

## 144 KILOMETERS

Luke 2:4-5 ... “Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.”

Today's passage is at the beginning of the traditional Biblical story of Christ and Christmas. From verse 1 through 20 of Luke chapter 2, we find the words that many pastors, priests and families recite at Christmas. We are focusing on verses 4 and 5 today because there is so much hidden meaning in them.

By law, Joseph had to return to the city of his birth to be counted in the government's census. This was necessary to collect taxes from citizens. It was also a way for the government to have a record of its citizens by name. Can you imagine the chaos if Filipinos needed to return to their places of birth just to pay taxes? But, in the time of Joseph and Mary, the local population was not too large. It is possible that the leaders of Israel, especially the priests, with their knowledge of scripture and the prophecies concerning the Messiah's coming, warned the government that the Messiah could be born anytime in Bethlehem, and that it might be a good idea to identify his parents so he could be more easily eliminated after his birth.

We also do not want to miss the fact that Jesus was born in the city of David. Jesus came to inherit David's throne, which he will do when he comes again to judge man. The third important thing we learn from today's passage, is that Mary traveled to Bethlehem with David, a journey of 144 kilometers, taking about three days on foot or by donkey. Although unmarried couples often travel together, live together, sleep together and have children together today, it would have been a scandal worthy of mortal punishment (being stoned to death) in the time of Christ. It is just as much of a sin today, but one that people commonly commit in disobedience and disrespect of God.

Why do we care about these details? Would you be impressed with a god who would allow the Savior of all mankind to be born in a random clinic in Cebu City, instead of the city (Bethlehem) of his legacy? Is it not impressive that God allowed Joseph to be recorded in the census, but the king was still unable to find him and his family later? Through these little details God fulfilled his promises and ancient prophecies about the coming of his son to save the world. That is an impressive God and we can celebrate him and his sovereignty over the world and all of history, this Christmas.

Merry Christmas!

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