

December 24, 2023 by Steve Brandon



Christmas in Luke (part 2)

Luke 2

In the 10 minutes that I have, I want to read "The Christmas Story" for you this evening. "The Christmas Story" is found in Luke, 2:1-20. As I read, I will comment lightly along the way.^[1]

The Christmas Story begins with these words,

Luke 2:1-3

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

This is not so unlike the census that we have in our country every decade. Our government wants to understand who is in the country. So, they call us to fill out our forms.

What is different, however, about this census is that it required everyone "to be registered, each to his own town" (Luke 2:3). We don't have to return to the city of our birth to register. but they did. That's why we read in verse 4,

Luke 2:4-5

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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Both Joseph and Mary were from the line of David. So, they traveled to Bethlehem, the city of David. Now, they came from Nazareth, which was some 80 miles to the north. Without cars and nice roads, this was a several-day hike, difficult especially for a pregnant woman. The story continues in verse 6 with Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem.

Luke 2:6-7

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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.

God entered our world. Not as a hero, but as a supposed illegitimate child; not as a king, but as a peasant boy; not to parents of influence, but to ordinary folks; not in comfort, but in a barn, where he was placed in a manger. It was one of the lowliest ways to enter the world. Yet, Jesus had one of the most spectacular birth announcements ever given.

Luke 2:8-9a

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them,

This angel was probably the angel, named Gabriel, the same angel who appeared to Zachariah (1:11) and Mary (1:26). This angel appeared to the shepherds. In those days, shepherds had no great standing among the sons of men. They were common laborers, an insignificant group of men, watching over a flock of sheep. It was at night. Without street lights, it was very dark. Without cars on the roads, it was also very quiet. But suddenly,

Luke 2:9a

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

In contrast to the night, this must have been super-bright! Verse 9 tells us that,

Luke 2:9b

they were filled with great fear.

That's why the first words out of the angel's mouth was this:

Luke 2:10a

"Fear not!" (verse 10).

Easy to say, but hard to do. Then comes the reason why not to fear.

Luke 2:10b

"Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

That's a good reason not to fear. The angelic appearance wasn't for judgment, it was for blessing. The angel was coming as a friend, not a foe. He was coming with good news! Good news that ought to bring great joy.

This is how life works. There is a strong correlation between "Good news!" and "Great Joy." When you receive good news, your response is great joy. Whether it's bonus at work or a passed credential exam, or a news of a healthy baby born, the good news brings great joy. This is how good news works. It brings great joy. Here is the good news (the heart of the passage):

Luke 2:11

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Oh, what a good word this would have been to the shepherds in the field. All of Israel were anticipating this day. Simeon was looking for this day (Luke 2:25). Anna was looking for this day (Luke 2:36-38). And the shepherds were the first to see the day! And what a great blessing!

Christmas is about waiting for the day! Perhaps you, children, know what it's like to wait for day that's coming in the future. Are some of you waiting in excitement for tomorrow? As a child, I had difficulties sleeping that Christmas night, just waiting for the morning to break. In a similar way, all of Israel were looking for that day when the Messiah would finally come.

For centuries, they had heard of his coming. The prophets had foretold it. And now, the day had come! They had received the greatest news that can ever be told: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

It has been said, "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need is forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior." That's who Jesus is. He is the Savior.

Is he your Savior? How can Jesus Christ be your Savior? It's really quite easy. You simply need to call out to him. Your calling doesn't need to be elegant. It doesn't need to come with a polished prayer. You simply need to see that you are in danger and needing saving. So, cry out to God, confessing your sin and crying out to him to save you.

This news came with a sign. The shepherds were told,

Luke 2:12

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

That sounds pretty far-fetched. What baby is placed in a manger? We place babies on our beds or tables or even on the floor. But we don't place them in feeding troughs? But this was the sign.

Now, before they could go and investigate the sign, an angelic choir broke out.

Luke 2:13-14

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

No longer was it merely Gabriel who was speaking with the shepherds. We now read of "a multitude" of angels. Perhaps there were hundreds, thousands, or even millions of angels. Whatever the number, my guess is that it was enough to overwhelm the shepherds. One angel is enough to overwhelm. But now an entire multitude of angels was giving glory to God! Wow! All the shepherds could do is watch and marvel, as these angels gave glory to God! Then,

Luke 2:15-16

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." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

This was an exact fulfillment of the sign that they heard from the angel. It was a confirmation that everything the angels told them was true. These shepherds couldn't contain their excitement.

Luke 2:17-18

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

The Christmas Story calls us to wonder at the ways of God. That indeed, the Savior has come into the world. Luke's emphasis here is that it's true! The Savior has indeed come! We need to do what Mary did.

Luke 2:19

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

This is what our service this evening is all about. It's about the wonder and awe of Christmas.

How can an angel predict the virgin birth? How can it come to pass? How can a multitude of angels tell the story and direct the shepherds to the very place where Jesus was? We need to wonder this Christmas season. We also need to do as the shepherds did.

Luke 2:20

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

We must leave this place "glorifying and praising God!" We have good reason: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 24, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] These words were addressed at a Christmas Eve service, which consisted of a children's program and a bunch of Christmas songs, ending with the entire room lit up with candles. I was given a ten-minute time frame for my devotional.