

AT THE CRADLE OF OUR FAITH

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, December 24, 2006



Luke 2: 1-8

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

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It was a few days before Christmas and two young brothers were spending the night at their grandparent's house. When it was time to go to bed, as was their custom, they both knelt down to say their prayers. Suddenly, the younger one began to do so in a very loud voice. "Dear Lord, please ask Santa to bring me a playstation, a mountain-bike and a digital camera." His older brother leaned over, nudged his brother, and said, "Why are you shouting your prayers? God isn't deaf." "I know" he replied, "But Grandma is!"

Once again, we are standing at the Cradle of our Christian faith. The Gospel of Luke portrays Jesus as the Savior of the World. Luke tells the birth story of Jesus with interesting, skillful religious undertones. He knew that the prophet Micah predicted that the Jewish Messiah would be a descendant of King David, born in Bethlehem. At this time, he needed to get the message across to the suspicious Jews that Jesus might have grown up in Nazareth, but that he was actually born in Bethlehem. Luke wrote decades after the life of Jesus, he sought to convince the Jews, including those who rejected and had Jesus crucified, that Jesus was actually the Messiah whom they failed to recognize.

Luke also included some interesting political undertones. There is clear reference to the hated Romans who ruled with an iron-fist. "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered." Now, everybody instinctively knew that a general registration or census, the counting of the people ~ meant only one thing! The hated Romans were planning the next tax increase for the already overburdened conquered Jews!

The church and religious leaders of those days also issued decrees and proclaimed law after law in order to force obedience from the people. They worded these religious laws in strict and threatening ways. Political and religious laws dominated the lives of everyone. Jesus was born at a time of suffering and injustice. However, as also in our times, decrees are

seldom effective – the people did not get to know and love God while the Church became a legal jungle of laws and decrees and taxation!

Some Christian denominations, even in our times still have to overcome the tendency to strictly rule and to threaten hell and damnation; to issue biblical decrees condemning people and to formulate exclusive communities, shutting out those whom they perceive to be different from their interpretations of who God and Jesus is. [Behind every sacred page of scripture beats the heart and true message of a loving God who is still speaking with Amazing Grace, unconditional acceptance and a timeless, liberating invitation.](#) Come to me, you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest. There is wideness in God's mercy that you and I cannot define. Jesus Christ points the way to the very heart of God.

Also in our times, there are plenty of one sided and opinionated self-appointed rulers. Like the husband and wife sitting together in the office of a marriage counselor. The husband says, ["Now that I've told you my side of the story, let me tell you hers."](#)

Our world is often harsh where compassion is in scarce supply. But, even compassion can be risky! There is the story of the man who was lying face down on a busy street, while traffic was getting backed-up for several blocks. A kindly woman rushes up, jumps on his back and begins giving him artificial respiration -- whereupon he swivels his head and says, ["Look lady, I don't know what you are doing -- but I'm trying to fix this cable beneath the street."](#) Let me tell you something about that woman – she was filled with compassion and love – she should be the hero of our story!

Amidst all the different traditions of Christmas, we are once again standing, not only by the cradle of a newborn child, but at **CRADLE OF OUR FAITH**. The story of Jesus begins, not with a law or a decree but with the birth of an innocent baby! Later this very same child would create a new fellowship of his own – from humble beginnings to a community, a family of God, a Church and later one of the greatest religions the world has ever seen! This was the major change in those days. The coming of Jesus Christ signified a new approach. No longer [decree](#) – but [invitation](#)! No longer [command](#) but [community](#). Right at the time that Caesar issued another decree, something else happened. From the heart and ranks of the God's people came this radical change. God's presence became visible in a person – a person who spoke with gentleness and love.

This makes so much sense! Decrees do not really work. Good marriages do not live by the law and prophets! They blossom by compassion, reasonability, commitment and most of all by love. Repeating and lecturing each other about marriage vows signifies a failed marriage. Compassion, tenderness and love are the building blocks of sound and lasting marriages.

On this day before Christmas - as we share in the celebration of joy - we firmly believe that God still chooses to draw people by loving [invitation](#) rather than by [decree](#). We seek [community and compassion](#) when we make our way to a Church. God's love shines brightest when we proclaim Jesus as a way of life! People choose to worship, to share in faith and to respond to God's love. [The secular, brittle world simply does not supply these things!](#)

What drew you back to Church every time when you wondered if it is worth continuing? If you ask any of our members what drew him or her to the church in the first place, it was probably the experience of community or a moment of compassion that they remember – a warm-hearted church family, a loving Minister, a Sunday school class, a youth group, a church mission project, a friendship group. That is why we will always treasure a true Church of Jesus Christ.

I believe that people seek and expect certain values from their church. When they are wrestling with the realities of life and when they hunger for warmth, acceptance, love and

understanding, they hope to find it every time when they turn into this parking lot. People seek a spiritual home, community, a feeling of belonging to God's family. People seek a place where help comes in many forms in times of need, distress and pain. Compassion and **not condemnation** kept the Church of Jesus Christ alive through 2000 years of history. **At the Cradle of our Faith**, we discover hope and the conviction that faith in a living God will see us through and keep on providing for us with something to live for with all our heart.

The experience of **compassion** and **community** made this Sanctuary precious to many hearts and gave birth to our Quo Vadis dream to stand on the promises rather than sit on the premises. Time has come to reach out far beyond these walls. May our church always have a huge open invitation and wide open doors to our entire community!

"Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born ~  
If he is not born **within** your heart – your soul is still forlorn."

**Silesius**

**AMEN**