

events-surrounding-the-birth-of-christ

Good afternoon to all of you.

I did not know what to expect when I first heard of Moreno Valley.

I have been to Afghanistan, but I had never been here before.

And you will pardon the fact that apart from the culture, there are some similarities.

This is a kind of cross between a coastal and an inland desert.

You know, the further you go, clearly the more inland.

I can only hope that the water supply is available and satisfactory.

This is quite a remarkable area.

Many of you perhaps have never realized what the population of this state has become in the last 70 years.

There was a time, if we were to go back, 200 years, that this state was essentially populated by Spanish grandees of various cultural levels in society and Native Americans, with a few people of African background coming from Mexico.

In fact, this state was essentially beginning to be settled in the year 1776.

It was so far from Mexico City, it is much like thinking of going to the Yukon from Los Angeles.

So this was not clearly discernible as the state of the future.

My grandfather came to this country 109 years ago.

He, unlike many, came to examine it as to whether he wanted to migrate here.

And he crossed the country by rail.

This was just after the development of the railway.

So it was possible to come to the West Coast by rail in 1889.

He did not come to Southern California.

He came to California's most famous area, the Barbary Coast, as we would think of in San Francisco.

And when he came to see this state, he had to conclude that it was the state of the future.

What he would have said if he had come here, I don't know.

Because this environment is one of those remarkable things that unless you know how to work with it, how to bring the right minds, the right skills, the resources, it would be a most difficult area to prosper in.

But one has to consider that Los Angeles is a coastal desert.

And as a coastal desert, it is now the most important city in all the Pacific Rim with respect to ports.

We are the hub of North America with respect to Pacific ports.

There is no port south of here equal to it.

There is no port in Asia that has an industrial background of 275 million people industrialized.

So we are indeed in a remarkable area.

And I admire how many of you have met the challenge to see what life can bring forth here in this area.

It is appropriate today that we consider events of some significance.

They might not have been seen of great significance at the time except for a few.

It's the story that is introduced in the book of Luke.

Luke is a writer.

The name is that typical of Jews in the diaspora living in the Greek world.

Luke certainly had a Grecian culture, but many aspects of his life and his relationship to the Jewish community would indicate that he was of Jewish background, a person trained in medicine as many Jews are, and one who was quite familiar with both the Greco-Syrian world and also the Hebrew community scattered through the Eastern Mediterranean.

He writes as someone who had remarkable knowledge of sailing, that is there is no one who uses the remarkable technical terms that he does about the story of the shipwreck of the Apostle Paul.

But if we go back to the events that are cited at the beginning of the book of Luke, we're in a world that we should have at least a little knowledge of.

As background, it was centered in the city of Rome in the Italian peninsula at a time when the language, the cultural thinking was centered in the Eastern Mediterranean.

For west of Rome, there were not the same great cities.

Rome was the outpost in the west of a vast realm that was essentially Hellenistic in culture and now beginning to be Romanized.

If you were to name the great cities, you would have included Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus, Athens, and then you would think of Rome, but you would never have thought of London, Paris, or Madrid, or any other area of North Africa.

So we are at a time in which the Temple of the God Mars was closed at Rome.

There was a time when wars had in fact stopped in the Roman Empire and on its borders.

It was a remarkable period to close of what we now call the first century before the present era, or BC.

Augustus had become the emperor. We are dealing with the year 31 BC to give you a background.

Caesar Julius was dead and there were great problems that had beset the beginning of the empire, the transition from a republic.

At the same time, there were also remarkable achievements and in these remarkable achievements, one that Augustus is given significant credit for is that he brought things to his state of peace as much as anyone could have in his time.

This does not mean that everyone was happy because in Judea there was a man named Herod, a subordinate king, an emperor is really a king of kings.

As a subordinate ruler, he was Jewish, he was Jewish by religion.

He was an Edomite by family background of the house or family of Esau.

He had come to significant prominence, had in fact supported the opposition to Augustus, Mark Antony.

But there was one thing about Herod that is important for our story.

When he made the wrong political decision, because Mark Antony was in the eastern part of the empire, he acknowledged it and he said with the same loyalty that I was willing to serve Mark Antony, I am willing to submit to you, Caesar Augustus.

And Augustus was impressed by a man who would acknowledge that he could look at things and not simply create problems locally in the hope that was without meaning anymore.

But this man, a great architect, a remarkably determined individual, had many aspects of his life that were unpleasant.

His family was in turmoil and his attitude toward the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the community, was not altogether satisfactory.

He tried to please and most certainly behaved as a practicing Jew with respect to the religious externals.

Hence, he was the only one who could have imagined dismantling the temple and restoring it at the same time.

And making it possible for the Jews to believe as a whole that he meant to serve the religion that his ancestors had come to accept in the previous century.

So we are in the days of Augustus Caesar. At a time of peace, the second temple had been completely restored.

Herod is near the end of his life.

And so with that, I would like to introduce some very important things with respect to the birth and the previous conception of one of whom we have already spoken today.

Jesus of Nazareth.

But for much of the world, this was an incidental story.

The birth of one who came to be known as the Messiah addresses his letter.

If you please, in gospel form, it's called a gospel, a kind of presentation.

If you please, a biographical story.

In as much as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us.

Speaking of the Christian community, more specifically the Jewish community.

Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us.

It seemed good also to me having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first.

Now Luke makes a claim that no biographer could otherwise have made.

We would have to say in this case just as he has known of eyewitnesses delivering their reports.

He not only had access to the eyewitnesses, he had free movement in the Jewish communities in Judea and Galilee.

He was also a trained man and he was a converted mind.

And we are not told all the story of how this man came to know what he did.

Nevertheless, what is remarkable is that he is publishing this account of the gospel, an orderly account, through the auspices of most excellent theopolis.

This implies, as any commentator would tell you, that in those days Luke would not have been able financially to publish the work he did.

It was in fact underwritten by a person who certainly had Roman and Greco-Roman culture, the Roman nobility behind him.

That you may know the certainty of these things in which you are instructed.

Someone here, theophilus, a man of high rank, almost certainly one whom Paul would have known of, he was being instructed.

And this is a form of instruction with respect to the background of one who has come to be, in a religious sense, the most important historic figure among those who consider the great religions of the world as a part of their study.

There was, in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias of the division of Abijah.

His wife was of the daughters of Aaron and her name was Elizabeth.

Now, Grecian writers had a tendency to begin and just give you the background, much as if you were to see a movie, you would have the personalities who are portraying certain events, given so you know whom to expect to meet.

You were introduced to a king. Most everyone would have heard of Herod. He reigned 37 years from his appointment in 40 BC and 34 years from his acquisition of power in Jerusalem.

And in addition, we are introduced to what almost everyone in the cultural world of that time would have taken note of, that there was a remarkable priesthood among Jews.

And the priesthood here is simply introduced by name.

A certain priest named Zachariah. He is not a high priest.

The assumption has been made that Zachariah was the high priest and that he had entered the holy of holies on the day of atonement when the following message that I have not yet read occurred.

But that's not the case. He was not a high priest.

His wife was of the daughters of Aaron.

So not only was he of the house of Aaron, but his wife also was.

It's a very important factor.

And her name was Elizabeth.

They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.

They had a reputation for conduct in the nation which they served.

They had no child because Elizabeth was barren and they were both well advanced in years.

That's the background of the story.

So it was that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, there were 24 divisions among the priests.

They served a week at a time and around the year.

And on two basic periods, the spring and the autumn and early spring, early autumn and late spring, there was extra work as we associate the story of Passover season, Pentecost, or their Jewish names for that, and then the autumn festival season.

So basically, as we think of a year of 52 weeks, you two times 24 is 48, and then you had roughly 49, 50, 51, 52 as it was divided.

So in a normal year of 12 months, he would have served essentially twice and then on the separate occasions in the nation.

And according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. This is not the Holy of Holies.

And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

Now, this tells you the story. The altar of incense was not in the Holy of Holies.

The altar of incense was outside because this kind of offering, a symbol of the prayers of the nation, was to be regularly presented, not just once a year.

Now, when Zachariah saw the angel, he was troubled and fear fell upon him.

But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zachariahs, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

The probability, as far as we know, that when John was 30, his parents were deceased.

We have no record that they lived at that point in time to know of his death.

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He was to behave as a Nazarite.

He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

Now, this is an important part of the story.

This was in the temple.

Zachariahs, like many, is going to express how human nature reacts to certain messages, even that might seem to be good news.

Here was the son promised, who would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

He will also go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, that's the message already, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Now, perhaps, I shouldn't discuss the topic today, I could just as well stop here with verse 17, and discuss the state of affairs in Washington D.C., and across the country, and in how many, many households, or broken households.

This man promised to Zachariah and Elizabeth, would be called of God, would be great in the sight of the Lord, and, Jesus said at a later time, Jesus of Nazareth, a cousin, no one born of women was greater than John the Baptist, in terms of the whole of his person, a remarkable individual.

And his function was to change the attitude of fathers to children.

I like the choice of this order, we propose too often today to try to change the children's attitude toward the parents, on the assumption that the problem started with the children, in school or before school.

So he will turn in the quotation from scripture, the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

You get away from God, you get away from the knowledge of parenting.

I like to just cite an expression that I learned from a man who founded a house for alcoholic rehabilitation, called Pacifica House in Los Angeles.

He himself did not have the problem of alcohol or drug abuse.

He simply was involved in a felony, selling drugs, had never been arrested before, came from a responsible, respectable family who thought they could rear him by giving him all the money he needed to entertain himself, while they entertained themselves.

And the judge saw this man was not like this young man, like others.

And he said, I'll give you this opportunity.

You devote your life to helping others deal with the social problems of which you become a peddler, and you will not have to go to jail, but you must serve the community.

Or else this was no common misdemeanor. This was a felony.

And so he set about to do that.

And he soon discovered what I want to cite from him.

He discovered that to help people who have been overcome by addictions, alcoholism, in his particular case, you can't do everything for everybody in one institution.

He said, I found I had to reparent everybody I had to deal with.

I had to get them to grow up as children, no matter what their age, to begin to behave responsibly.

The process of rehabilitation in a thing like that is indeed reparenting.

And the message that the angel gave to Zacharias in a sense was that John would function as one who would show how parents should behave in order that their attitudes toward their children would be improved.

This does not mean we should abandon responsibility in the schools, but it is very important to realize we have to also change the environment in which young men and women, boys and girls, little children grow up.

Zacharias said to the angel, how shall I know this? Why, that's a surprise, after being told this remarkable message from, if you please, the presence of God's throne now manifest at the altar of incense, he expressed what many do.

How shall I know? How can I be sure? Doubt is one of the greatest problems that human beings have.

You remember the man who said, I believe in response to Jesus' query, do you believe that I can do this? His answer was, I believe. Help my unbelief.

Contrast that with the concept that lies behind the language of the New Testament, which is Greek, for the Greeks do not have to have one word for belief and another word for faith.

One word does for both, because if you have faith you believe, and if you believe you must have faith, or else you don't have belief.

A remarkable insight, but lost on so many today, who cannot imagine what God could do.

But here was a young man who would grow up and have a remarkable effect on a nation.

For I am an old man, he said, and my wife is well advanced in years.

I mean, let's be realistic, he's trying to argue.

An angel made it quite clear, he said, I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and am sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.

But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their own time.

We should learn from this the importance of believing truth when truth is established, when you know the source, and the people waited for Zacharias, because he took unusually long to come from the area where the priests could function into the court of the men.

And they marveled that he lingered so long in the temple.

And when he came out, he could not speak to them.

And they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

So it was as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.

We know nothing further of the conversation.

It was quite clear the people accepted that something had happened, that God had spoken, given some vision.

Now after those days, when that had happened, Luke says, his wife Elizabeth conceived and she hid herself five months.

Five months of the conception is not the first five months of the year.

She hid herself five months.

This was something that essentially would come to surprise the whole world when, that is the world of Judea, when the story came out.

They did not tell the story directly to the people at first.

And she said, the Lord has dealt with me in the days when he looked on me to take away my reproach among people.

Not to have children was considered a reproach, whether it should have been or not.

Many of those mentioned in the Bible, the wife whom Jacob first wanted to marry, Sarah herself, here we have another, Hannah the mother of Samuel as well.

Barenness can occur.

Now in the sixth month after it became apparent to all her friends that Elizabeth indeed was pregnant.

In the sixth month, the same messenger, Gabriel, was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.

To a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph.

A virgin is a statement of Luke.

It is based on a translation in the Greek of an Old Testament prophecy in the book of Isaiah.

In which the word virgin is used.

Now in the Greek world, moral behavior was not of the same standard as it was in what we would call the Orthodox Jewish communities.

There was enough adultery there, as Jesus pointed out.

But in the Greek world, the sense of the Hebrew term in the original Hebrew would not have been perceived in the same way.

The prophecy originally said in Hebrew, a young woman shall conceive and bear a child.

The translators, looking at what kind of child would be born, perceived that this would be an act of God.

And that it must be perceived as one who is a virgin.

And they so translated it, not because the Hebrew word says so, but because the context of what would happen.

And the origin of that child made it clear what the will of God would be.

But this virgin was betrothed.

Now I would like to say, there are people who will take exception to what I am going to say.

I don't intend to persuade anybody.

Jesus of Nazareth was not conceived in the womb of Mary out of wedlock.

She was betrothed.

This is not and can never have been in English properly translated as merely engaged.

An engagement in our culture is completely different from the old sense of betrothal in English or the Hebrew sense of this word.

This was the legal agreement that made it a marriage, as I will show you.

In order to establish virginity, the Old Covenant did not have any significant length of time between betrothal and marriage.

But as time went on and the morality of the world came to be what it was, that time came to be paramount.

So that finally living with one another as husband and wife was after a period of time that would demonstrate that there was no premarital affair.

But now listen carefully to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David.

So this is not now a part of the story of the priesthood.

This is a story of a young woman, a virgin named Miriam or Mary in English.

Miriam would have been the Hebrew word.

Of the house of David, Joseph descended from the royal family.

Mary is understood also historically to have so descended.

And having come in, the angel said to her, so he bid himself that he might enter the house and he says, Rejoice, highly favored one.

The Lord is with you.

Blessed are you among women.

Rejoice, highly favored one.

The old, old story, Ave Maria.

Though many of the thoughts later expressed differ from what Luke gives in that song.

Blessed are you among women.

And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying and considered what manner of greeting does a stranger bear me like this.

The angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God and behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name.

And here the original Hebrew was the same name as the successor to Moses, just so you understand.

Joshua, the English form of the Hebrew word when we think of going from Hebrew to English would be Joshua.

This went through the Greek language, Jesus.

The Jewish Christians today would have some form of Yeshua, of Yeshua.

And of course, you know what has happened.

In Spanish, we end up with Jesus.

In German, Jesus.

And in English, Jesus, all derivatives by way of the Greek.

But the interesting thing here is the importance of this name.

Who led the children of Israel into the promised land? Joshua.

He is the one who came to be the captain of the people who entered the promised land.

And the one who ultimately will lead the people into the land of promise without any further footnote.

Has the same name.

We think of it as Jesus because we have learned to read in a language where proper names have drifted through one language to another.

Now let us go on with the story.

He will be great and will be called the son of the highest.

And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

If he is the son of God, the son of the highest, we would see here that his origin is not through a human father.

Hence the translators of the prophecy that this refers to understood that God would be father to this son.

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

He would not die as mortal kings do and pass their inheritance from one generation to the next.

And of his kingdom there will be no end.

A most remarkable story of the function of Jesus.

He will be called the son of God.

He will sit on the throne of his father ancestor David.

Through his mother and through the legal right that Joseph would have in this case.

He would reign forever.

His kingdom will have no end.

Then Mary or Miriam said to the angel, now how can this be since I do not know a man? That is I am betrothed, I am married to legally someone.

How can this happen? That is what she wanted to know.

Her husband in that sense waited the second part of the marriage ceremony.

He was elsewhere.

So the answer came clearly.

The angel said to her, the Holy Spirit will come upon you.

The power of the highest will overshadow you.

Therefore also that holy one who is to be born.

Will be called the son of God.

God would send the Holy Spirit.

Such that she would conceive.

And this son would be unique in all of human experience.

Now indeed Elizabeth your relative by marriage has also conceived a son in her old age.

And this is now the sixth month for her who was called Baron.

That is the reputation she had.

And now the story gets out.

Nobody, not even Zephyr.

Or Elizabeth first mentioned it.

But once the sixth month had come there wasn't any question she could hide it no longer see.

And now the angel bears a message to Miriam.

For with God nothing will be impossible.

Then Mary said, behold the maid servant of the Lord.

Let her be the servant of the Lord.

Then Mary said, behold the maid servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to your word.

So she offered herself and called herself a maid servant.

When she said behold it means well look I will be that maid servant.

Let it be to me according to your word.

This young woman was not fearful.

Not in doubt about whether she would be ridiculed as having got pregnant by someone else after the formal legal documents were agreed to.

She made it plain and clear where she stood.

And the angel departed from her.

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste to a city of Judah.

Nazareth was in Galilee.

This was now the hill country in the area of Judah.

And entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

Now she didn't just slowly walk.

I'm reminded of how Rebecca was met by the servant of Abraham.

The woman who would be the wife of Isaac.

She ran from one place to another and was just bouncing around doing work.

Nothing lazy.

And here a woman, a young woman gets everything ready in her household and went into the hill country with haste to a city of Judah.

Now it happened when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary that the babe now six months along leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the spirit of God.

And she spoke out with a loud voice and said, Behold, Sorry, blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Everyone reared in Orthodox or Catholic faith would remember the story.

Hail Mary.

Blessed are you among women.

Blessed is the fruit of your womb.

But why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? A remarkable summation, isn't it? Why is this granted to me? Elizabeth said that the mother of the one who is our Lord.

The God of Israel who was to be born as an infant should now come to me.

You see, this tells me something very important that there were Jews who did understand and who did know that the Lord, the God of Israel would manifest himself as the savior.

And that in fact he would be born of the house of David of the tribe of Judah from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And he would manifest himself not merely in the words of instruction as he did in times past, but he would manifest himself by living his instruction.

And you would see how we ought to live.

God reveals in his revelation a way of life.

Today we love another expression, an expression that I would never have heard when I went to school, grammar school or even high school.

We call it lifestyle.

We have abandoned the sense of a way of life and we have substituted a style.

Now the implication of lifestyle versus way of life is quite obvious.

If there is a way of life, that is the way we go.

If there is a lifestyle mind can differ from yours.

My lifestyle is this, your lifestyle is that.

This is an age in which we do not like the negative aspects and even many of the positive aspects it seems of understanding what a way of life should be.

Recognize that there are certain areas of human responsibility that cannot be modified.

Indeed, as soon as the voice of your greetings sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.

So that's Elizabeth's comment, a remarkable insight into the meaning of what this is.

Now let's also understand that this was at a period of time when the question would arise if a Messiah is to be born.

How much earlier from the time he begins to manifest himself will he have been born? You see, if Messiah was to come after Augustus is dead, after Herod is dead, are we going to be privileged to know of his birth earlier? Is he going to function as a priest but not of the house of Aaron? If so, generally speaking, you note that to start with, even though it was later dropped to age 25, people entered the priesthood at age 30.

That's the way the law essentially was given of God because it takes a young man and a young woman to be something of that age to have the kind of maturity of this responsibility.

And so it was some potentially 30 years before the fulfillment that people were beginning to think of what might happen.

Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things.

Now Zacharias didn't believe right away.

He had to learn.

Mary did believe.

And Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for he has regarded the lowly state of his maid servant.

She places herself as someone of that status and certainly not a wealthy young lady.

For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed.

She who, sorry, for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.

And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered the proud and the imagination of their hearts.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly and has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty.

That's the history and the story of human experience.

He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers to Abraham and to his seed for ever.

This did not happen in China.

This did not happen in Spain.

This did not happen in Ethiopia.

It did not happen in Germany.

This happened among the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and David and Aaron.

And Mary remained with her about three months into the ninth month and returned to her house.

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered and she brought forth his son.

So Mary was away some three months.

When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.

So it was on the eighth day that they came to circumcise the child of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

And they would have called him after the name of his father Zacharias.

Normally the naming of a child remained until the ceremony of circumcision.

In many societies it's even longer than that because in many cases children don't live that long.

Now his mother answered and said, no, he shall be called John.

The father had not yet spoken.

But they said to her, there is no one among your relatives who is called by this name.

So they made signs to his father what he would have him called.

And he asked for a writing tablet and spoke saying that as he beckoned sign language.

His name is John and they all marveled.

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed and he spoke praising God.

Then fear came on all who dwelt around them and all these sayings were discussed throughout.

Listen carefully, notice, not throughout the great and important cities of Judea, all this was discussed in the hill country of Judea.

This would never have made the headlines in Jerusalem.

This was in the hill country of Judea.

And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts saying, what kind of child will this John be? And the hand of the Lord was with him.

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave the following prophecy that is foretelling what would happen.

Blessed is the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David as he spoke by the mouth of the Holy prophets.

Who have been since the world began? That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.

The oath which he swore to our father Abraham to grant that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear.

In holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

And you child will be called the prophet of the highest.

Now the first thing that is said here is not about John the Baptist in verses 68 through 75.

This is something that is foreseen in terms of what was yet to come in the house of David.

Verse 69.

But this child of the family of Aaron will be called the prophet of the highest.

For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.

That is your function is to precede the manifestation of the Lord who will be born of cousin Miriam, Mary.

To give knowledge of salvation to his people for the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God.

With which the day spring from on high has visited us.

That is a reference of course to what happens when the dawn comes.

John comes to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Tragically only some of the nation listened to John.

Some 40 years after he died the nation rejected the way of peace.

They rejected Messiah and abandoned anything they had learned from John and went to war with Rome.

And two generations later went to war again.

And it is remarkable I meet my wife meets in the home in a small group from our Kanoga Park congregation we meet in Sunland.

The home of a person of the house of Judah whose background doesn't even go to the days of Herod.

Who has been a descendant of the house of Judah from the time of Nebuchadnezzar.

Living in the media, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Grecian Empire and they finally migrate northwest and lived in the city of Minsk.

From which they migrated to Mexico and now live in Southern California.

Who have been out of the promised land 2,500 years.

Because they did not learn the way of peace and now they have to learn what happens.

What is it like to be among the nations? So the child grew John and became strong in spirit and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

That is the time when he was approximately 30.

That time we learn from later which is not the story today.

That time was the beginning of the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar.

According to the traditional eastern reckoning.

If you are interested you might take note that the Greeks by this time had made the Roman year that we would say begins with October.

The Greek world and that became October 1 became the beginning of the year.

I happen to have, my wife and I have friends in the Greek Orthodox Church in Richmond, Virginia.

And it is interesting when you look at the calendar, they all start in January.

But even the Greeks will tell you that when you come to October that is the real beginning of the year.

This happens to be a 1994 calendar.

Up to date one is at home.

So John the Baptist began in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar.

Beginning of October in AD 27, beginning of the 15th year.

Augustus had died in the month of August in AD 14.

Now to get back, and it came to pass in those days when John was a child, sorry, when John was born, that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

Now it doesn't say taxed, it says registered.

This was a registration unique up to this point.

This census could always be used for tax purposes, but they were to register and it was a census.

First took place when Carinius was governing Syria.

There is no documentation which would establish verse 2.

To this date no such information is demonstrable that would satisfy the scholarly world.

There is indeed a record that this decision occurred in the year 5 BC, in the month of August.

This particular registration was formally issued and therefore would, since that was already mid-summer, would be spread abroad before winter to the far reaches of the empire, and it is probable that it would have taken some two years, four and three, before all the evidence and everyone would be able to be registered.

And in February 2 BC a remarkable event happened.

Caesar acknowledged in his appointments from the senate that in fact the whole of the people by registering had given their oath of support and allegiance.

In the area of Ankara, Turkey is a summary of Augustus' statement of his appreciation of the fact that the people throughout the realm acknowledged him as Caesar.

The first time a Caesar had ever said that his ultimate function is not just that of the senate, but that of all the people of the empire.

That is, in submitting to this they had in fact granted Augustus the highest honor of respect, that he should be their Caesar.

And therefore we have an indication of the background of this story.

So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

This would take time, this was not just locally that you could do it.

You returned to where your people were so that no matter where you may be in business or traveling, where your home was, that's where you were to register.

Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David which was called Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife who was with child.

Now here Luke tells us nothing, but if you read Matthew you will discover that in the interim Joseph had found that Mary was pregnant and he was mindful to put her or divorce her, put her away privately.

If this was only an engagement it would never have required divorce.

By requiring divorce it is to acknowledge that they were man and wife legally.

And therefore this was not a child conceived out of wedlock.

Speaking of Jesus, so it was that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered and she brought forth her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

And so it would be difficult to start at a lower level than in the feed trough of livestock.

Where the king of the universe should be placed.

This is a remarkable area and I think that you should read the background of the story of John and of Jesus, the forerunner who gave his life and the one who followed.

Who gave his life and died and rose again as John will rise again.

If you haven't read the story I suggest you do in John with a different kind of background and in Matthew with the details that would have in fact given you a Jewish perspective of the story.

Luke tells it in terms of remarkable events for people who lived in the Greek speaking world.

I don't know how many of you play the piano or other musical instruments apart from those who are here but it certainly would well be worth your time to give some thought to some of the remarkable statements that are found in the four gospel accounts in the birth and the conception of Jesus so that you do understand because I know there are people who simply have not paid adequate attention to the remarkable words of Elizabeth of the angel twice and of Mary and then of Zachariah himself.

Because this child who was born shortly before Herod died in Jewish tradition he died on the 7th of Kislev and after Herod had reigned 34 or 37 years that would have been the equivalent of the day on the Roman calendar of November 25th and 26th and he was dead in 4 B.C.

His last year of reign would have been from 4 to 3 he never completed it.

That man was responsible for all his great gifts for the murder of an unaccountable number of children in and around Bethlehem and on the Greek calendar they even commemorate the death of those children which occurred shortly after the traditional view that the wise men came not only was Jesus circumcised 40 days afterward Mary went through the purification rites at Jerusalem and if Herod died on the 7th of Kislev November that year 25th and 26th you have some understanding of when the conception took place in late December and when the birth of Jesus took place in the beginning of autumn in the month of October I appreciate very much the opportunity of being here I would say this is a very alive congregation and may God bless all of you and this desert and help all of you to make it blossom as much as lies within you and may God bless all of you and may God bless you