How do people see the Bible, in terms of being God’s truth and being 100% accurate? Many people consider the Bible as a work of fiction, or at best, a number of stories that give a rough indication of how to live a good life.

But as Christian believers in Jesus as our Saviour and God’s Messiah, would you rather base your faith upon a fictional story, or actual events? Do you believe the Bible to be 100% accurate, or do you consider some parts can be side-lined as they don’t conform to what 21stC society considers as acceptable lifestyles and behaviours?

**SLIDE Luke 1:1-4**

**1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilledamong us, 2just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 3With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.**

At the start of Luke’s gospel, he writes that he has carefully investigated everything from the beginning – meaning he went and spoke to those who had been eye-witnesses, or even directly affected by Jesus’ ministry

If we look at the very beginning of Luke’s gospel, we find that Luke has investigated the events of Jesus life, possibly at the request of a man called Theophilus. Luke gives us an indication at the end of **v4** that the account that Theophilus has been given already is both correct and corroborated in Luke’s writing.

Luke’s account of the events of Jesus’ life and ministry are not merely a nice story to give us a warm feeling, they are actual events, they are history, investigated by the writer himself.

But with all Scripture, bear in mind who is in control – God.

He has been in control of world events from the day He created everything and will remain so, until the new heaven and earth replace what was broken at the Fall.

So, as we read Luke’s account in chapter 2, Caesar Augustus may have thought he was making the decisions, but they are in fact being used by God for God’s glory.

**SLIDE Luke 2:1-7**

**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place whileQuirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to their own town to register. 4So 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. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.**

**Caesar Augustus**, who started life named Octavian, had come to power after being adopted by Julius Caesar (his great uncle), who saw his potential as a leader. In 46BC Octavian ruled the Roman empire with two others - Mark Antony and Lepidus – but in the following years, the whole Mediterranean world was filled with wars and violence.

In 31BC, Octavian beat his rivals and took the title Caesar, as well as naming himself Augustus, which means ‘revered’. Supposedly, until this time, this name had only been given to refer to things, not people.

One commentator has written in respect of what Luke describes as **the entire Roman world**… ‘The region was worn out with twenty years of civil war. Its farms had been neglected, its towns sacked or besieged, with wealth stolen or destroyed. Administration and protection had broken down; robbers made every street unsafe at night; highwaymen roamed the roads, kidnapped travellers and sold them into slavery. Trade diminished, investment stood still, interest rates soared, property values fell. Morals, which had been loosened by riches and luxury, had not been improved by destitution and chaos.

Rome was full of men who had lost their wealth and the people waited vainly for life to turn back to affluence…’ (Durant)

This is the world that Jesus is about to be born into – certainly not the cosy pictures depicted on Christmas cards and in nativity scenes. In many ways it is the mirror of the society we live in today, desperate for a Saviour, though not willing to accept Him when he comes.

Yet, through the human administrative skills of Caesar Augustus, life did change – almost miraculously.

His rule brought peace, political stability and vast sums of money from Egypt to pay the soldiers and to help the Roman economy. The people considered him in a way as their saviour.

The internal peace and order which Augustus achieved endured, with occasional interruptions, for about two centuries – a fact that the early Christian believers took advantage of to spread the message of Jesus.

Luke tells us that Augustus called a **census**.

The registration and **census** described wasn’t for simple record-keeping or statistics. It was to efficiently and effectively tax everyone in the Roman Empire.

This really happened - Justin Martyr, an early Christian historian writing in the middle of the 2ndC, said that in his own day (more than a hundred years after the time of Jesus), those census records were still available.

This is fact, not fiction and Luke names Quirinus, the governor of Syria as a known, verifiable historical figure to prove the fact. **This was the first census that took place whileQuirinius was governor of Syria. 3And everyone went to their own town to register.**

The original Greek text means ‘the first enrolment.’ Using a census for taxation was common in ancient Rome, so Luke calls this differently to identify it from another enrolment in AD6 that is referred to in **Acts 5:37**.

Remember who is in control here. Caesar Augustus has made a decree and the result is **everyone went to their town to register**.

But Augustus wasn’t really powerful at all. In **John 19:10-11**, Jesus confronts another Roman who believed he was powerful. Pilate said to Jesus, ‘**Do you refuse to speak to me? Don’t you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?’ Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. ‘**

In human terms there is a problem - a 90-mile problem. **Micah 5:2** states the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem in Judah, but **Luke 2:4** tells us that Mary and Joseph live in Nazareth, in Galilee.

We are not told at what point when Mary was visited to be told she would give birth to the Messiah, in relation to the time the census was called, but she was clearly a God-fearing girl **Luke 1:28** and she too would have known the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem.

But God is in control.

God uses the supposed political saviour of the Roman world to enable a young Jewish couple to make a journey of 90 miles – one they would not have done otherwise.

This is an important thing to remember, everyone is God’s servant – the difference is that some acknowledge the fact and willingly work for Him, whilst other don’t recognise the fact and fight against their creator, whilst still doing His will.

Augustus may have been Caesar, but at the end of the story, who is more important, Augustus or Jesus? Who does the world know more today – Jesus or Caesar Augustus? Who has a more lasting legacy?

So, through a pagan man, God ensured His word is never wrong – a prophecy given 700 years previously is enabled and fulfilled by the actions of Caesar.

God knew the heart of this man, centuries before he was born. He knew that one of the ways he would rule was by being very sensitive to the nationalistic feelings of his subjects and this may be why he commanded them to return to their cities of family origin for the census.

They had to travel, they had to pay taxes – but they would also gather together with family and see relatives that they perhaps had not seen for a long time. The first Christmas!

God is still working his plans out.

Joseph takes Mary - according to the Roman law, Mary didn’t have to go with Joseph for the tax census, but it was probably safer for her to do so as she was in the latter stages of a controversial pregnancy – surely the subject of much gossip in Nazareth.

God won’t prevent His word from being fulfilled.

The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, so Mary needs to be there.

Luke gives simple explanation that **While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.**

Such an event would not be written about in that way today. There would be media, eye-witness reports by people presented as more important than they actually are and probably much embellishment on the story – think nativity plays.

What we find is the Saviour of the world, born to this young woman and laid in an animal feeding trough. Several commentators pick up on the fact that Mary wrapped the child herself, pointing to possibly a birth, with only Joseph present.

John’s gospel covers the events of the nativity in ten words - **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.**.

**SLIDE John 1:1-2**

**1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.**

**14The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

The events recorded by Luke concern Jesus’ earthly and mortal life as a human being, but John deals with the eternal.

He starts his gospel with the eternity of **Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** Joh’s gospel is saying, when the beginning began, the Word was already there. He wants us to understand that the Word existed before the creation, or even time.

He is saying that The Word had no beginning. A commentator described this saying, ‘…if we reach back to any beginning, there already was in existence the Word. It is evident to John that The Word is no other than God the self-existent.” (Trench)

The Greek original for The Word is *Logos*, which had great meaning in both Jewish and Greek thinking.

Jewish rabbis often referred to God’s personal aspects in terms of His word. They spoke of God Himself as ‘the word of God’. For example, very old Hebrew scriptures record **Exodus 19:17**, where Moses took the people out of the camp to meet God, as being, ‘Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet the word of God.” To these early writers, the phrase ‘the word of God’, meant God Himself.

The Greeks on the other hand saw the *logos* as the power that holds the universe in perfect order, rather than it being chaotic. They saw this *logos* as the ‘Ultimate Reason’ that controlled all things.

John introduces his gospel to both Jews and Gentiles – he says, ‘for centuries you’ve been talking, thinking and writing about the Word, the Logos, now I will tell you who He is.’

So, from Luke and John, we have an account that Jesus is both equal to and part of God – we need to understand that as we need God to supply a means for our salvation, that needs to be done by one who is God.

That is the importance and significance of the Christmas story – it is the Saviour of the world, God Himself, coming into the world for our benefit.

The Bible is historically accurate, written by those who were there, or by the likes of Luke, who spoke personally eye-witnesses. All of these records were inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that accuracy can be assured.

We can accept the Bible as being 100% truth and God’s message to us.

The relevance for us today is that Jesus’ birth was the start of His ministry that led to His death on the cross – and resurrection three days later.

His spilt blood on the cross, enables us to have our sins covered in the sight of God, so we can approach Him to have the relationship that God really wants to heave with us.

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead shows that death need not have any fear for any one of us, as long as you have put your trust in Jesus for your salvation.

We need to concentrate on repenting for our wrongdoings and turning to Jesus as much at Christmas, as we do at any other time of the year.

**OFFER / PRAY**

**2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24976a)**] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to their own town to register. 4So 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. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.**

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**ISAIAH 7:1-17  
When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. 2Now the house of David was told, “Aram has allied itself with Ephraim”; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. 3Then the Lord said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field. 4Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. 5Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son have plotted your ruin, saying, 6“Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.” 7Yet this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “‘It will not take place, it will not happen, 8for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. 9The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah’s son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.’” 10Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 11“Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” 12But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”   
13Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. 15He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, 16for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. 17The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.”**

**Proverbs 30:4  
Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Whose hands have gathered up the wind? Who has wrapped up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is the name of his son?  
Surely you know!**