

The Savior is Born

Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

The Birth of Jesus

(Mt 1.18—25)

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. ¹

The Savior is Born! We've been waiting all year! The people of Israel had been waiting 3000 years. The One who came in the form of a weak baby humanly speaking was also the center of power as far as heaven was concerned.

We remember the old, old story that Christians have been telling for 2000 years. Jesus' birth drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem (vv. 1–7). Augustus Caesar was ruling in Rome, but God was in charge, for God used Caesar's edict to move Mary and Joseph eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill God's Word. Rome took a census every fourteen years for both military and tax purposes, and each

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Lk 2:1-20

Jewish male had to return to the city of his fathers to record his name, occupation, property, and family.

When Mary said “Be it unto me according to Thy word” (Luke 1:38), it meant that from then on, her life would be a part of the fulfillment of divine prophecy. God had promised that the Savior would be a human, not an angel (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:16), and a Jew, not a Gentile (Gen. 12:1–3; Num. 24:17). He would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and the family of David (2 Sam. 7:1–17), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2). Bethlehem means “house of bread,” the ideal birthplace for the Bread of Life (John 6:35).

All of this occurred just as the Scriptures said, and Caesar unknowingly played an important part. A.T. Pierson used to say, “History is God’s story,” and President James A. Garfield called history “the unrolled scroll of prophecy.” If God’s Word controls our lives, then the events of history only help us fulfill the will of God.

Mary and Joseph were already husband and wife but had not consummated the marriage (Matt. 1:18–25). The journey must have been very trying for her, but she rejoiced in doing the will of God, and she was no doubt glad to get away from the wagging tongues in Nazareth.

Mary accompanied Joseph for several reasons. The couple knew she would have the Baby during the time Joseph was gone, and they most likely did not want to be separated at that event. Also both of them knew that the Child was the Messiah. They also would have known that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

The accommodation for travelers was most primitive. The inn was like a series of stalls opening off a common courtyard. Travelers brought their own food; all that the innkeeper provided was fodder for the animals and a fire to cook. The town was crowded and there was no room for Joseph and Mary. So with the animals Mary’s child was born. She rapped him in swaddling clothes consisted of a

square of cloth with a long bandage-like strip coming diagonally off from one corner. It was believed that the bands of cloth gave the limbs strength and protection for the infant. The child was first wrapped in the square of cloth and then the long strip was wound round and round about him. Then she placed him in the trough where the animals fed.

That there was no room in the inn was symbolic of what was to happen to Jesus. He continues to seek entry to the over-crowded hearts of men and women; he could not find it; and still his search—and his rejection—go on.

Jesus' birth drew the angels from heaven (vv. 8–14). How amazed the angels must have been when they saw the Creator born as a creature, the Word coming as a speechless baby. The best commentary on this is 2 Corinthians 8:9, and the best response from our hearts is wonder and worship. “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). It is said when a boy was born, the local musicians congregated at the house to greet him with simple music. Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem and therefore that ceremony could not be carried out. However heaven took the place of the earthly musicians, and angels sang the songs for Jesus that the earthly singers could not sing.

The first announcement of the Messiah's birth was given by an angel to some anonymous shepherds. Why shepherds? Why not to priests or scribes? By visiting the shepherds, the angel revealed the grace of God toward humankind. Shepherds were really outcasts in Israel. Their work not only made them ceremonially unclean, but it kept them away from the temple for weeks at a time so that they could not be made clean. God does not call the rich and mighty; He calls the poor and the lowly (Luke 1:51–53; 1 Cor. 1:26–29).

The Messiah came to be both the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world (John 1:29). Perhaps these shepherds were caring for the flocks that would provide sacrifices for the temple services. It was

fitting that the good news about God's Shepherd and Lamb be given first to humble shepherds.

Shepherds are not easily fooled. They are practical men of the world who have little to do with fantasy. If they said that they saw angels and went and found the Messiah, then you could believe them. God selected hardworking men to be the first witnesses that His Son had come into the world.

First, one angel appeared (Gabriel?) and gave the glad announcement; and then a chorus of angels joined him and gave an anthem of praise. For the first time in centuries, the glory of God returned to earth. If brave shepherds were afraid at what they saw and heard, then you can be sure it was real!

"Fear not!" is one of the key themes of the Christmas story (Luke 1:13, 30, 74; and see Matt. 1:20). Literally the angel said, "I announce to you good news, a great joy which shall be to all the people." Luke's emphasis on a worldwide Gospel: the Good News is for everybody, not just the Jews.

The Good News was that God had sent a Savior to meet humans' greatest need. It was a message of peace to a world that had known much war. The famous "Pax Romana" (Roman Peace) had been in effect since 27 B.C. but the absence of war doesn't guarantee the presence of peace.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, "While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart for which one yearns more than even for outward peace."

The Jewish word shalom (peace) means well-being, health, prosperity, security, soundness, and completeness. It has to do more with character than circumstances. Life was difficult at that time just as it is today. Taxes were high, unemployment was high, morals were slipping lower, and the military state was in control. Roman

law, Greek philosophy, and even Jewish religion could not meet the needs of human hearts. Then, God sent God's Son!

The angels praised God at Creation (Job 38:7), and now they praised God at the beginning of the new creation. The whole purpose of the plan of salvation is "glory to God" (see Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). God's glory had dwelt in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34) and in the temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3), but had departed because of the nation's sin (1 Sam. 4:21; Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22-23). Now God's glory was returning to earth in the person of His Son (John 1:14). That lowly manger was a holy of holies because Jesus was there!

Jesus' birth drew the shepherds from the fields (vv. 15-20). Shepherds were despised by the orthodox good people of the day. They were quite unable to keep the details of the ceremonial law; they could not observe all the meticulous hand-washings and rules and regulations. Their flocks made far too constant demands on them; and so the orthodox looked down on them. However these shepherds may have been caring for lambs which were destined for sacrifice during the time of Passover.

It was to simple men of the fields that God's message first came.

Although the shepherds were located some distance away, they were willing to make the trip to Bethlehem to see the newborn Messiah. Halford Luccock called this "the first Christmas rush," but it was certainly different from the Christmas rushes we see today!

The shepherds knew what to look for: a newborn Baby wrapped in strips of clothes and lying in a manger. And they found Him after their search! They worshiped Him and marveled at God's grace and goodness and the miracle He had given for them and for the world.

These shepherds are good examples for us to imitate today. They received by faith the message God sent them and then responded with immediate obedience.

After finding the Baby, they reported the good news to others, “glorifying and praising God.” They took the place of the angels! (Luke 2:13–14) Then they humbly returned to their duties, new men going back to the same old job.

For some reason, shepherds were not permitted to testify in court, but God used these humble shepherds to be the first human witnesses that prophecy had been fulfilled and the Messiah had been born. The angels have never experienced the grace of God, so they can’t bear witness as we can. Telling others about the Savior is a solemn obligation as well as a great privilege, and we who are believers must be faithful.^{2 3}

The Savior, the Son of God, was born in rough simplicity. We, you and I, might have expected that, if he had to be born into this world at all, it would be in a palace or a mansion. There was a European monarch who worried his court by often disappearing and walking incognito amongst his people. When he was asked not to do so for security’s sake, he answered, “I cannot rule my people unless I know how they live.” It is the great truth of the Christian faith that we have a God who knows the life we live because he too lived it and claimed no special advantage over common humans.⁴

Yes the Savior is born and we with all the earth rejoice at the birth of the Christ Child, but in reality God requires that we accept and live in obedience to the Son of God who taught us to trust and obey. Yes – the Savior is born, and we like the shepherds are to go and tell others that following the Christ is the way to God! Rejoice, rejoice, the Savior is born!

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 2:1

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:207

⁴Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 19