



LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES
People Of Christ With The Message Of Hope

From Nazareth to Bethlehem – An Advent Journey



Advent Devotions 2009

From Nazareth to Bethlehem

During the Christmas season people often travel to visit family and friends. If it's not a trip across town, it might be a trek out of state. More often than not, it probably involves a passage in one's mind too—darting back to Christmases past and time spent with family and friends. For Joseph and Mary (pregnant with Jesus), that first Advent season involved no small journeying either.

From Nazareth to Bethlehem, written by Pastor Vern Gundermann, takes readers alongside Joseph and Mary as they travel dusty roads, seek shelter, meet dignitaries from the East and lowly shepherds, encounter angels, and make their way down to and back from Egypt. This journey—a seemingly unpromising beginning for a couple bearing the Son of God—reveals again God's hand at work in the events of history as He guides and directs those who are obedient to Him.

In the end, Joseph and Mary's far-flung journey and the birth of Jesus were but the prelude of greater things to come. The Christ Child would not remain the babe in a manger. He would mature into manhood and would humble Himself through His ultimate journey to Golgotha. There, the apostle Paul says, He became "obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8b).

From the Gospels and their retelling of one couple's journey, there emerges for us the prologue to the world's greatest story: the birth of a Savior, who is "Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11b). Join Pastor Gundermann as he recounts this story with depth and insight.

JOURNEY 1

“The Journey Begins In Rome”

TEXT: Luke 2:1 - In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem actually begins in Rome. Caesar Augustus was concerned about many matters in his kingdom. One of them was its size. Roman men were not marrying and not having children. He imposed penalties for those not contributing to the growth of the kingdom. One way to monitor the growth was with a census.

The census would work an Advent blessing. It had been prophesied the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Caesar had expected the census would be one of the marks of his greatness. He listed it as eighth among the thirty-five “Acts of Augustus.”

He might well have expected his death would be noted by the number of years since the founding of Rome. Instead, the baby that would be born in Bethlehem because of his census would cause his death to be marked by *that* birth.

As we begin our Advent journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, we are reminded that what may seem like the innocent events of government, under the blessings of God, have a profound impact on how God’s grace is released into the world. This act of Caesar had a profound impact on God’s grace to us.

There are many governments involved in many decisions these days. Many of them appear to have no impact on the message of God’s love for us and His people, but they do! We give thanks for God’s blessings on the acts of leaders and their governments in times’ past. We pray He might bless those acts and decisions of government these Advent days. For as He acted to release His love in the days of Caesar Augustus, so He acts to release His love to us and through us today.

THE PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, we pray Your blessings upon the acts of those who govern these days. Use their acts for Your glorious purposes. Amen.

From Nazareth to Bethlehem boldly declares God's love and grace in the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ, in a style that's familiar and time-honored. In these texts, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod International Center Chaplain Vern Gundermann chronicles a number of journeys. Beginning with Mary and Joseph's road trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, to the Messiah's birth there, to the family's flight to Egypt, to Jesus' ministry in Palestine—these devotions show a God on the move in the lives of men—both ancient and modern.

As an adult, Jesus was no stranger to the road. One might suppose it only natural then that His introduction into this world would be while on the move. For Jesus, birth came not in the security of some luxurious residence in Palestine but, instead, in a nondescript manger when "there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7b). It didn't matter, however, where the Christ was born, because He, too, was on a mission—one of love and saving grace. As Gundermann writes, "He would be the Good Shepherd who would lay down His life for His sheep. For them. For us. For the whole world!"



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