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The Nativity of Christ.

At that time, Augustus Cæsar, the Roman Emperor, issued a decree, that Judea, or perhaps the whole Roman Empire, should be taxed. This was first done, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. It became necessary, therefore, that the inhabitants of Judea should repair to the places of their nativity, and enrol their names in the proper register of their particular families. Joseph and Mary at this time lived at Nazareth, but they undertook a journey to Bethlehem, or the city of David, (being both of the house and lineage of that monarch,) where their names were recorded. The distance was very considerable, being about eighty-two miles. When they arrived at Bethlehem, they found that it was so crowded with strangers who had come upon a similar errand, that there was no room for them in the inn; they were, therefore, under the necessity of being contented with such accommodation as they could obtain in the stable. The time was now fulfilled that Mary should be delivered;

and in this humble mansion the Saviour of the world was born, and laid in the manger; a remarkable proof that God's ways are not as man's ways, nor his thoughts as man's thoughts.

This was an event of too great importance to be long concealed, as not only the happiness of the Jews, but of all the nations of the earth, was involved in its consequences. Nay, what is more, the Cherubim, the Seraphim, and the whole host of heaven, were not unconcerned spectators of the birth of Him in whom the mercy promised to the fathers should be performed.

The annunciation of so glorious a messenger as the Prince of Peace was not long delayed. The country around Bethlehem was chiefly adapted for pasture, and, therefore, in a great measure, occupied by shepherds. In climates such as that of Judea, it is no uncommon thing, at certain seasons, to keep watch over the flocks by night, principally with the view of protecting them from the wild beasts that abound in