Josephus records in *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVI, ix 3 that Augustus was furious with Herod in 8 BCE and threatened to treat him no longer as a friend (client), but as a subject (subject to taxes).

I believe that the prudent and prudish Augustus, scandalized by Herod's outrageous reputation and increasing madness, began the movement toward making Judea a prefecture in 8 BCE and part of that preparation was a registration. Caesar could have delayed actual imposition of direct rule in deference to Herod's ill health and the hope that his successor would not be as loony toony. When Herod died and Archelaus turned out to be crazier than his father, Augustus made Palestine a prefecture. He sent Quirinius as Legatus (a second time) and Coponius as the first prefect. The census of 6 CE therefore becomes the first census under direct Roman rule and fell in schedule with the Roman census on a 14 year rotation. The census of Jesus' birth, perhaps only a registration, became lost in the archives. In this scenario, it would make sense to send Quirinius back as Legatus since he presided under the previous registration. Quirinius was no minor functionary. He was a Roman senator of the Equestrian order and had been consul since 12 BCE. He had won an insignia of triumph for the Homanadensian war and had accompanied Caesar to Armenia in 3 CE. He died in 21 CE.(3) Service in Palestine was not considered "prime duty" by Roman functionaries but the governorship of Syria was one of the most important positions in the Empire. The post was always given to the most respected and capable of Imperial functionaries chosen from the elite of Roman aristocracy. The Syrian Legatus was the commander-in chief of the entire Roman East and responsible for the Parthian border. I believe this Roman soldier, senator and administrator, who had already served Caesar well, returned to Syria as a personal favor for his emperor/friend. I must, therefore, be an audacious layman and disagree with the majority of New Testament scholars. I conclude that Luke is accurate.

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  In Prague, in 1603, shortly before Christmas, the astronomer and mathematician, Johannes Kepler, was making observations of the stars through his rudimentary telescope. He was observing the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces. The two planets had converged to look like one larger and new "star." Kepler later remembered something he had read by the Rabbinical writer, Abravanel (1437-1508). Jewish astrologers maintained that when there was a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in Pisces, the Messiah would come. In ancient Jewish astrology, the constellation of Pisces was known as the House of Israel, the sign of the Messiah. Jupiter was the royal star of the house of David and Saturn was the protecting star of Israel, the *Messiah's Star* Since the constellation of Pisces was the point in the heavens where the sun ended. it's old course and began its new, it is understandable why this conjunction would be viewed as a portent of the Messiah.

Kepler concluded that he had found the "star of Bethlehem" but his hypothesis was rejected. It was not until 1925 that the hypothesis was re-examined when references to this conjunction were found in the cuneiform inscriptions of the astrological archives of the ancient School of Astrology at Sippar in Babylonia. Sippar was an ancient Sumerian city lying on a canal which linked the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It was a very important commercial and religious center. Excavations at the site of Abu-Habbah during the latter part of the 19th century unearthed the remains of a temple and ziggurat dedicated to Shamash and the ancient scribal School of Astrology. The most important discovery were tens of thousands of clay tablets from the school archives that dated from the Old Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian periods.

In 1925, the German Scholar P. Schnabel found, among the endless cuneiform records of dates and observations, a note on a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces. The position of Jupiter and Saturn, converged in Pisces, had been recorded over a period of five months in 7 B.C.E!! Calculations show that the conjunction was observable three times over the course of the year, May 29, October 3, and December 4.
The conjunction in Pisces is observable in the southern sky over Judea and would sit directly over Bethlehem if one were observing along the road leading from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Matthew 2:2 stating "We have seen his star in the east" is a mistranslation of the Greek phrase EN TH ANATOLH "in the east" from the original wording which means idiomatically, "the first light of dawn" *(which comes from the east)* when the conjunction is visible. The correlation of this celestial event with the first visit of Quirinius and a preliminary registration in Syria is too much of a coincidence for this layman to ignore. I must therefore humbly and respectfully disagree with the majority of New Testament scholars who again contend that the story of the Star of Bethlehem is another of those little "white lies." I conclude again, therefore, that the Gospel account is accurate.

        Accepting the Star of Bethlehem as an historical fact, our detective work gives us three possible dates for the birth of Jesus, May 29, October 3, and December 4 in the year 7 BCE. I would rule out May 29 as too early. Scholars also contend that the Gospel account of the three "Wise Men" is another of those theologoumenon white lies. If one were to accept the story of the three *magi* (astrologers), or at least three visitors who came to Judea based on the astrological omen, as containing an element of fact, May 29 is too early. Why would "wise men," astrologers/magi in Babylon care about a celestial event predicting the Jewish Messiah? Christians are normally unaware that Babylon was as important a center for Judaism as Jerusalem in the ancient world. It is the center for the predominating Babylonian Talmud. It is very likely that the "wise men" were scholars of the School of Astrology in Sippar and likely of Jewish ancestry dating to the mass deportations of Jews to Babylon in the 7th century BCE. Steeped in their Jewish messianic hopes and in astrology, these men would have been convinced that the birth of the Messiah was imminent. Given their background, an expedition to the Homeland would seem the most likely course of action for validation of both their scholarly, astrological and religious prognostication. These astrologers would have observed the first conjunction on May 29 and then made preparations to travel to Judea, arriving for the time of a predicted second conjunction. October 3 intrigues me because it is within days of the time of other recorded Roman censuses. Including the one in 6 CE. December 4 would be too late for Shepherds to be tending their flocks. These were usually brought in around the first of November. I must therefore again, with all respect to the New Testament scholars, disagree that the Gospel story of the Wise Men from the East is fiction. In this historical detective story, correlating the Gospel accounts of the registration with the celestial phenomenon, I choose Saturday, 10 Tishri, 3755 (October 3, 7 BCE.) as the date of the birth of Jesus. Interestingly, that day was a Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

http://www.historian.net/NTHX.html

 **“Archelaus’** reign lasted ten years; but instead of seeking to heal the wounds brought upon the country by himself and his house, he did much to accelerate the ultimate overthrow of Judean independence. In the year 6 AD, a deputation of the Jewish and Samaritan aristocracy went to Augustus in Rome, to present charges against Archelaus, with the result that he was immediately summoned to Rome, deprived of his crown, and banished to Gaul, where he lived until his death. (Dion Cassius Cocceianus, "Hist. Roma," lv. 27)

Archelaus was cruel and tyrannical, sensual in the extreme, a hypocrite and a plotter. He observed the customary seven days of mourning for his father, but in the midst of them gave to his companions a congratulatory banquet upon his accession. He carefully avoided placing his image upon his coinage in deference to the Pharisees; but he allowed his passion for his widowed sister-in-law, Glaphyra, to master him, and he married her in defiance of the sentiment of the people and the Pharisees, who regarded the union as incestuous (Lev. xviii. 16, xx. 21).

Archelaus, in his short reign, deposed three high priests for purposes of profit. Against this serious list of evils there is hardly anything good to set in contrast, beyond perhaps the fact that he inherited from his father a certain love of splendor and a taste for building.”

http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1729-archelaus