

DAY 2

II - NATIVITY

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Having listened to the **deed** of the Incarnation, the next **deed** to listen to is the Lord's birth. Luke places that event in a very specific set of space and time coordinates. It happened in Bethlehem of Judea, precisely when Caesar Augustus was emperor and Quirinius was governor of the Roman province of Syria that included Judea. Later on, as Luke introduces the beginning of Jesus' public life at the time of his being baptized by John, Luke specifies almost redundantly that it was precisely on the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea, while Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ithurea and Trachonitis, when Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. Luke is not telling a fairy tale that happened "once upon a time in a faraway land". This real event, this real **deed**, is what we want to *listen to*.

Whatever the "historical" accuracy of the details of the event narrated by Luke, a message is clearly conveyed: Jesus is born in poverty both in physical poverty and in the powerlessness of a newborn baby. Later on the oblation offered for him in the temple shows him legally poor, as his parents are allowed to offer not the normally prescribed oblation, but a simpler one permitted to the poor. Also significant is the presence of the poor shepherds, the outcast because they were not in a position to observe ritual purity at their hillside meals, the *anawim*, who receive the announcement of salvation arrived with Jesus' birth. The gospel of Matthew [11: 5] sees in Jesus the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about the coming of the Servant of God: *the good news is announced to the poor*. The Lord's poverty at birth is a **deed** we need to listen to.

We can benefit from making ourselves present to the scene of Jesus' birth using "imaginative contemplation" not as a theological-historical research tool, but asking to be given a sense of the meaning of that moment in Jesus' heart, in Mary's heart and now in our own heart. Mary's and Joseph's disposition, as they *listen* to this **deed** of Jesus, is one of great love and respect together with some perplexity, because they would have liked to give the child a better birth setting. It is most pertinent to ask God to help us to *listen* to the scene, to that **deed**.

REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

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Lk. 2: 1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them: *Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you, who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.* And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests.*

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another: *Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.* So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.