

# The Scene

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**Today** – *Understanding that Jesus WASN'T born on a snowy winter's night, right off of Main St. Bethlehem, on a silent night when all was calm and bright, is critical in understanding The Scene Jesus was born into and Why? We will look at The Scene and answer the Why of His birth at such a dark time in human history. What must we grasp about these details?*

**History lesson at the time of Jesus' birth...** few years before and after...

## **Roman Empire – slide**

- a) British Isles on the west, the Euphrates on the east, the Danube and the Rhine on the north, and the deserts of Africa on the south.
- b) more than one-third of the entire population of the globe – amounted to about one hundred million of souls.
- c) 500k foot soldiers.
- d) Pax Romana – created and managed through power!

## **Rome is disintegrating –**

- a) Fervent patriotism was disappearing, in its place was selfish ambition and greed.
- b) Bribery and corruption reigned throughout every department of their government offices.
- c) Moral virtues were waning, and the prevalence of carnal living damaged society.
- d) The traditional roles of marriage and family were going away and a large portion of the citizens of Rome preferred just living together.
- e) The development of the arts and sciences were progressing, but during the brightest period in the history of Roman literature, vice in every form was rising among the entire population.
- f) Nothing in their arts, sciences, philosophy, or the religion of heathenism gave answers to solve man's fallen nature.
- h) Consider the Greek and Roman deities, known for being jealous, gluttonous, lustful, and vengeful. Jupiter, the king of the gods, was deceitful and licentious; Juno, the queen of heaven, was cruel and tyrannical. **What could be expected from those who honored such deities?**
- i) **The Roman Empire is gradually imploding at the time of Jesus birth!**

## ***Augustus — slide***

- a) He's the grandnephew of Julius Caesar and had become sole master of the Roman world. **He doubled its size during his reign.**
- b) Augustus had converted Rome from a city of brick huts into a city of marble palaces.
- c) The Temple of Jerusalem, rebuilt under his administration by Herod the Great, was one of the wonders of the world.
- d) **Luke 2:1**  
And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

## ***Herod the Great — slide***

Herod was a semi-Jewish king, Idumean/Edomite, but he had to rule under Roman authority, supporting all the heathen idolatry. These activities enflamed religious-nationalist Jews.

- a) **At the birth of Jesus, Herod the Great was coming to the end of a long career that was brutal, bloody, and paranoid, fueled by mental illness.**
- b) He ruled through tactics of mass terror and widespread surveillance. Think of communism's surveillance.
- c) Herod had killed multiple members of his family and executed his son Antipater for alleged treason.
- d) He also killed all the males from the old Hasmonean royal dynasty. Herod's paranoia and mental illness was becoming a scandal among other local and national rulers.
- e) **When Wise Men appear "troubled with all Jerusalem," Matthew 2:3, and then had no problem killing all the male babies in Bethlehem, when he is told One was the King of the Jews. Matthew 2:16.**
- f) Tensions are rising, two Jewish activists, Matthias and Judas, destroyed the imperial eagle that Herod had ordered erected at the Temple gate. They heard a false rumor that Herod was dying, time to make a statement. Herod burned them alive and killed all their accomplices.
- h) Immediately following his death, the country entered a period of increased rebellion and violence.

"It's clear that Herod was brutal, Jesus was born into essentially a third-world context under a military dictatorship. It was a society where everyone was coerced."<sup>1</sup>

Douglas Oakman, Pacific Lutheran University.

LA Times Dec. 24, 1994

## ***Archelaus - slide***

- a) Takes over after his father Herod dies, he's 19.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-12-24-me-12520-story.html>

b) He's ruling when Joseph and Mary return from Egypt.

c) **Matthew 2:19-23**

Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

a) Archelaus is in charge, how might it be different than Herod?

b) "The people" gathered to demand that Herod's pawns get punished, they want a new high priest, and lower taxes.

c) Archelaus was terrified of rebellion at Passover. He ordered his troops to watch out for problems, regardless massive problems arose, **Archelaus kills 3,000 Jews**.

d) Pentecost — The mob besieged the Roman garrison, leading to another bloody battle, violence, robbery, murder reigned in Judea.

e) Three "Jewish Kings" emerge at this time...

1. **Judas** — son of Hezekiah, killed by Herod.
2. **Simon** — burned and looted, utterly destroying royal houses, and a palace in Jericho.
3. **Athronges** — a tall, strong, shepherd. Jewish nationalist.

**Interesting** — *When Archelaus' forces attacked Sepphora, just four miles from Nazareth, Joseph, Mary and young Jesus likely lived there!*

**Listen** — when you understand the scene of Jesus' birth and life, you see why His ministry was so explosive, and why the authorities dealt with Him so swiftly and decisively. Upheaval was everywhere!

**Jesus was plunged into that dark world — God sent His Son in the fullness of time, Galatians 4:4 — at the exact right moment. *What does that mean to us?***

**God has not forgotten us in the silence.**

**God is in charge even in the chaos.**

**Jesus came in the darkness proving we can find Him in our darkness.**

Zecharias, father of John Baptist, at John's birth...

a) **Luke 1:78-79**

Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."  
*(light in darkness, peace in chaos)*

30 years later, after John is thrown in prison for rebuking Herod Antipas...

b) **Matthew 4:16**

THE PEOPLE WHO SAT IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT, AND UPON THOSE WHO SAT IN THE REGION AND SHADOW OF DEATH LIGHT HAS DAWNED."

**You and I need to be a people who know how to find Jesus  
in the midst of our own darkness,  
because He's there, He hasn't forgotten us,  
He's still in charge!**

**Listen –**

***Start seeking Him now, in the light,  
and when the darkness comes,  
remember in the darkness what you learned in the light!***

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## **Discussion Question**

**The whole sermon is wrapped up in this summary, discuss:**

Jesus was plunged into that dark world –

God sent His Son in the fullness of time,

at the exact right moment.

*What does that mean to us?*

God has not forgotten us in the silence.

God is in charge even in the chaos.

Jesus came in the darkness, proving we can find Him in our darkness.

# NOTES