

## Good News of Great Joy

### Luke 2:1-20

I am so thankful our Bible reading did not line up the Gospels to be read all together at the first of the year but instead, scattered them throughout the year for us to return to again and again.

Luke's story about Jesus is unique in many ways –

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed,<sup>[b]</sup> who was with child. <sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the <sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" <sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

### First: Luke's History

The Gospels are written at a time when the eyewitnesses of Jesus are passing off the scene. A written record is essential to maintain the facts of who Jesus is and what happened to him.

Luke is:

- a) A medical doctor and companion of Paul in his missionary journeys
- b) The only Gentile writer of the NT
- c) The author of Luke and Acts

Both are written to Theophilus in Luke's efforts to

a) Provide certainty to Theophilus

Luke 1:1-4 - *Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.*

b) Detail Christianity after Jesus

Acts 1:1-2 - *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.*

This is why, as Luke demonstrates in chapter 2, he is so specific about people, dates and places.

**Ex:** If you or your friends need external evidence, ask.....

Note: Your friends' arguments against Christianity aren't really about its historicity. Christianity is placed in real time with real people and real events that are undeniable.

Romans 1:21 - *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him... 25 - they exchanged the truth about God for a lie... 28 - they did not see fit to acknowledge God*

It isn't an intellectual issue. It's a moral issue.

*The Iliad* = 1,757 copies – first copy = 400 years after written.

NT = 5,000 copies – first copy = 50 years after John wrote his Gospel.

And it gets worse for *The Iliad*. The latest scholarship now says that Homer never existed. *The Iliad* was written by several cultures.

*There was no such thing as a single Iliad, no one fixed text (with no single author). The Iliad survived for hundreds, if not thousands, of years as a spoken poem and was eventually written down, around 700 to 750 B.C. But no manuscripts survive from that time.*

– Adam Nicholson in *Why Homer Matters*

Until recently, until it became undeniable, the professors at NEST or ETSU didn't tell you this when they attempted to discredit the Bible and teach *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*

Psalm 2:4 - *He who sits in the heavens laughs...*

## Second: God Rules the World. 1-3

How and why are Mary and Joseph going to leave Nazareth for Bethlehem.

God uses the world – in this case, a pagan ruler, to do his bidding. This is not the first time this happened –

a) Pharaoh - **Exodus 12:29-32** - *At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. <sup>30</sup> And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. <sup>31</sup> Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, “Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. <sup>32</sup> Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!”*

b) Cyrus - **Ezra 1:1-3** - *In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: <sup>2</sup> “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.*

c) Luke says it like this –

*Luke 2:1-3 - In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> And all went to be registered, each to his own town.*

d) Paul says it like this –

**Galatians 4:4** - *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son*

## Third: God Directs People. 4-5

*<sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.*

Matthew and Luke assure us that both Joseph and Mary are descendants of King David. As such, they have to make the 90-mile trip to Bethlehem, David's city (1 Sam 20:6) for the census.

- a) Joseph originally had other plans

**Matthew 1:18-25** - Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

- b) Luke uses the word 'betrothed' to remind Theophilus that Joseph and Mary had not yet consummated their marriage.

*We should perhaps reflect that it was the combination of a decree by the emperor in distant Rome and the gossiping tongues of Nazareth that brought Mary to Bethlehem at just the right time to fulfill the prophecy about the birthplace of the Christ (Mi. 5:2). God works through all kinds of people to effect His purposes.*

—Leon Morris in *The Gospel According to Luke*

#### **Fourth: God Controls History**

**Micah 5:2-5** - But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. <sup>3</sup> Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. <sup>4</sup> And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. <sup>5</sup> And he shall be their peace.

#### **Fifth: God Oversees Simplicity and Specificity. 6-7**

<sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn

- a) Her firstborn son – Virgin conception and birth
- b) Wrapped him in swaddling cloths

After an infant was born, the umbilical cord was cut and tied, and then the baby was washed, rubbed with salt and oil, and wrapped with strips of cloth. These strips kept the newborn child

warm and ensured that the child's limbs would grow straight. (Ezekiel 16:4 describes Israel as unswaddled, a metaphor for abandonment).

Luke 2:12 - *And this will be a sign for you [shepherds]:*

(Say 'goodbye' to shepherds and sheep. They are not mentioned any more in the NT. The Great Shepherd (Hb 13:20) has come and the ultimate sacrifice has come (Hb 10:12).

- a) *you will find a baby*
- b) *wrapped in swaddling cloths and*

Middle Easterners used the inner layer of clothing, cut into strips, for their burial cloths. The baby Jesus may have been wrapped in Joseph's death cloth.

The sign for the shepherds wasn't that they'd find a baby wrapped in a blanket in a manger. The sign was that they'd find a baby prepared for death.

- c) *lying in a manger.*

Jesus, as the Bread of Life (John 6:5) is placed in a manger / feeding trough

(This could be wooden. It could be concrete. When we go to Megiddo, just beneath Mount Carmel, and see Solomon's stables, the mangers are concrete).

#### **Sixth: It Was Everything God Intended It To Be. 15-20**

17 - *And when they saw it, [everything the angels had said] they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.*

20 - *And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

#### **Seventh: Applying the Text from a Sovereign, Providential God**

**Galatians 4:4 - But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son**

The good news of great joy is not only that Christ is born but that God, who promised a Savior at the very beginning of the Bible has providentially kept his word and sovereignly overseen history and lives to bring it to pass.

This good news should bring great joy to our lives each, and every day. The question for you is, "How is this coming to pass in your life?"

- What are you waiting on God for?
- What has God promised you that is yet to come to pass?
- What seems to be working contrary to or against your joy in God?

***Conclusion:***

And what has God ‘told’ you?

When you read this account, doesn’t it build your faith?

- a) God is providentially overseeing your life
- b) God is working all things together for your good
- c) God is using every circumstance and person for his purposes
- d) God’s end is everything he has promised

**Community Groups:**

- 1 – What do you know about Luke?
- 2 – Why did Luke write his gospel and Acts?
- 3 - What historical evidence does Luke give Theophilus to bolster his faith in the story he is telling?
- 4 – Why do unbelievers have moral arguments against the existence of God?
- 5 – How does Luke demonstrate God’s sovereignty in verses 1-3?
- 6 – On what other occasions did God use unbelievers to further his cause?
- 7 – How does Paul summarize the time between Gen 3:15 and the birth of Jesus?
- 8 – What do Micah 5 and Luke 2 have in common?
- 9 – What specific things did the angels tell the shepherds to look for in Bethlehem?
- 10 – What is significant about the manger and the swaddling cloths?
- 11 – How might you apply this text to your life?
- 12 – How does this text encourage your life?