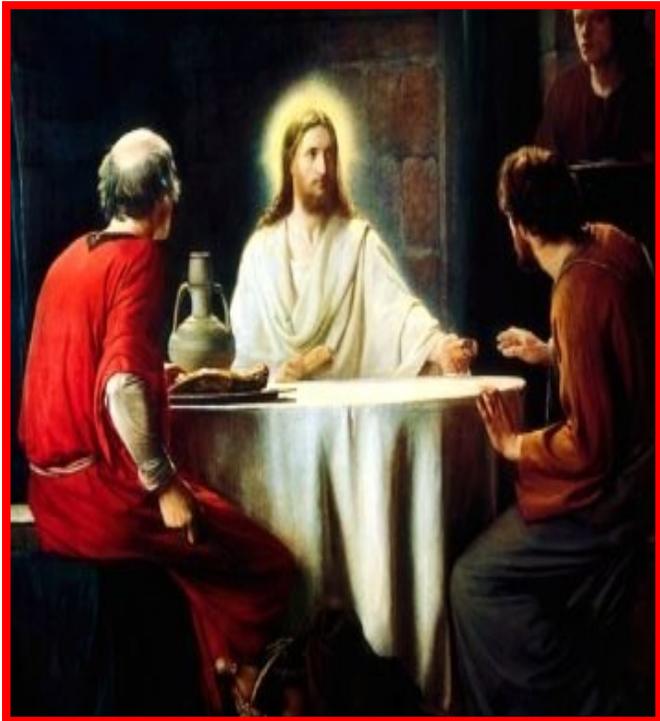


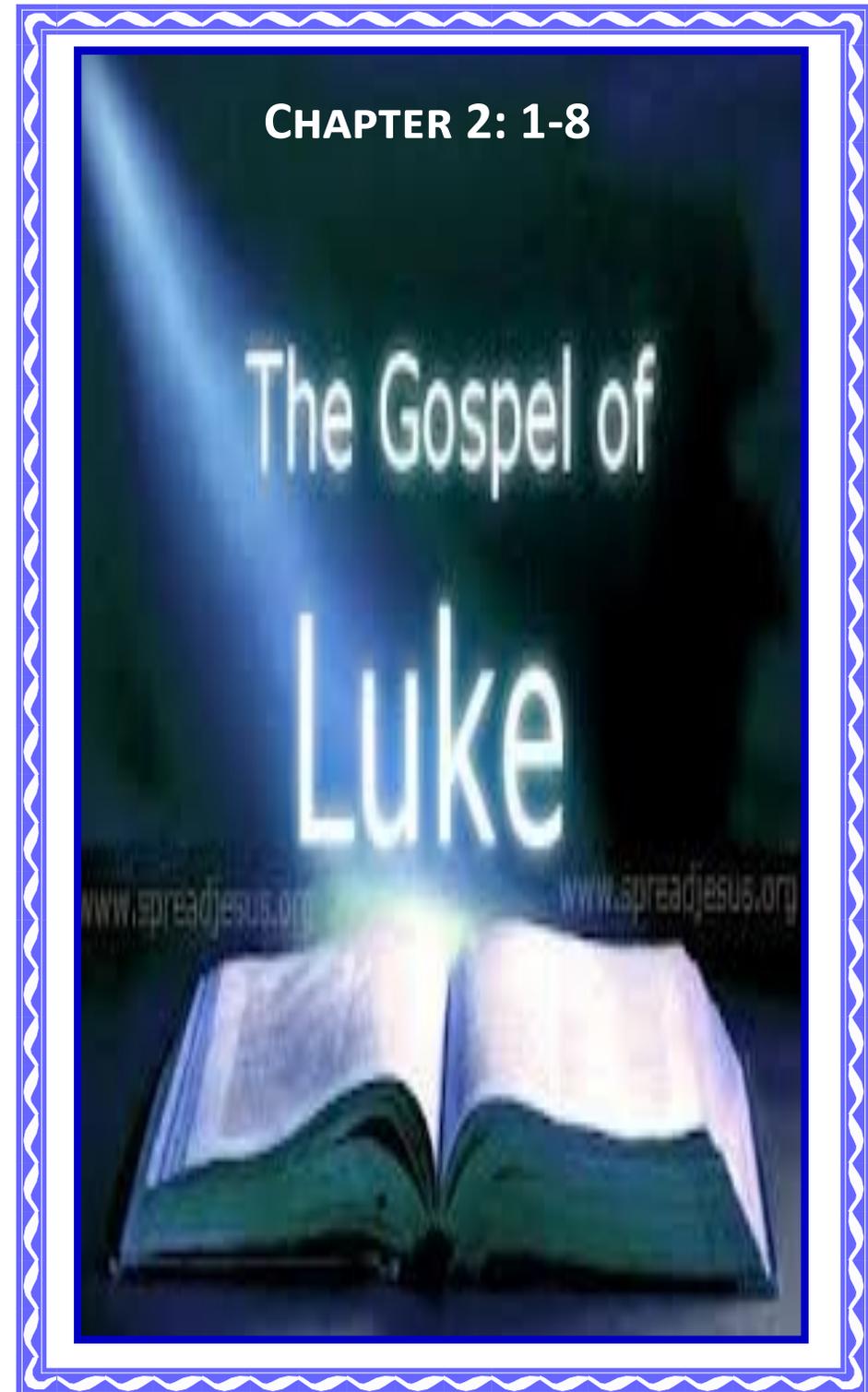
December is the common tradition of the Church and of all ages. In answer to Scaliger's argument, it may be urged that in warm climates, such as Palestine, flocks stay in the fields even in winter; whether in the open air, or in sheds prepared for the purpose, such as there doubtless would have been in "the Tower of Edar." So in Italy one sees sheep and cattle feeding on the plains the whole winter.

*Keeping watch over their flocks by night.* In the Greek *φυλάσσετε φυλακάς*—keeping watch through the four watches of the night to guard their flocks lest they might be pillaged by wolves or robbers. Hence we gather that Christ was born in the night, probably after midnight, when the 25th day of December was beginning. And this is signified mystically (for there is another and literal interpretation of the passage) by the words of Wisdom xviii. 14:—"For while all things were in quiet silence, and that night was in the midst of her swift course, Thine Almighty Word leaped down from heaven out of Thy royal throne, as a fierce man of war into the midst of a land of destruction."

In memory of the event the Church of the Three Shepherds was afterwards built on this spot. Lucius Dexter in his Chronicle, which he dedicates to S. Jerome, says, "A.U.C. 752, in the consulship of Lentulus and Messala, one year before the consulship of Augustus and Sylvanus, Christ is born, and is pointed out to three shepherds who were holy men." See Baronias, AC. 1.



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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.*

Luke's gospel is a compilation of various interviews with eye-witnesses and close followers of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). The author, Luke, probably did not become a Christian until several years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is first mentioned (implicitly) in Acts 16:10 (Acts is another book of the New Testament which Luke wrote). He did not, therefore, meet Jesus in the flesh and he himself was not an eye-witness.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

## Luke 2: 1-8

Douay Rheims Version

*The birth of Christ. His presentation in the temple. Simeon's prophecy.  
Christ at twelve years of age, is found amongst the doctors.*

1. And it came to pass that in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled.
2. This enrolling was first made by Cyrinus, the governor of Syria.
3. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city.
4. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem: because he was of the house and family of David.
5. To be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child.

am shut up in a tiny body and in this paltry manger, and art thou, Christian, ashamed to be despised as a little one and lowly? Not in Herod's palace would I be born, not in the palace of Augustus, but in a cavern, in a manger; I chose to dwell in humble cottages, and preferred the sheepfold before the royal court, but thou dost follow after courts and the things of courts. Sons of men, why delight ye in vanity, and why seek ye after a lie?

“The stable cries aloud”—says S. Bernard, sermon 5, “On the Nativity”—“the manger cries aloud, His tears and His clothes. The stable cries out that it is ready to be the shelter and hospital of man who has fallen among thieves; the manger, that food is ready for man that is become like to the beasts; His tears and His clothes that with them man's bleeding wounds are now washed and wiped dry.”

*Because there was no room for them in the inn*—namely, for Mary and Joseph. The reading “for Him,” adopted by some, is, therefore, incorrect. Barradius, who is among these, gives as a reason why the Blessed Virgin brought forth in the cave, and why Christ was laid to rest in a manger and not in a bed, that all the places in the inn had already been taken by the crowd of richer people who were flocking thither for the census. It is very likely that in a small town like Bethlehem there was only one inn; as S. Luke here implies. But this came to pass by the supreme foreknowledge and providence of Christ, that he might give us an example of the greatest humility and poverty. Hiding Himself away, however, He was made manifest and glorified by God, through the star that summoned the wise men, the angels sent to the shepherds, the over-turning of idols, and other miracles which Orosius, bk. vi. ch. 20, and Baronius in his annals, vol. 1, recount.

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.* In the fields and plains about Bethlehem. St. Jerome, Ep. 27, Brochardus, and others say that it was the same place where Jacob fed his flocks, and which was called the Tower of Edar, or the flock, because it is rich in pasturage; Gen. xxxv. 21. Here, then, it was that the angels sang “Glory to God in the highest;” and Helena built on the spot a Church in honour of the Holy Angels. The place is about a mile from Bethlehem.

Abiding in the field. In Greek *ἀγζαυλοῦντες*—*passing the night or keeping their flocks in the field.* For *αὐλή* is a *fold or enclosed place*, and *αγζός* is a *field.* Theophylact interprets *singing in the field*, as though from *αὐλεῖν*, *to sing.*

From these words Joseph Scaliger argues that Christ was born in September; for it is then, he says, and not in December, the depth of winter, when everything is stiff with frost or snow, that sheep are herded and fed in the fields. However, that Christ was born on the 25th of

prepared the heavens I was there: when He set a compass upon the face of the depth . . . Then I was by him, as one brought up with him.” Prov. viii. 22.

And let the Sybil of the Gentiles tell us in Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue.

“The last great age, foretold by sacred rhymes,  
Renewed its finished course, Saturnian times  
Roll round again; and mighty years begun  
From their first orb, in radiant circles run.  
The base degenerate iron offspring ends;  
A golden progeny from heaven descends”

—Dryden’s “Pastoral IV.”

With reason, then, does S. Augustine exclaim, “O miracles! O prodigies! O mysteries! Brethren, the laws of nature are changed, God is born as a Man, a virgin is pregnant. . . . God who is and was the Creator becomes a creature, He who is unmeasured is held, He who makes men rich is made poor, the Incorporeal is clothed with flesh, the Invisible is seen. . . . What was it that so great a God did, lying in so small a covering of flesh in the crib? Let us hear Him as He teaches us from His Manger-Throne,—teaching not by word but by example.” I, who with three of my fingers poise the earth’s vast mass, I who did create heaven and earth, the King of Glory and Lord of Majesty, beneath whom the columns of heaven tremble, and they that bear the globe are bowed down,—I, for love of thee alone, O man, to deliver thee from thy sin and from the eternal flames of hell, and to bring thee to the happiness of heaven, have come “leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills;”—from heaven have I leapt down upon earth, from the bosom of the Father to the Virgin’s womb. Through the bowels of My compassion have I “the Dayspring from on high” visited thee; I have joined in one person the Word with flesh, a spirit with the slime of earth, God with man, and most intimate have I made the union. I have become a little child, thy bone and thy flesh, I am made man to make thee God. Within the manger, the food, as it were of the ox and the ass, I lie among the beasts, because thou wast living like unto the beasts,—wallowing in flesh and blood. Thou hadst become as the horse and the mule that have no understanding. For man when he was in honour did not understand, and was comparable to the senseless brutes and became like unto them. Therefore did I take flesh upon Me, that thou mayest eat My flesh, that joining it to thy flesh thou mayest breathe the breath of Heavenly and Divine Life.”

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If, then, thou wouldst not err, follow Me as the way to heaven; hearken unto Me as the Truth; embrace Me as the true Life. Vain is wealth, vain are pleasures, vain the honours of this world, which foolish mortals, like silly children, follow after and covet so greedily. True riches, true pleasures, undying honours are in heaven;—these doth God enjoy, and His angels and His saints;—aspire after these. Am I, Christ, the King of kings, born poor and needy, and dost thou, O Christian, seek after comforts and riches? Have I, the uncreated and illimitable Wisdom, chosen for Myself the pains of flesh and of spirit, and wilt thou indulge in the delights both of the one and of the other? I, whom the heavens cannot contain,

6. And it came to pass that when they were there, her days were accomplished that she should be delivered.
7. And she brought forth her first born son and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger: because there was no room for them in the inn.
8. And there were in the same country shepherds watching and keeping the night watches over their flock.
9. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by them and the brightness of God shone round about them: and they feared with a great fear.
10. And the angel said to them: Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people:
11. For, this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.
12. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.
13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying:
14. Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good will.
15. And it came to pass, after the angels departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another: Let us go over to Bethlehem and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath shewed to us.
16. And they came with haste: and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.
17. And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this child.
18. And all that heard wondered: and at those things that were told them by the shepherds.
19. But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.
20. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.
21. And after eight days were accomplished, that the child should be circumcised, his name was called JESUS, which was called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.
22. And after the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord:
23. As it is written in the law of the Lord: Every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord:
24. And to offer a sacrifice, according as it is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons:
25. And behold there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon: and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Ghost was in him.
26. And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.

27. And he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when his parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law,  
28. He also took him into his arms and blessed God and said  
29. Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace:  
30. Because my eyes have seen thy salvation,  
31. Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples:  
32. A light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.  
33. And his father and mother were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning him.  
34. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother: Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel and for a sign which shall be contradicted.  
35. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that, out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.  
36. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser. She was far advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity.  
37. And she was a widow until fourscore and four years: who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day.  
38. Now she, at the same hour, coming in, confessed to the Lord: and spoke of him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel.  
39. And after they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their city Nazareth.  
40. And the child grew and waxed strong, full of wisdom: and the grace of God was in him.  
41. And his parents went every year to Jerusalem, at the solemn day of the pasch.  
42. And when he was twelve years old, they going up into Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast,  
43. And having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem. And his parents knew it not.  
44. And thinking that he was in the company, they came a day's journey and sought him among their kinsfolks and acquaintance.  
45. And not finding him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking him.  
46. And it came to pass, that, after three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.  
47. And all that heard him were astonished at his wisdom and his answers.  
48. And seeing him, they wondered. And his mother said to him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.  
49. And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?  
50. And they understood not the word that he spoke unto them.  
51. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them. And his mother kept all these words in her heart.  
52. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men.

S. Maria Maggiore, where it is religiously visited and venerated.

Christ was placed in the manger for two reasons; first, because there was no place better fitted to hold Him—the straw in it forming a kind of bed on which the tender babe might repose; and, secondly, that in the rigour of winter, He might be warmed by the breath of the ox and the ass. For the tradition goes that an ox and an ass were tethered to this manger, and such is the common belief of the faithful. Of these two animals the Church interprets the words of Habakkuk iii 2, “In the midst of two animals shalt Thou be known” (Vulgate), and appropriates also Isaiah i. 3, “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib,”—such is the explanation given on these passages by S. Jerome, Nazianzen, Cyril, Paulinus, and others, quoted by Baronius.

Gregory of Nyssa “On the Nativity” gives a mystical reason as follows:—“A manger is the dwelling-place of beasts; in such a place is the Word born, that the ox may know his owner, and the ass the resting-place of his Lord. Now, the ox is the Jew under the yoke of the Law; and the ass is an animal fitted for bearing burdens,—the Gentile groaning under the grievous burden of idolatry. Moreover, the ordinary food of beasts is hay. But the rational animal eats bread, wherefore the Bread of Life which came down from heaven is laid in the crib where the food of beasts is wont to be placed, that even animals void of reason may share the food of reasonable beings.”

Many mothers of Saints, following the example of Christ, have brought forth their sons in a stable. The mother of S. Francis, being pregnant, and, unable to give birth to her child, advised by a poor pilgrim to betake herself to a stable, did as she was told, and there gave birth to S. Francis, the imitator of Christ’s poverty. So says Ribadaneira in his life. Let all Christians look at and contemplate Christ in the manger, and consider Who and What He is,—what He does, for whom and why He does it. For Christ in the manger, God made Man, the Word become a babe,—is the love and admiration of all the angels and all the faithful, at whom they stand amazed and shall be amazed for all eternity. For who will not be astonished if he look thoughtfully at this Child and ask Him, Who art thou, O Babe of Bethlehem? and hear Him answer; learn of Isaiah,—“Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” Isaiah ix. 6.

“O God, we have thought of thy loving kindness in the midst of Thy temple. For this God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide unto death.” Ps. xlviii.

Let Solomon, the wisest of kings, teach who this is;—“The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. . . . When He

A third reason is that Christ took upon Him the meanness, the lowliness, the ills of our flesh, not for Himself but for us, to prick the icy hearts of men with the effectual stimulus of love and stir them up,—nay, force them, to love Him in return. For Christ, in His Incarnation, is ever calling aloud to us; I have given Myself all to thee, do thou in turn give thyself whole to Me. For this did I take flesh upon Me, that thou mightest say with Paul, I live now not I, but Christ lives in me. Listen to S. Ambrose,—“He therefore was a little infant that thou mightest be a perfect man—He swathed in bands that thou mightest be freed from the snares of death—He in a crib that thou mightest be on the altars—He on earth that thou mightest be in heaven—He had not room in the inn, that thou mightest have more abiding places among the inhabitants of heaven. . . . His poverty, therefore, is my heritage, and the weakness of my Lord is my strength.”

A fourth reason is that we could not conceive the idea of God, who is a pure and uncreated spirit, so God clothed Himself in our flesh that we might see Him with our eyes and hear Him with our ears. It is this that the Church sings in the Preface of the Mass of the Nativity—“Because by the Mystery of the Incarnate Word a new effulgence of Thy glory has shone upon the eyes of our soul, that coming to know God visibly we may by Him be rapt into yearning after things that are not seen.”

*Firstborn*—and only born. The firstborn is he who is born first, though no other be begotten after him; for such an one enjoys the rights and privileges of primogeniture.

*And wrapped Him in swaddling clothes*—and cheap, but clean and decent. Cyprian, or whoever is the author of the book, “On the Chief Works of Christ,” in serm. 1, says, “In place of purple some rags are got together, instead of the regal equipage a few fragments; the Mother is also the nurse and pays devoted attention to her beloved Offspring.” The Ethiopian version, instead of “wrapped Him in swaddling clothes,” has “bound His thumbs,” as though this were the sign by which the Infant was recognised by the shepherds. This is connected with the Ethiopian tradition that the Queen of Sheba, when she returned to Ethiopia from her visit to Solomon, brought forth a son called Menelich, whom she had conceived by him, and that she sent this son back to Jerusalem, putting on his thumb the ring which Solomon had given her, that by this sign he might be known by his father.

*And laid Him in a manger.* Passing over the various opinions on the subject recorded by Baronius and others, we may note that the place of Christ’s birth was not the stable belonging to some rustic dwelling, but a cave hewn out of a rock at the eastern end of the city of Bethlehem. This is on the authority of S. Jerome, “Ep, 18 ad Marcellam,” Bede, “de Locis Sanctis” ch. 8, and others. Whether the cave were within or without the city of Bethlehem authorities are not agreed. Bede says that a miraculous perennial spring took its rise in the rock of the cave, and was still flowing, in his time; he also records that the whole cave was cased in marble by the Christians, and adorned with a magnificent church built above it. That there was in this cave a wooden manger, well known to all the shepherds of that part, is clear from the fact that the shepherds soon found the spot when the angel indicated it to them by this sign. This manger was taken from thence to Rome, and there placed in the Basilica of

Ver. 1.—*And it came to pass in those days* (in which John the Baptist was born) *there went forth a decree*, &c. The Syriac for “all the world,” has “all the people of his dominion,” subject that is, to Augustus and the Romans. For we have the authority of Suetonius that Augustus did not rule over the Goths, the Armenians, or the Indians. This enrolment was made, both that the number of men under the sway of Augustus might be known, and also with a view to collecting the tribute to be taken to the Roman treasury, exhausted by so many wars; for each person gave in an account of his income. It is probable that the Jews gave what they otherwise gave in taxes according to their law, half a shekel apiece, that is two reals. Exod. xxx. 11-16; Matt. xxii. 19.

*From Cæsar.* The true name of this Cæsar was Octavius or Octavian, the sister’s son of Julius. He being the first Monarch of Rome, extended the glory of the empire and added to it in a wonderful degree; hence he received the surname of Augustus in the eighteenth year of his reign (from which date Censorinus reckons the years of Augustus, and calls them the Augustian or Augustæan years) as though he were some divinity come down from heaven. For he reigned in the greatest peace, plenty, splendour, and felicity for fifty-seven years. Hence the proverb, “Happier than Augustus, better than Trajan.” This census was taken by Augustus when he had the whole world in a state of peace, and had therefore closed the temple of Janus for the third time, in the fortieth year of his reign. And all this happened under the guidance of God, that He might signify that Christ was now born, who was to bring peace to all the world. So Bede, “A lover of peace, He would be born in a time of the most profound quiet. And there could be no plainer indication of peace than that a census should be taken of the whole world, whose master Augustus was, having reigned at the time of Christ’s nativity for some twelve years in the greatest peace, war being lulled to sleep throughout all the world.” Wherefore the Virgin Mother of God appeared to Augustus in the Capitol bearing the Infant in her arms, Augustus himself having already learned from the Oracle of Apollo that a Hebrew child was born who had imposed silence upon the Oracles of Idols, and having erected an altar in the Capitol with the title, “The Altar of the Firstborn of God.” Hence Constantine the Great built on that spot a temple to the memory of Mary, Mother of God, which exists to this day, and is commonly called the “Ara Cœli.” There too the place is shown where Augustus saw the vision. So Baronius, following Suidas, Nicephorus, and others, in the materials of his “Annals.” Moreover, in the same reign there flowed out of the earth, in the shop of a certain deserving man, at Rome, a plentiful fountain of oil, which lasted the whole day; and the spot is still shown in the Church of St. Maria in Trastevere. “By this sign” says Osorius, book vi. ch. 20, “what more plainly declared than the birth of Christ in the reign of Caesar Augustus?” “For ‘Christ’ being interpreted is ‘The Anointed’”—because He hath anointed us, and doth anoint us with the oil of grace and of gladness through all the days of our mortal life. The question arises, In what year of Augustus was Christ born?

The opinions of the learned and of chronologists differ on this point. The first opinion is that Christ was born in the 41st Julian year, the 40th of the reign of Augustus, the 36th of Herod, that is, A.U.C. 749, the fourth year of Olympiad 193. The Julian years date from that in which Julius Caesar reformed the calendar, the last year but one of his life. This opinion agrees very well with Sacred and Profane histories. The only objection to it is that in S. Luke iii. 1 and 23. It is said of Christ that when He was baptized He “was beginning to be about thirty years old,” while according to this view He must have been thirty-two, or nearly as much, for Augustus reigned fifty-seven years. The answer given to this is that Christ is called *about* thirty years, because He was thirty-two. In the same way S. Augustine is said in the old Breviaries to have been baptized in his thirtieth year, when he really was thirty-three, as the lately corrected Breviaries have it.

The second opinion is that Christ was born in the 41st year of Augustus, A.U.C. 750. So think Sulpicius Severus and S. Jerome; Irenæus and Tertullian also are inclined to this opinion.

The third places the date in the 42nd year of Augustus, A.U.C. 751. So Clement of Alexandria and Cassiodorus among the ancients, Scaliger and the Martyrologium Romanum for the 25th December among the moderns. I have accordingly taken this date in the Chronological Chart which I have prefixed to the Pentateuch.

The fourth is the 43d of Augustus, A.U.C. 751. So S. Epiphanius, Eusebius, Nicephorus, and others. Francis Suarez, Maldonatus, and others incline to this opinion.

The fifth makes it the 44th of Augustus, A.U.C. 753. So Joannes Lucidus, and Dionysius Exiguus with their followers.

The sixth is the 45th of Augustus, A.U.C. 754. So Paul of Middlesburgh, Bishop of Sempronia, Peter of Aliacum, Bellarmine, and Bede; and very recently, but with great exactitude, our own Petavius, in the “Rationarium Temporum.”

All these opinions have their probabilities and also their difficulties. In a matter of so much doubt there can be no certainty of definition. With the first the early Annals in Epiphanius expressly agree, the old, Chronicle in Eusebius, and an anonymous chronologist writing 1400 years ago. In its favour there is also, first, that in that year the temple of Janus was shut, and there was the greatest peace in the world, as I have said. Secondly, that Herod in the 37th year of his reign (the 41st of Augustus), and a little before his death, ordered the children under two years to be slain, Matt. ii. Christ must, therefore, have then been in His second year. This argument is strong, and can scarcely be solved except by torturing the expression “a bimatu” [Greek ἀπὸ διετοῦς]. Thirdly, Christ must have been born in a leap year, as is clear if we count back from the present to the birth of Christ, for every hundredth year is a leap year. But the 40th year of Augustus was a leap year, and the 41st and 42d were not. For the first year of the Julian Era was a leap year, as Macrobius, Censorinus and others tell us, and therefore the tenth leap year of the Era must have been the year 41—or the 40th year of Augustus. Besides which, it is clear from Josephus, Dion, Hegesippus,

Ribadaneira says that there is a tradition to the effect that the Blessed Virgin, as soon as she saw Christ, struck with wonder at God made Man, prostrated herself on the ground before Him, and, with the deepest reverence and joy of heart, saluted Him with the words, Thou art come to one who has longed for Thee, my God! my Lord! my Son!—not doubting that she was understood by Him, infant as He was; and that thus she adored Him, kissing his feet as God, His hands as her Lord, and His face as her Son.

Christ, says S. Bernard, sermon 4, “On the Nativity,” when born cried and shed tears like other infants; both that He might begin to weep for and wash away our sins and also that He might conform himself to other infants; as Solomon, who was a type of Christ, says, “And when I was born, I drew in the common air, and fell upon the earth, which is of like nature, and the first voice which I uttered was crying, as all others do. . . . For there is no king that had any other beginning of birth.” Wisdom vii. 3-5.

All the angels accompanied Christ, their God and Lord, to earth, as all royal households accompany a king when he goes abroad. They were amazed at God the immeasurable as it were straitened into a span’s breadth, they venerated Him and adored Him. Such is the meaning of the Apostle where he says, “And again, when He bringeth His Firstborn into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him,” Heb. i. 6.

And so it came to pass that this stable was, as it were, turned into the highest heaven,—full of angels, yea, of cherubim and seraphim, who all, leaving heaven, came down to adore their God made Man. Such was the work of the Incarnation and Nativity of the Word,—hitherto inconceivable, and, as it were, incredible to the angels, as being the supreme and appropriate work of the Divine Power, Wisdom, Justice, and Clemency—surpassing every understanding of men and of angels.

The reasons why Christ would be made Man and born on earth were many. First, that suffering and dying in the flesh He might redeem us from our sins and from hell. That He might teach us by example rather than word the way of salvation, and give us a perfect specimen of sanctity and of all virtues, but especially of the most profound humility. “Dig within thyself,” says S. Augustine, “the foundation of humility, and so shalt thou arrive at the summit of charity.”

Another reason was that Christ wished to become our kinsman and brother, nay, our very flesh and blood, in order that He might deal as flesh with flesh, as man with man, as equal with equal. Hence S. Bernard (*Serm. 3, super Missus Est*) says, “He has been sent;—let us strive to be made like as this little one; let us learn of Him, for He is meek and humble of heart, lest the Great God be made Man to no purpose.”

far greater than that between other mothers and their offspring, for the love which is divided between mother and father was, in the case of the Virgin, united and kept together, since she was to Him in place of both, mother and father. Secondly, as she conceived so she brought forth, remaining a virgin, so that Christ was born while the womb of his mother was closed, and penetrated as the rays of the sun penetrate glass.

Thirdly, the Blessed Virgin, as she conceived without concupiscence, so also brought forth without pain, or any of the concomitants of ordinary childbirth. So say the Fathers everywhere.

So the Blessed Virgin was all vigorous and in good health, absorbed in the love and contemplation of her Son, each moment expecting His birth, and longing to see and embrace Him.

And she herself on a certain anniversary of the Nativity made a revelation to S. Bridget, as the latter tells us in book vi. ch. 88 of her Revelations, saying, "When He was born of me He went forth from my closed virgin womb with unspeakable joy and exultation. . . . I brought Him forth as thou hast now seen me, kneeling alone in prayer in the stable. For, with such exultation and gladness of soul did I bear Him that I felt no trouble nor any pain; but straightway I wrapped Him in the clean clothing which I had prepared long before. And when Joseph saw these things, he marvelled with great joy and gladness that I had brought forth without assistance." And in the "Angelic Discourse," ch. xv.—"God Himself bent low His majesty, and, descending into the womb of the Virgin . . . formed in purest fashion from the flesh and blood of the Virgin alone His Human Body. And therefore is that most chosen Mother fitly likened to the burning bush which Moses saw, that took no hurt. . . . Moreover as, when the Son of God was conceived, He entered throughout the whole body of the Virgin with His Divinity, so, when he was born with His Humanity and His Godhead, He was poured forth throughout her body, like all its sweetness shed whole from the bosom of the rose, the glory of maidenhood remaining entire in His Mother."

There is a question as to what place was the first to receive Christ at His birth. Barradius thinks it was the ground, that Christ might teach us humility. Others think that Christ was received into the arms of His Mother, with exceeding joy,—for this would seem to be becoming for such a mother and such a son, and would be natural, and is gathered from what Luke immediately adds, "and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes." Taking Him in her hands she adored Him, kneeling, and then kissed Him most sweetly, and wrapped Him in the clothes and bands. Suarez thinks that Christ, as soon as He was born, was laid by angels in the arms of His most holy and loving Mother; S. Gregory of Nyssa implies the same. This would be the place most becoming to Him, and most consonant to the wishes both of Son and Mother; and from thence she placed Him in the manger.

S. Bridget, Revel. bk. viii. ch. 47, implies that, at His birth, Christ came of His own accord into the hands of His sweet Virgin Mother, and this may be piously believed with great probability.

and others, that Herod ruled altogether thirty-seven years, and died in the year 43 of the Julian Era, *before the Passover*. Therefore Christ could not have been born under him in that or any following year in the *end of the year namely*, in December.

Lastly, this was the year in which Augustus introduced to the Forum, with great pomp, his grandson Caius Caesar,—the son of his daughter Julia and his son-in-law Marcus Agrippa—he, on that occasion, laying aside the "toga prætexta," and putting on the "virilis"—according to the Roman custom. For Caius was born A.U.C. 734, in the consulship of M. Apuleius and P. Silius—as Lipsius shows from Dio, from the stone of Ancyra, and from other documents. Therefore A.U.C. 749 must have been that in which he assumed the "toga virilis"—he then entering on his sixteenth year.

In this same year it was that God the Father introduced to the world His Son Jesus Christ, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, that through Him He might adopt as sons all that believed in Him, and make them heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

From this view likewise we may easily understand why Christ did not come to Jerusalem before the twelfth year of His age; namely, because Archelaus, the son of Herod, reigned there until that year, and he, like his father, was a source of danger to Christ. Archelaus reigned ten years, add to these the two last years of Herod and we have the twelve years, after which Archelaus was driven into exile, and then Christ freely and without fear went to the Temple at Jerusalem.

Ver. 2.—*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. First, that is general*,—throughout all the world, which had now been lulled into peace under Augustus and the Romans; for there was a particular census taken in several provinces prior to this general one. So Paulus Orosius, Bede, Maldonatus, Jansenius, Toletus, Franciscus Lucas and others. *First, again*, because a second was taken ten years after, when Cyrenius was sent to Syria to superintend it, for the purpose of confiscating the property of Archelaus who was then exiled;—see Josephus, Antiq. bk. xviii., ch. 1. Tertullian, "against Marcion" bk. iv., ch. 7, 19, and 36, says that this first enrolment was made under Sentius Saturninus, who was sent expressly for the purpose by Augustus at the time when Cyrenius was governor of Syria in all things, and, consequently, with respect to this census as well. Or, according to others, Cyrenius began the census, and, being called away to a war against the Homonadians—over whom he shortly after triumphed—left it to Saturninus to finish.

Hence it follows that this enrolment and census was not a lustral or quinquennial, but a new and universal one; the second and most celebrated of the three made by Augustus, in the Consulship of Censorinus

and Asinius, as the stone of Ancyra, Suetonius, and Josephus, Antiq. xvii., ch. 3, have it. The first census was that which Augustus took twenty years before in his sixth consulate and the seventeenth year of his reign, M. Agrippa his son-in-law being his colleague, while the third was twenty years after, in the last year of his reign and his life, with Tiberius, who had married Julia at the death of Agrippa, his mother Livia having married Augustus.

The time occupied in making one of these enrolments was five years.

*Cyrenius.* This was P. Sulpitius Quirinus, Cyrinus, or Cyrinius whom Augustus had appointed tutor to Caius Cæsar when he went to Syria, and whom he ordered to remain as governor when Caius died there, as Velleius the companion of Caius, Suetonius, Florus, Dio, and others record.

*Ver. 3.—And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.* To the cities from which their respective families took their origin; as the house of David, of which Joseph and Christ were born, took theirs from Bethlehem; David having been born and brought up in Bethlehem. The Jews had divided their nation into twelve tribes and these again into different families, and so the Romans, in taking the census among them, followed this division.

Indeed all this was taking place under the direction of God, that it might be clear to the whole world that Christ, then newly born in Bethlehem, was of the tribe of Judah and the house of David, and that He was the Messiah, as the Prophets had foretold.

*To be taxed.*—The Greek ἀπογζάφειναι means both *to be enrolled* and *to make a declaration*. Each one was enrolled, and made a declaration of allegiance to him who enrolled him, namely to Cyrenius, as the viceregent of Augustus. For at Rome all as to whose loyalty towards Augustus and the Senate there was no doubt, were enrolled as citizens and subjects, but elsewhere they were said to make a declaration of allegiance, as being foreigners subdued by the Roman arms. Orosius, book vi., last chapter, infers from this enrolment that Christ was a Roman citizen, that He might, as it were, tacitly signify that all Christians must be subjects to the Roman Pontiff and Church.

*Symbolically*, by this enrolment is signified the coming of Christ to free us from the servitude of the devil, and subdue all the world to His faith and worship, not by force of arms, but by the efficacy of His grace; and for this cause it was that Augustus at that time refused the title of “Lord,” as Orosius and others testify.

Again, S. Gregory, Homily viii. in Evang., says, “Why is it that a census of all the world is taken when the Lord is about to be born, except that it is by this means clearly shown that He was appearing in the flesh who should enrol His elect in eternity? For, on the other hand, it is said of the reprobate by the Prophet, Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the Just.” So too Origen. “To one who regards the matter attentively it seems to present a kind of mystery, as though, in the enrolment of the whole world, it behooved Christ too to be enrolled, that being

enrolled with all other men He might sanctify all, and that having entered in the census with all the world, He might grant to the world something in common with Himself.”

Hence it appears that Christ was enrolled not immediately after His birth, but eight days after His circumcision; for at His circumcision the name of Jesus was given Him, and, in the presence of the inhabitants of Bethlehem, who were of the house of David, entered on the public tablets which Cyrenius forwarded to Augustus, to wit that Jesus the Son of Mary was born in Bethlehem, of the lineage of David. So Justin “Apol. ii., ad Antoninum Pium,” Origen, and others.

*Ver. 6.—And so it was that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.* Here the prophecy of Micah, v. 2, that Christ should be born in Bethlehem, was fulfilled.

*Went up*—from Nazareth, where, at the annunciation of the angel, the Blessed Virgin had conceived Christ. Hence Christ was called by the Jews a Galilean and a Nazarene.

*To Bethlehem*, which was beyond Jerusalem, and two hours journey from it; so that from Nazareth to Bethlehem was a journey of three days or more, and the Blessed Virgin, though near her delivery, accomplished it, as many piously suppose, on foot. S. Bernard, in his sermon on the words “A great sign appeared in heaven” of the Apocalypse, says, “She went up to Bethlehem, her delivery being now at hand, bearing that most precious trust, bearing a light burden, bearing Him by whom she was borne. . . . She alone conceived without defilement, carried without trouble, and brought forth her Son without pain.” S. Gregory, Hom in Evang., says, “And well is He born in Bethlehem. For Bethlehem means ‘The House of Bread.’ And He it is who says, ‘I am the Living Bread that came down from Heaven.’”

*Her days were accomplished.* She brought forth, not under the influence of the fatigue of the journey, but naturally. Observe that Christ was born a little after the winter solstice, when the days begin to increase, John the Baptist a little after the summer solstice, when the days begin to decrease. For, as John himself said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” So S. Augustine remarks.

*Ver. 7.—And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for Him in the inn.* She brought Him forth naturally like other mothers, and was, therefore, truly and naturally the mother of Christ, and therefore of God, for Christ is God. Moreover the Blessed Virgin was more the parent of Christ than other mothers are of their children; for from her Christ received all His substance, and other sons receive it not only from their mother and but also from their father. Hence the love between Christ His mother was