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Hay, Jesus !

Almost sounds like an all-American family today. Single mom. Adoptive father. Poor, but happy.

Respectable people looked down on them. Recently married, it was a godsend to get away from Nazareth. Mary was with child. Joseph wasn't the father. Tongues wagged. Two good reputations shot to pieces by an unplanned pregnancy. Saying it was God's will didn't seem to help much. The gospel of Luke chapter 2 tells the story.

Rome had issued an imperial decree. A census. Joseph was a descendant of King David, so he had to return to his ancestral home, Bethlehem. It would be a long and difficult journey any time. But Mary was pregnant. Would they make it before she was due? They had no choice.

After they arrived, an emergency. No hospital. No 911. No room in the inn. Too many people in a little town. Yet another reminder of the oppressive Roman occupation. Durned Romans. Durned census. No room! Would she give birth in the street? Finally – a shepherd's manger. Just a stinking cave, but at least they weren't out in the open. Shelter. Maybe a little hay. Humble.

You wouldn't have thought it would be like this. After all, this baby had been announced by angels. He was to be the Son of God – the promised Messiah, Savior, the Christ who was to come fulfill ancient prophecies about the eternal throne and kingdom without end.

And what was that guy Herod doing in the grand royal palace of Herodion, looming above the little town of Bethlehem? Just Caesar's pawn, Herod wasn't even Jewish. And now Jesus, king of the Jews, was being born in the hay of a humble manger. Herod the Great builder would be forgotten, and Jesus would become the King of all Kings, building with living stones an eternal dwelling of God in His people.

Name him Jesus, said the angel to Mary in Luke 1, because *"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his forefather David, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Name him Jesus, said the angel to Joseph in Matthew 1, because *"He will save his people from their sins."* Jesus may have been born in sin but he was without sin. His birth was out-of-wedlock, but he was born without sin because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Most High God.

His name means *"Jehovah saves."* Born for the purpose of saving his people from their sins, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for sin, to fulfill thousands of years of prophecy, promises, expecting.

Christmas is the utmost in irony. The exalted creator came to his lowly creation. Like one of them, in a humble cradle. Born to be king, he lived to die. On a cross, the most heinous of deaths. And all this to inherit the eternal crown of glory -- by raising from the dead, to give new life to all who believe in Him.

John 1 says *"He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right and authority to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."*

Conceived of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ became flesh and dwelt among us, so that all who receive Him and believe in Him are likewise born of the Holy Spirit. Saved from their sins. Given His righteousness. Inheriting eternal life.

Receive God's gift, and be turned away from sin and self. Be turned to Him, with healing from your past, your hurts and habits and hangups. With new hearts, born again from above.

Finally, in Jesus, God turns all the bad news into good news. Creator to Cradle to Cross to Crown. Hay, Jesus! Merry Christmas!