

25 Days of Advent

Seeing Jesus Through the Eyes of the Christmas Story Characters

ADVENT DAY 8: Dec. 8 – Caesar Augustus, the Arrogant Ruler

Devotional

The prophet Micah prophesied 700 years before the birth of Christ that he would be born in Bethlehem. Have you ever thought about the fact that God caused a worldwide census to be taken by the emperor of Rome so that the two people He had foreordained as Jesus' parents had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem? Lineage was an important part of God's design for the family of His Son, and Scripture lists Joseph's family tree in both Matthew and Luke. Jesus came from the royal line of King David.

Most of us read the words of the Christmas story in Luke without giving them a second thought ... "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world" (Luke 2:1).

Augustus was the greatest Roman emperor, greater even than his grand-uncle, Julius Caesar. When he came to Rome, it was a city of brick, but when he left, it was a city of marble. Rome almost doubled in size under Augustus. The empire spanned from Great Britain to India.

Caesar Augustus was a larger-than-life figure in Roman history. The Senate acclaimed him "Augustus" (most revered), and he ruled for 41 years as Rome's first "emperor" from 27 BC to 14 AD. During that time he gave to the world the great Roman Peace, flourishing trade, and stability by the time of Jesus that spread across the Mediterranean world.

His greatest act – the one which would have the most lasting effect on world history – was to call for a census of the empire. This was a common custom, in keeping with the pattern of Roman control of conquered territories. Censuses were a favorite of Caesar Augustus. Taxes helped keep the Roman army healthy, build roads, and finance army campaigns to keep conquering the world. Plus, he was a very luxurious emperor. Romans taxed Jews and they followed Roman laws. Rome put in local authorities. So, when it came to the census, the Jews did what their Roman governors and local leaders told them.

Clearly, there was purpose behind Luke's unique recounting of Jesus' birth. He was locating Jesus in historical time and place. The birth of Jesus, the true God who took on human flesh, was not some sort of myth. The context was genuine. Additionally, Roman census methods required registration at the place of family origin. This meant that Joseph and his pregnant wife, Mary, would need to head 90 miles south from Galilee to Bethlehem – in fulfillment of a prophecy from Micah (5:2). God's plans happened as He said they would.

The census was a thoroughly secular decree, the kind of thing governments have been doing since the beginning of time. Yet God used it to serve His purposes...

This much is certain. Caesar Augustus never met Joseph or Mary, and he never knew of a certain Jewish baby born in a village outside of Jerusalem. When Augustus died, they mourned as if a god had died. Little did they know, his call for a census had been used by God to bring His Son to the earth, the one true God.

That's the history lesson. But consider the legacies. Caesar, a human, claimed divine status. Jesus, God from eternity, humbled himself to be born in time and die as a human to save humans from their sin. Augustus looks humanly impressive; Jesus appears humanly defeated. Appearances can be deceiving. Faith grasps the truth.

Look Up – Connect with God

Read: Luke 2:1-5

Key Verse: “At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.” (Luke 2:1)

Pray: Lord, you hold the mightiest rulers in your hand; nothing they do is beyond your command. Open our eyes to see your Invisible Hand moving through our world today. Help us to see the truth, as you show in your Word.

Look In – Family Memories

Discuss: Are there people serving in government offices that you do not support? Talk about how God calls us to pray for authorities, even those who do not follow God, and trust that whatever is happening, God will ultimately turn it for His good. Share your thoughts about the current political environment and discuss how you, as a Christian family, can help positively impact the culture we live in.

Activity:

- Advent Tree: make or select an ornament of a counting device or ballot and put it on the tree. [Download Ornaments](#) or [Ornament Ideas](#)
- Advent Garland: put the key verse on a paper/card, assign #8, and attach it to the garland twine. [Key Verses](#)
- Advent Cards: select a card and see what the activity might be (i.e., color a Christmas picture). [Family Activities](#)

Look Out – Connect with Others

Is there currently a government initiative in your community that requires volunteer help? If so, step in and volunteer as a family. If not, check your local schools to see if they need any extra help this holiday season.