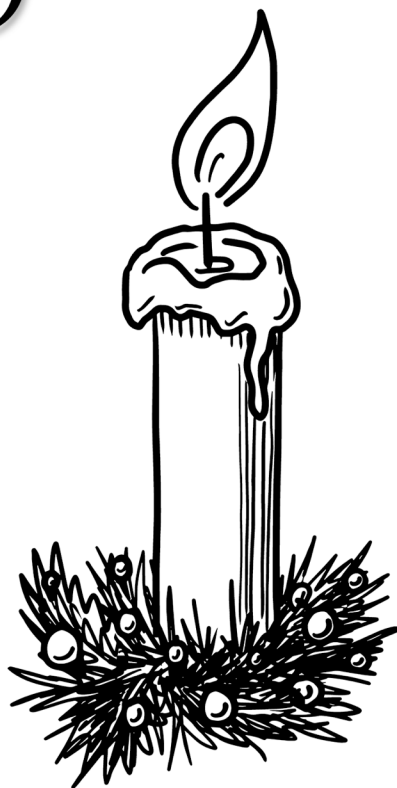


THE SETTING



The Setting—Day One



Luke 2:1-3, 11-12 “Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city ... for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

One year, for Christmas, my employer took all of us to The Fabulous Fox theater in St. Louis, Missouri, to see *Wicked*. I’d never been to a theater, other than small, local ones. And none at all since my college days.

The Fox was better than I could have imagined. As we walked up to the venue, the lights brightened the evening sky, drawing in passers-by. Posters beckoned with promises of beautiful sets and enjoyable shows. Inside, Christmas trees, rich colors, and elegant decorations set the tone. This would be a memorable evening.

Once seated, I scanned the theater. More trees. Distinctive architecture. And a dragon. Yes, a dragon hovered at the top of the stage. Before the

curtain even rose, I was completely drawn in. Piqued solely by the scenery, I sat ready for the show.

Hollywood spends a fortune on set design, location shoots, and CGI. Why? Would you watch their film if actors performed on a blank stage? Of course not, and neither would I.

Think about your favorite book. Did the author weave the setting into the tale or leave you feeling like the story could happen any time, in any place? The environment increases the impact a story has on its readers.

While the reason for Jesus's birth is the most important aspect of the Christmas story, we gain greater depth of understanding when we consider the setting of the event. God could have sent Jesus to a wealthy family or even a royal family. Jesus could have been born with every privilege that would immediately garner Him the credibility and respect He deserved. But God chose a different setting.

The time of Roman rule. The City of David. A manger.

No piece of the Christmas story happened by chance. Each element was chosen by God in the writing of His story. Whether allowing us a glimpse into the desires of the Jewish people of the time, giving us a geographical picture, or reminding us that Jesus's story is for everyone, when we look at the setting God created for the salvation story, we come away with a greater appreciation of God's plan.

Daily Reflection: Not even the unimportant details of the Christmas story were left to chance. God orchestrated each one with purpose. As we look further into the setting of Jesus's birth, I pray we come to greater understanding of the truths God wove into the coming of His Son. This season, set aside time to consider the various traditions and events in your holiday. Is there purpose to them or do they only make demands on your time?