

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

Luke 2:1

Other Things

Sometimes I am struck with the matter-of-fact elements in the Bible. Some of the most important moments in God's story with us happen when the humans involved are off doing other things. Take Christmas, for example. Yes, there's a celestial body lining up to point foreign astrologers to the Christ child, and heavenly messengers trying to prepare folks for the big event. But for the most part, the world is going about doing its business as usual—shepherds are going out with their flocks, the priest Zechariah took his turn to tend to the temple and offer incense, and the government was issuing decrees and looking out to cut down political rivals.

By mentioning Caesar Augustus's census, Luke tells us when in human history God broke in and became one of us, and explains why Jesus was born into a temporarily displaced family, who spent his first night on earth in an animal food trough, because there was no guest room available. For all but a handful of folk, this greatest moment in human history went totally unnoticed.

It got me wondering. Our current president has a penchant for issuing executive orders—he has signed 225 between January 20th and December 20th. So what momentous thing might have happened in the world, while the president is signing off on yet another executive order?

While it's nice to have special days like holidays or birthdays to remind us to reflect on history as we know it, the fact is that God's timing is not our own, and is not bound to take action when we are looking. Conversely, we may be doing just what God needs not in the big steps we take, but the small, faithful ones that no one notices. God might even like acting in ways we do not expect—like the King of Kings being born in a cow's stall. As one Advent song goes,

Come, wander where lion and lamb gently play,
where evil is banished and faith takes the day,
a babe in a manger to fool the world's eyes.
One candle is lit for God's loving surprise.

This is my last column as Executive Presbyter (yes, finally!), and I have thought about my legacy, or what did I do that made a difference. But who knows what God uses to strengthen a church, or heal a wounded heart, or expand God's kin-dom? God has worked through a young shepherd boy with a small harp, a poor young girl cocky enough to say "Yes" when told she will bear the Son of God, multiple women giving birth way beyond their years, even murderous men and angry prophets.

So while I have been greatly blessed to serve San Gabriel Presbytery, and to receive such support in our work together, let us continue to strive to be faithful, obeying God's will whether we are called to do something newsworthy or something even we don't think makes any sense. Because we all have a piece of the puzzle, and it doesn't matter how big or pretty the piece is—the full picture will not be complete without what you bring.

Thank God for each of you, for the ways you seek to do God's will, for your loyalty to your church and your call, for the countless years given to serving in your current and other churches: singing in the choir, counting the offering, sitting with a first-time visitor, scrubbing the toilet, giving someone a ride, working in the food pantry, standing up to a bully, forgiving someone who hurt you, preaching that sermon, serving on session, praying for lands you will never visit . . . in this and other acts of faithfulness and kindness, even the little favors you do that no one notices, you are participating in God's plan of salvation.

May you have eyes to appreciate God's handiwork in your life. May you have the patience to wait on the Lord, and the courage to move even if you're not ready when God is. And may you feel the love and healing power of the Spirit when you act as a channel of God's grace for this hurting world.

God bless you, this Christmas, throughout 2026, and beyond. May you take a moment once in a while, and feel a little of the overwhelming love Christ has for you.

Merry Christmas!

*Holiday blessings,
Wendy*