

The Heights Baptist Church

* Christmas at Luke's * The Birth of Jesus * Luke 2:1-21 * 12/12/2021 *

MAIN POINT

Jesus' birth demonstrates God's profound love for us. This should motivate us to worship God, proclaim Christ, and demonstrate Christ's love to those around us.

INTRODUCTION

What experiences, images, and ideas come to mind when you think about Christmas?

Christmas can be a frustrating and stressful time of year; crowded stores, last minute gifts, family drama, etc. Why do you think these things can get to us during the season when we should be reflecting on the fact that God sent His Son to us?

What tends to distract you from worshiping Christ during the Christmas season?

When we think of Christmas, there are dozens of things that come to mind. We need to be aware that we live in a culture that does not value worshiping Jesus and we often get distracted by lesser things. These lesser things are not necessarily bad in themselves, but our main focus at Christmas should be a time of rejoicing in God's decision to take on flesh, dwell among us, and provide the way for our salvation.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 2:1-7.

As with his other writings, Luke gives the historical setting of the birth of Jesus. What stands out to you about the way Jesus entered the world as a man (who is also fully God)?

Luke's record of Jesus' birth is both simple and magnificent. Luke's record frames Jesus' birth in historical terms while dramatically demonstrating how God became a man and lived among us. The prophecies about the Messiah's birth were unfolding. Mary's baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and she was married to Joseph. This resulted in the birth of a son whose human lineage via Mary was through David's line, and whose earthly father was also from David's line. This fulfilled prophecy about the Messiah being from the line of David, and also giving him the right to the throne of Israel.

God also worked through the ordinary plans of a pagan government to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for Jesus' birth, fulfilling Micah 5:2. God then used common people to spread the extraordinary message of His birth. The Son of God was here, and it was time for people to know.

Jesus humbled Himself in ways beyond our understanding. This is how much He loved us—that He, being in very nature God, became a baby, born in a manger. And that was just the beginning.

Verse 7 says there was “no room for them at the lodging place.” How might this historical event also serve as a metaphor for what happens when people reject Jesus today?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:8-14.

Why do you think God chose to announce the birth of His Son to shepherds, some of the lowliest members of society?

In the countryside near Bethlehem, shepherds were working in the fields. Shepherds were often ceremonially unclean because of the duties their occupation required of them. As a result, these men were considered low in the social order. Yet, they would be the first to hear of the Savior’s birth—and be the first ones to share it. By letting the shepherds know about the good news of Jesus’ birth and sending them to meet Him, God made it clear that there was no social barriers to His love.

Verse 9 tells us “an angel of the Lord” appeared to the shepherds. The men were stunned and terrified by the angel’s presence, but the angel quickly made it evident that his presence was cause for worship, not fear. God wanted the shepherds to know the good news about Jesus’ coming to earth. A further sign ensued. A multitude of the heavenly host appeared. The word “host” signified an army from Heaven present on Earth. Instead of presenting themselves for battle, though, the heavenly host announced a message of peace. The host proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest heaven.” They praised the One God who revealed Himself in all His sovereign greatness to lowly, sinful human beings.

What three titles are given to Jesus in verse 11? What is significant about them?

As Jews, the shepherds probably knew some of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. The angel heralded the Savior. Jesus had come to save people from their sins (see Matt. 1:21). Luke further identified Jesus as Messiah and Lord. “Messiah” means “anointed one”, showing God anointed Jesus with the mission to save mankind from their sins. The title of “Lord” shows Jesus was above His creation.

In Matthew 1:23, Jesus is called “Immanuel”, which means “God with us.” So we see from this and other scriptures that Jesus is fully God, and fully human.

What message did the angel bring to the shepherds in verses 11-14?

Of the truths about Jesus in these verses, which moves you to worship, and why?

How can these verses reassure you when you’re tempted to feel unworthy of God’s love?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:15-21.

How did the message delivered by the angel affect the shepherds?

The shepherds had a sense of expectancy and urgency. Verse 15 reports their first words as “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem.” Even though they had earthly responsibilities (keeping the flock of sheep), these men knew they were experiencing something divine. Seeing angels, hearing them speak of God’s peace, and knowing that the Savior had arrived was something

worth abandoning their daily routine over. We need to make our worship of God a priority in our life as well.

How did seeing Jesus affect the shepherds? How can we spread the good news about Jesus today?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:1-16.

Compare how each of the following people responded to the birth of the Messiah.

- **Herod:** Felt his power was threatened. Tried to have the Messiah killed.
- **The scribes:** Knew the scriptures, but didn't even bother to check it out.
- **The people in and around Bethlehem:** Initially unaware of the event. The people who were told of the event by the shepherds were amazed at what the shepherds told them.
- **The magi:** They came from a great distance to worship the child and give Him gifts.
- **The shepherds:** They hurried to find the baby. They then spread the word about what had been told them about the child.

What lessons can we learn from the different responses?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 20:11-16.

These verses describe Jesus at his second coming. How does his second coming differ from his first coming?

“If Jesus came to this earth at his second coming, and there hadn't been a first coming, we'd all be in BIG trouble!” Dr. Randall T. Hahn, *The Heights Baptist Church*, 11/3/19.

APPLICATION

Are there things in your life that are distracting you from delighting in Christ? How might you need to reevaluate your involvement in these things?

What can you do this Christmas season to keep your focus on Jesus, and what God has done for us?

What are you do to help spread the good news about Jesus?

PRAYER

Thank God for Jesus' humble birth and sacrificial death. Pray that God would inspire your group members to share Christ boldly, passionately, and wisely in light of His grace towards us in Christ. Praise and thank God for the wonderful gift of Jesus and for the joyous fact that He drew you to him. Ask God for the courage and clarity to make Jesus known enthusiastically and humbly, just as the shepherds did.

Spend some time praying for the loved ones in your group members' lives who don't know Jesus personally. Pray that the gospel would reach these individuals' lives, and pray for you and your group members to have wisdom and courage in delivering the good news.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 2:1-7

2:1 Augustus (meaning "Exalted") was the Roman Caesar from 31 BC. to AD 14. This decree that the whole empire should be registered was a census for the purposes of taxation and military service.

2:2 It is thought that Quirinius served two terms as Roman governor of Syria: from 6-4 BC, and then AD. 6-9. Jesus was born during the period of the first registration. There was also a census registration in Quirinius' second term (Ac 5:37).

2:3-4 His own town refers not to where Joseph presently lived (Nazareth in Galilee), but to the town of his ancestral roots (Bethlehem in Judea), which was called the city of David because King David grew up there (1Sam 16:1). Joseph was descended from David (1:27). The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem would have taken three days and covered roughly 90 miles.

2:7 That baby Jesus was laid in a feeding trough indicates that the family was forced to stay in a stable, or perhaps a cave that served as a stable, because there was no other room available in Bethlehem.

LUKE 2:8-14

2:9. The shepherds likely were going about their usual routines when the quiet night was shattered by the appearance of an angel of the Lord. The absence of a definite article (in Greek) separates the identification of this messenger from "the angel of the Lord" who is mentioned in the Old Testament and whom some scholars believe to have been the pre-incarnate Christ. (See Gen. 16:7-14; 22:11-18; Ex. 3:2; and Judg. 6:11-12.) The natural reaction of human beings to supernatural appearances is fear. These shepherds were terrified as they encountered the angelic messenger and were surrounded by the "glory of the Lord," by which the darkness was turned into brilliant light. The phrase glory of the Lord refers to the unique manifestation of God's presence.

2:9. The message to the shepherds follows a similar pattern to the messages we have encountered in Luke 1:13-20 and 28-37; (1) the angel's appearance (2:9a), (2) a response of fear (2:9b), (3) a word of reassurance (2:10), (4) the divine message (2:11), and (5) the giving of a sign (2:12).

2:10. The single word translated “I announce good news” is euangelizō, from the same word from which we get “evangelism”. The noun is translated by the word “gospel.” The root word is angelion, meaning message or news, from which we also derive the word angel. The messenger from heaven was bringing a good message! Such wonderful news is not for a select group of people, but for all the people. Although the Jewish people believed the Messiah was uniquely promised to them, God intended His Son to be the Savior of the world. At the end of His earthly ministry Jesus would command His followers to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20).

2:11. “Christ” is actually a title meaning “Anointed one” (Acts 5:42; cf. also Acts 17:3), this verse reveals that the title was so closely identified with Jesus of Nazareth that it soon became part of His name—Jesus Christ. The reader has been prepared for the use of this title by 1:32-33, 69 and 2:4. This Savior is also the Lord. Although the realization of the authority of the titles “Christ” and “Lord” would await the resurrection (Acts 2:36), Jesus at His birth was already both Christ and Lord, for the one born to Mary in Bethlehem is the same person of the Godhead who existed with the Father from eternity, and who was raised in glory and is seated with the Father. For Luke’s readers, who knew of Jesus’ birth, death, resurrection, and ascension, this description of the child would have far greater theological meaning than for its original hearers. These three titles, Christ, Savior, and Lord, also appear together in Philippians 3:20.

2:11-12. The cause of celebration was the birth of the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Each phrase of this announcement is important. This verse does more than just identify Bethlehem as the town where Jesus was born. It is the city of David that fulfills the prophecy in Micah 5:2. The three titles of Jesus are distinct, yet unified. He is the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah sent by God. He is Lord of all creation. He saves us when we acknowledge who He is and trust in Him as our Savior and God’s Son. The angel told the shepherds how they would be able to recognize this particular baby. Their sign would be finding the child lying in a manger. Undoubtedly, not many newborns would be sleeping in stables that night, even in overcrowded Bethlehem.

2:13-14. “Praising God” is the proper response not only of the believer (Luke 2:20; 19:37; 24:53; Acts 2:47; 3:8-9) but all of God’s creation (cf. Ps 148:1-4). The term “praising” was a favorite of Luke and is found eight times in the New Testament, six of which appear in Luke-Acts. Here the “highest” refers to the highest heavens (cf. 19:38), not to the highest degree. For the glory of Jesus, cf. 9:26, 32; 21:27; 24:26; for his receiving glory from people, cf. 4:15. “Peace” refers here to the fullness of blessing which the Savior/Christ/Lord brings and is essentially a synonym for salvation (cf. Acts 10:36).

2:13-14 The proclamation by the angels (heavenly host) is well-known today as the “Gloria in Excelsis Deo,” from the first words of verse 14 in the Latin Vulgate (glory to God in the highest). To give “glory to God” is a confession of the wondrous glory He forever possesses. The peace to be found was not the Pax Romana (the “universal peace” of the Roman Empire), but peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Ro. 5:1). The people whom God favors are those who have found God’s undeserved favor, or grace, through Christ.

LUKE 2:15-21

2:15 After the angels departed, the shepherds discussed among themselves about what to do. They agreed they should go straight to Bethlehem. Nothing would delay or detour them. They

had to see this thing that had occurred. The shepherds did not have any doubt about the validity of this news.

2:15-16 “Note, When extraordinary messages from the upper world are no more to be expected, we must set ourselves to improve the advantages we have for the confirming of our faith, and the keeping up of our communion with God in this lower world. And it is no reflection upon the testimony of angels, no nor upon a divine testimony itself, to get it corroborated by observation and experience. But observe, These shepherds do not speak doubtfully, "Let us go see whether it be so or no;" but with assurance, Let us go see this thing which is come to pass; for what room was left to doubt of it, when the Lord had thus made it known to them? The word spoken by angels was steadfast and unquestionably true. 2. They immediately made the visit, [v. 16](#). They lost no time, but came with haste to the place, which, probably, the angel directed them to more particularly than is recorded ("Go to the stable of such an inn"); and there they found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. The poverty and meanness in which they found Christ the Lord were no shock to their faith, who themselves knew what it was to live a life of comfortable communion with God in very poor and mean circumstances. We have reason to think that the shepherds told Joseph and Mary of the vision of the angels they had seen, and the song of the angels they had heard, which was a great encouragement to them, more than if a visit had been made them by the best ladies in the town. And it is probable that Joseph and Mary told the shepherds what visions they had had concerning the child; and so, by communicating their experiences to each other, they greatly strengthened one another's faith.” Matthew Henry's Commentary on Luke

2:16-18 The reaction of the shepherds was one of haste. They did not wait; they hurried to see the Son of God. We are not told how the shepherds found the particular inn whose stable housed the baby, but Bethlehem was a small town, estimated by bibleversestudy.com to have a population of “a few hundred, perhaps as high as a thousand” at the time of Christ's birth.

2:17-18 “The care which the shepherds took to spread the report of this (v. 17): When they had seen it, though they saw nothing in the child that should induce them to believe that he was Christ the Lord, yet the circumstances, how mean so ever they were, agreeing with the sign that the angel had given them, they were abundantly satisfied; and as the lepers argued (2 Kings 12:9, This being a day of good tidings, we dare not hold our peace), so they made known abroad the whole story of what was told them, both by the angels, and by Joseph and Mary, concerning this child, that he was the Saviour, even Christ the Lord, that in him there is peace on earth, and that he was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, and born of a virgin. This they told everybody, and agreed in their testimony concerning it. And now if, when he is in the world, the world knows him not, it is their own fault, for they have sufficient notice given them. What impression did it make upon people? Why truly, All they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds, v. 18. The shepherds were plain, downright, honest men, and they could not suspect them guilty of any design to impose upon them; what they had said therefore was likely to be true, and, if true, they could not but wonder at it, that the Messiah should be born in a stable and not in a palace, that angels should bring news of it to poor shepherds and not to the chief priests. They wondered, but never enquired any further about the Saviour, their duty to him, or advantages by him, but let the thing drop...” Matthew Henry's Commentary on Luke

2:17-18 Note the progression of discovery by the shepherds. They heard the good news (2:12); set out in faith to see it (2:15); saw it for themselves (2:15); and proclaimed it to others (2:17).

For the first time after His birth, the good news of God in Christ was testified to by humans. The shepherds' message amazed those who heard it. Amazement refers to "wonder and awe."

2:19 While everyone else continued to talk about the events, Mary treasured in her heart everything that had occurred. Each word of the witnesses was precious treasure, and Mary gently placed each in the safekeeping of her heart. This verse shows us Mary valued all her experiences related to Jesus. The mother of the Christ child pondered the meaning of all she had been told and had experienced. Meditating on them, she mulled the events over and over in her mind. Her reaction was not just an intellectual analysis of the news about her son, prophesied by Gabriel and conceived by the Holy Spirit, but also the emotional response of a mother to her son to whom her life was devoted.

2:19-20 "The virgin Mary made them the matter of her private meditation. She said little, but kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart, [v. 19](#). She laid the evidences together, and kept them in reserve, to be compared with the discoveries that should afterwards be made her. As she had silently left it to God to clear up her virtue, when that was suspected, so she silently leaves it to him to publish her honour, now when it was veiled; and it is satisfaction enough to find that, if no one else takes notice of the birth of her child, angels do. Note, The truths of Christ are worth keeping; and the way to keep them safe is to ponder them. Meditation is the best help to memory. 2. The shepherds made them the matter of their more public praises. If others were not affected with those things, yet they themselves were ([v. 20](#)): They returned, glorifying and praising God, in concurrence with the holy angels. If others would not regard the report they made to them, God would accept the thanksgivings they offered to him. They praised God for what they had heard from the angel, and for what they had seen, the babe in the manger, and just then in the swaddling, when they came in, as it had been spoken to them. They thanked God that they had seen Christ, though in the depth of his humiliation. As afterwards the cross of Christ, so now his manger, was to some foolishness and a stumbling-block, but others saw in it, and admired, and praised, the wisdom of God and the power of God." Matthew Henry's Commentary on Luke