

## **My View of the Bay**

**By: Rev. Dr. Robert Lueck**

*“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world...and everyone went to his own town to register...so Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.” Luke 2:1, 3-4*

These words from Luke’s gospel begin the familiar passage containing the record of Jesus’ birth. These verses are read numerous times during the Advent and Christmas season, and are committed to memory by many of us. They provide mental snapshots of the events surrounding the birth of the Savior.

Most of us will receive dozens of Christmas cards over the next 4-5 weeks that contain pictures of the events of Luke 2. We will see Joseph and Mary (riding on a donkey) looking toward the outline of a town in the distance. We will see shepherds, surrounded by sheep, looking at a star in the sky with Bethlehem in the background. There will be cards with angels suspended above those shepherds, and there will most certainly be a stable with a baby, Mary and Joseph, numerous animals, several shepherds bowing reverently in front of the manger, and a procession of camels ridden by men wearing crowns and gazing at a star shining down upon that same stable. Yes, you can picture it all.

Often we get caught up in the quaintness or sentiment of Christmas and view it as some mystical event filled with the emotional aspects of peace and joy, forgetting that it was a purposefully crafted plan of God to bring peace and joy far beyond that which can be expressed in human word and thought. The opening verses of the Christmas record remind us that this was an event imbedded in the historical context of its day. Caesar Augustus, one of the world’s most powerful rulers and viewed by his own people and culture as a god, makes a proclamation and the entire Roman world responds. Armies are mobilized, civil servants fulfill their obligations, and people from dozens of cultures line up to be counted, and, most likely, pay a registration tax because the ruler of the empire says so.

We may talk about divine power, but in our minds the power of Caesar trumps the mystical power of an unseen God...or does it. Joseph and his wife Mary would have had no justification to leave Nazareth at this point in their lives, though they may have desired to avoid any more speculation about her pregnancy, to travel several days to Bethlehem. But the Messiah was to be born in that humble village according to prophecy announced centuries before the Roman Empire came into being.