

SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES: 27 NOVEMBER 2016

The Roman Emperor, whose name was Caesar Augustus, wanted to know exactly how many people he could tax and therefore he ordered that a census be taken so that every person in Judea could be counted. To make sure the count was accurate, he ordered every family to make its way back to the town where its ancestors had lived.

This meant that the many people who knew that King David was their great-great-great-great (about 14 greats!) grandfather had to go to all the way to Bethlehem, a sleepy little hill town south of Jerusalem.

So the families set out.

There they were: the rich and the poor, the old and the young, mums and dads, boys and girls. Imagine how busy the roads were! Of course there were no cars or buses or trains – most people had to walk; although some lucky people might have ridden on a donkey. Imagine how exciting it must have been to meet uncles and aunts and cousins you had never met before in a place you had only ever heard about!

Imagine the chatter; imagine all the news being shared: “Wow! Your Samuel has grown! And Matthew has become a fine young man! And isn’t little Hannah cute! But, oh dear, your mother is getting very old, isn’t she!” Little Bethlehem was probably not so quiet anymore!

In fact, Bethlehem became over-full. People crowded into every home and every lodging place, filling every corner.

No wonder then, that by the time Joseph and Mary arrived, there wasn’t any space left.

They had had to travel such a long way, and probably they travelled more slowly than other people because Mary would have got very, very tired. You see she was heavily pregnant and her baby was due very soon.

I wonder how she felt when they discovered that the only place left in Bethlehem for them to rest in was a stable, a place where animals usually spent the night. Yes, even the animals had to share their homes!

And there in that cave-stable, Mary had her baby!

I wonder who came to help her? Did the other women in the street come in when they heard Joseph knocking on the inn door to ask for help? Did they recognise Joseph and his young wife? Had they realised her baby was due so soon? Did they come round with advice and care? We don’t know, but I am sure they did and that the news about this newest baby soon spread from one house to the next.

But the people didn’t realise that this was a special baby – they probably just joked about the fact that this little boy had arrived in time to be counted! But God was doing something very special in that little over-crowded town.

The only people, apart from Mary and Joseph, who realised that something special was happening in that stable were some shepherds!

Even though they knew the town was crowded, the shepherds left most of their sheep and came along to check if what the angel had told them was true: Was there a baby in the stable?

They crowded into that little stable, delighted to find that what the angel choir had sung about was true. Seeing is believing, and when they left I am sure they told everyone who would listen to them in that busy town about the angels' song and what they had seen!

Bethlehem was probably even more noisy after that!! And I am sure some people began to wonder about this new-born baby.

But, that wasn't all. The next thing people heard was camels!

And on those camels were the wise men, bringing gifts for the baby: gold and frankincense and myrrh.

I don't suppose they stayed in Bethlehem; it probably wasn't grand enough! But while they were there, I suspect the town was even more busy – people wanted to catch sight of them and crowded out of their homes.

And remember the star that shone so brightly, I am sure the children begged to be allowed to stay up late to see it shining in the dark sky – and then everyone would have crowded outside to marvel at it!

Can you picture it? The children, peeping into the cradle to see the baby, the grown-ups coming in to see why this baby was so special, the animals looking for their straw and water? It wasn't just the town that was busy! I am sure the stable was busy too!

But the Bible tells us that, even in that busyness, as she got used to caring for her baby, Mary listened carefully and 'treasured' everything she was told – about the angel, about the star, about the heavenly choir. She and Joseph took time to think about how special this baby Jesus was and to wonder what God had planned for their little family.

And, that's what we have to learn to do too.

Durbanville at Christmas time can be as busy as Bethlehem – probably even busier! In the middle of all the excitement of Christmas shopping and Christmas lights and Christmas presents and holidays, we too need to make sure that we also take time to "treasure" this story, to think about it and to learn from it. We weren't there in Bethlehem, but we mustn't get so busy that we don't think about the special thing which was happening there.

God was sending his son to live in our world! You see, this special baby is still with us today – no longer a baby that we can see, but a risen Saviour and Lord who is never too busy to care for us.