

WHICH KING? (Luke 2:1-7)

COT He was born about 2,000 years ago, along way from here, His birthday was Sept. 23rd, 63 BC. He had a magnificent cot, with purple blankets and silken sheets. His family lived in a beautiful house, full of servants; his dad was a Senator. They ran an E-Type Chariot. His name was Gaius Octavianus – and he had a famous uncle. Does anyone know who his uncle was? It was Julius Caesar. They all knew young Gaius was going to turn out well – and when Gaius was 16, his uncle Julius adopted him.

CRIB He was also born around 2,000 years ago, a long way from here. He was born in a cave, and there was no cot for him to snuggle up in. Instead he had to make do with some straw and a cattle trough. There were no doctors or midwives. Mary, his mother, and Joseph could find no where better to stay than a dirty cave, used as a cattle shed. But at least it was a roof. What a contrast between these two babies!.

COT He grew up to be a mighty General, After his uncle, Julius Caesar, was murdered, Gaius led an army against the murderers. He defeated Brutus. He occupied Rome. Later, he conquered Antony and Cleopatra, and by 30 BC, he was the undisputed master of the greatest Empire in the world – the Roman Empire. On January 16th 27BC, the Roman Empire gave him the title “Caesar Augustus” – a title meaning increasing majesty. Under him, the Roman Empire grew and grew.

CRIB He grew up to be a carpenter, working in an obscure town on the Judean hills. On clear days he could look down across the broad plain of Esdraelon and see the sun glinting on the armour of the Roman legions – Caesar Augustus' legions. It was Augustus who decreed the census that took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem when Jesus was born. Jesus was about 17 when the great emperor died. 13 years later, when he was thirty, He left the carpenter's shop and became a preacher. He never left his little country. It was just a tiny fragment of the great empire that Augustus ruled. At 33 He was executed by some of another Caesar's soldiers.

COT The symbol of Gaius' reign was the Roman Eagle, carried across the world by the Roman legions. In the 41 years of his reign he ruled the roads and the seas. He stabilised the borders, enlarged the empire's territory; he brought about a political reconstruction of Rome. He promoted the arts, education and trade. By force of arms, backed by political skill and wisdom, he preserved civilisation for the next two centuries through the empire he built up. But then it faded, and began to decline.

CRIB The symbol of Christ's reign is a Roman gibbet – a cross. It is the symbol that tells us that God cares for this world so much that he sent His only Son, the Lord of Glory, to live among us, and then to die for us. The Empire of Augustus, like those of Alexander, Charlemagne, Napoleon, depended on the rule of force. Jesus' kingdom is founded upon love. The empire He founded is still intact and growing after 2,000 years. Of the increase of his government there shall be no end. He alone has crossed the barriers of race, time and place.

CONCLUSION Which of these two babies proved to be of greater significance? At the beginning, it seemed like Gaius. Yet the baby in the manger finally gave significance to the Emperor, whose name is read out from Luke's Gospel every Christmastide. Towards the end of his reign, the mistaken courtiers of Augustus declared, "A man has become god". But Augustus was no god. By the end of his life on earth, the followers of Jesus knew who He was. "God has become a man". Emmanuel, God with us.

Two kings, two kingdoms. One long dead. The other still alive and his kingdom growing all the time. Across the years He still asks for what philosophers ask in vain from their students, parents in vain from their children, a leader in vain from followers; the human heart. Which one is your king?