



Lesson 4 December 21st, 2024

Born in the City of David

Study Scripture – Luke 2:1 - 16

Background Scripture – Luke 2:1 - 20

Key Verse:

“When the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Luke 2:15

INTRODUCTION

Our Study Lesson is designed to remind us of the fact that the rulers of this world are not autonomous or independent and their evil decisions and their evil decrees are turned away from their intended goals to ensure that God’s glorious purpose will rule.

Thus fact is of great importance for just like Mary and Joseph we have tyrants and rulers in our lives whether in homes, schools, the community, or the nation. Some rulers do good, but some abuse their authority. They all are imperfect, and they continue to make all kinds of mistakes. But note this Study shows that God uses the abuses and mistakes of rulers and those in authority to produce good developments in the life of people.

But do not forget that both the Apostle Paul and the apostle Peter follow the teaching of Jesus that we submit to governing authorities. (See Romans 13:1-7, and 1 Peter 2:13-17 for their comments on this matter).

The birth of the Messiah, a Jewish name which reflects the nation long awaited expectation of a deliverer that would purify and destroy the nation, called the Christ, a Greek name which stress the fact of the Anointed One, was the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham 2000 years before to bring forth his son that would save a broken world. This son of Abraham born in the lineage of David would arrest the repeated cycles of human failure.

The account of the actual birth of Jesus is certainly the most well-known and most significant religious story in history, for it records the birth of a baby who is the Savior of the world. This story and several events which preceded and followed it are contained in our Study Text. Here we have a detailed account of the implementation of the sovereign decree and plan of God, and so we must understand that these events did not “just happen by the way”. This event was prophesied. God had long ago disclosed that He would *in the fullness of time* bring His own Son into the world, so that He would accomplish our “great salvation”. See Galatians 4:4.

It cannot be overstressed that the event is a historical fact, for many theologians and writers of different backgrounds and affiliations teach that Jesus never really existed, that the description of His supernatural birth, His life and teaching, the many miracles He performed, His death and His resurrection were all created, propagated, and promoted by Jews, who were desperately waiting for their expected Messiah.

Luke presents the account simply and factually, with no indication that there were any elements of Jewish imagination or wishful thinking involved. The account not only fitted the predictions of Scripture perfectly, (we refer to Isaiah 9:2-7), but in doing so goes against the whole stream of the then current Jewish attitudes and opinions, which looked for Messiah coming in power, splendor and glory, certainly never in poverty. We have described a real event, actual history, unlike the fanciful stories of pagan religions.

Note that these events marked the beginning of what theologians call the 'Humiliation' of the Son of God and everything here points to the significance of Him 'emptying' Himself, and taking on the form of a servant. The context of this birth of the Christ is significant and one scholar explains why as follows:

"Gaius Octavius succeeded Julius Caesar as ruler of Rome in 44 B.C. He united warring factions within Rome, ushering in the Pax Romana (Roman peace). To honour this achievement, the Roman Senate conferred on him the title "the August One" or Augustus in 27 B.C. (the word "august" means great or awe-inspiring). Thus was born the Roman Empire with Augustus as the first Emperor. He ruled until his death in 14 A.D., a total of 58 years. He was widely acclaimed for bringing peace on earth. The peaceful time of his reign was 27 A.D. to 14 A.D., and Jesus was born right in the middle of those years.

Clearly God used Augustus just as He used Cyrus and other secular figures for divine purposes.

The contrast between Augustus and Jesus could hardly be greater. One lived in splendour in the capital of the world while the other was born in a stable in a minor colony. The irony is that most people remember Augustus today only because of this mention in Luke's gospel. Every year, when they hear the words, "*Now it happened in those days, that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled*", they hear them as the lead in to the Greatest Story ever Told- the story of the birth of the greatest king".

The Son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour has indeed been born. Now here is a warning for us. He is no longer to be seen only as a baby in a Manger, but as the righteous Judge, the Avenger of unrighteous deeds, and the Ruler of mankind, and the One who will restore Paradise on earth during the Millennium.

The Book of Hebrews points forcefully to the historic birth of the Saviour. It states:

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.



For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

And again, I will put my trust in him.

And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil;

And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted”.

Hebrews 2:9-18.

The Apostles insist that those who profess to believe in Jesus Christ must believe that Jesus came in the flesh and that those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh are of the antichrist. Christians need to beware of those who teach that Jesus was not fully a man and only appeared to be a man. There are many that do so and have built great careers during which they mask their essentially heretical position.

Note also that most significant role played by God the Father in these events, for it is He that sent His only Son. Therefore, when we pray, we address our prayers of thanks and our requests to the Father.

God does things completely differently from men. Despite the extraordinary importance of this event there is no hype as would have occurred if men had control of planning such a dramatic intervention in human affairs. The story though simply told, contains deep doctrinal truths in this short passage and we will pay special attention to the significance of:

- the fulfillment of prophecy
- the role of the Father
- the concept of the “joy” proclaimed
- the importance of Providence
- the importance of angels and their personality
- the banishment of fear
- the announcement to shepherds, persons from a lonely, humble profession with no power or riches



We must direct our attention to the fact that Mary, a woman in the line of David, was a woman of God par excellence. We learn that she knew the Scriptures and was submissive to the direction of God. She remains the best kind of model for women and for men.

We know that Joseph came from royal lineage and though not a genetic parent to Jesus, was His legal parent and thus was His legal heir and through him Jesus obtained a rightful claim to the throne of David.

Joseph was a compassionate, caring man who did not want the betrothed but yet pregnant Mary to be accused of adultery and possibly be stoned to death. When the angel explained to him why Mary was pregnant, this man of faith obediently accepted the situation. His only concern now was the care and safety of the child that God had entrusted to him. He always obeyed God's direction and protected Mary from any difficulty or gossip. He gave his heart, soul and life to the work of God and did everything possible to make Jesus grow up in the *fear and admonition of the Lord*. Joseph remained hidden and out of the limelight, yet he worked hard, calmly, humbly, faithfully and obediently. Not much is known about him we nor do we have any of his recorded words but by observing him we learn what the Scriptures mean when it states, *"By their fruits ye shall know them"*. (Matt. 7:20).

We do not have to make a lot of noise, promote ourselves or seek the limelight to be found worthy of God and chosen for mighty works. Here was a man par excellence, quiet and attuned to God despite the problems, distractions and dangers around him.

All men can learn from Joseph's virtues of patience, sacrifice, devotion to God, devotion to his wife and children, purity of heart, and faithfulness.

It is to this woman of God par excellence, and this man of God par excellence that God entrusted his son and now we will see why.

It should also be noted that this passage has given rise to a highly regarded religious arrangement called Christmas. But it is also clear that there is no Scriptural support for observing any day in the calendar as the birthday of Jesus. The celebration clearly arises from superstition and not from any divine authority. The historical records show that it was only near the middle of the third century that a part of the existing church celebrated the birth of Jesus. It is clear that the time assigned to the birth of Jesus is too late, and as one writer puts it: **"Where is the method in the madness of the superstitious? Probably the fact is that the holy days were arranged to fit in with heathen festivals. We venture to assert, that if there be any day in the year, of which we may be pretty sure that it was not the day on which the Saviour was born, it is the 25th of December."**

It would be wise for us to keep away from pagan influences and concentrate our attention and efforts on doing what God commanded instead of going outside of Scripture and creating our own things.

The Scriptures which discuss the prophecies, and the event of Jesus' birth call on believers to be among other things listed in Philippians 2:1-16 to be:

1. Like-minded
2. Of one accord.



3. Of one mind.
4. To shun vain glory.
5. To be in lowliness of mind and behavior.
6. To highly esteem others including the poor.
7. To pay attention to the things of God rather than to their own things.

We should in other words, model ourselves after Christ.

It should also be remembered as we study who Jesus was and the actual circumstances surrounding His birth that the names used to describe Him is

- Saviour, one who delivers from the enemy
- Christ- the New Testament idea of the Messiah-King to fulfill the destiny of Israel
- Lord- the title used for God the Father Himself. Note what the titkes teach:

1. Jesus was obedient. Obedience to God is a highly prized characteristic. If we are not obedient to God our status at best is questionable.
2. Jesus was humble. We also should be humble.
3. Jesus gladly allowed Himself to be humiliated, to leave “glory” and to become a servant. All this He did on behalf of His brethren. We too should be servants to our brethren.
4. Jesus suffered. Suffering comes before exaltation. We too must be prepared if called on to suffer.
5. Lastly, before we even read this story in Luke 2, we should turn to the Book of Revelation, chapters 1: 13-18 and 5:5-14. There we will see exactly who Jesus is. Never think of Him as only a “baby”.



THE TEXT

Verses 1-7. **God's time arrived when the Roman Empire was at its height, practically extending all over the then known world. A subdued Judah was a small province in this empire and paid tribute to Rome. The “scepter had indeed departed from Judah” and now Judah was subservient and taxed at the whims of a foreign ruler. It was now the time for ‘Shiloh to come’ and to set up His kingdom (Gen.49:10).**

Caesar Augustus might have thought that his proclamation came only because of his desire to number his subjects, extract more money from them and show how his power. God however used the Emperor to give the order that all subjects in the empire be registered and enrolled according to their families so that they could subsequently be taxed.

Note that God regarded this birth as of such importance that He worked His will through Caesar Augustus’ desire to record the number of people in his empire to facilitate his taxation purposes.

Octavian was a good ruler in many ways and when he defeated his enemies and brought an end to the wars and destruction that plagued the Roman Empire, he did something quite extraordinary. Because he wanted absolute power over the Roman Empire he got the Roman Senate to give him the title “Augustus” which means “exalted” and “sacred”. One writer comments on this action by a man who did not think that being a political Savior was enough and wanted the title “Augustus”:
“Hitherto the word had been applied only to holy objects and places, and to certain creative or augmenting divinities; applied to Octavian it clothed him with a halo of sanctity, and the protection of religion and the gods”.

He got the title all right and was now the first Emperor of Rome, claiming to be a political Savior, as well as the commander of the army and now also a divine person. But despite his achievements, he could not stop the disintegration of the empire, for it eventually collapsed after only a few centuries. It is this man whose order that the entire world go through the trouble of being enrolled, that God used to have Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem to be enrolled and there have the child who was the Messiah, (Micah 5:2).

Luke tells us the precise date of this census, it happened during the governorship in Syria of Quirinius. History records however that Quirinius was governor of Syria about A.D 6-7, years after the estimated date of Jesus' birth. For Luke to be accurate, the census would have had to be ordered for Judea during the reign of Herod the Great, which ended in 4 B.C. it is known that Jesus was born about two years before Herod's reign ended. There is some ambiguity in translating Luke’s words. Some have challenged his statement based on the writings of



Josephus the Jewish historian, which refers to a census taking place at about ten years later than the date Luke states under a Quirinius, a Syrian magistrate in charge of the registration.

Several explanations have been given to reconcile the apparent dating Luke made with that of secular history. We know however that Luke was a master of Greek. Conservative scholars generally feel that the reading of the verse should be, for this is what it literally reads, *“the taxing itself was made, for the first time, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.”* On this basis, the edict for registration was made during the reign of Herod the Great, showing that the birth of Christ occurred just when Israel had suffered the greatest of humiliations at the hands of pagans. The actual taxation however, was carried out sometime later.

Others write concerning the phrase:

“ ‘First took place’: The idea in the original language is that this was “the first enrolment”. Using a census for taxation was common in ancient Rome, so Luke calls this one “the first enrolment” to distinguish it from the well-known enrolment in 6 A.D. that he later mentions in Acts 5: 37.”

Some others propose a solution based on an archaeological find that there were two Quiriniuses, with the census Luke mentions taking place under the reign of the earlier Quirinius.

There certainly are different views on this matter, but we know that the Scriptures are absolutely trustworthy. The decree did exactly as God wanted, for every element in the prophecies about the birth of the Messiah would have to be met. Joseph and Mary could not keep living all the time in Nazareth and have the “child” sent by God born in Nazareth. Joseph and Mary might have had plans to live in Nazareth, but God determined otherwise. Joseph, because he was from royal line, had to go to Bethlehem for personal enrolment.

At the command of Caesar Augustus the entire world responded, and everyone went to his own city to be registered. Augustus must have thought that he was calling the shots, but really it was God dictating events and using what He wanted for His own purposes.

Note that both Mary and Joseph were poor and of low estate and going on this trip would be an expense and a burden that they would probably have liked to avoid. But Joseph had to go, especially since being of the royal line, the Romans would probably want to ensure that they knew all details about the surviving members in the royal family.

The decree served another purpose. Joseph’s going to Bethlehem to be registered proves for us that Jesus Christ was indeed born of the house of David. There can be no denying that, for the Roman requirement proved the case.

Joseph's trip clearly marked the fact that Jesus had made Himself of no reputation when He became a man. He had to obey laws decreed by earthly kings, instead of them obeying Him. The initial circumstances of the birth are called his low estate and abasement.



That journey of Mary and Joseph would certainly have been memorable. Mary had proclaimed that she was a *handmaid* of the Lord. During the pregnancy and even before the journey she must have thought about the Scriptures which stated that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. She would certainly be acquainted with Micah 5:2-5. Mary and Joseph's would probably be somewhat happy that though they were going to Bethlehem because of Caesar's decree, they were really following God's plan. They might have been aware that God had put the requirement for the census in the minds of the Roman officials so that the centuries' old prophecy would be fulfilled.

They knew that their son the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem and so their obedience to that knowledge would have brought them some joy. Even if Bethlehem was crowded and even if they did not have many friends there and despite malicious gossip, they would be happy that they were being obedient and acting in a way to fulfill the plan of God.

Mary went with Joseph, and they arrived in Bethlehem, just in time for the birth of Jesus to occur according to prophecy. We do not really know whether or not Mary was close to delivery during the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, but we do know that she was probably at least a month or a couple of months away from childbirth.

The trip was a long, arduous eighty miles, but as far as she was concerned the trip with Joseph would take her away from the gossip about her controversial pregnancy; for it makes sense to assume that the pregnancy would have brought quite a bit of stress to Mary. While she was in Bethlehem, she delivered her "*firstborn child*" (***prototokon***) This means that this was her first child, and it also leads to the logical conclusion that Mary had other children afterwards. It is noted that: **"Luke uses the word *prototokon* (firstborn) rather than *monogene* (only—as in John 3:16). This suggests the possibility of other children later".**

Note however that though we assume that Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem and did not spend much time there before the actual birth of Jesus, the Text does not support that assumption. They could have been in Bethlehem for some time before the actual time of labour and the birth.

Mary was a virgin. Jesus Christ had to be the firstborn so that the rights of the firstborn, the double portion of the inheritance and the right to be the head of the entire family, and its priest, would fall on Him.

This is important for we note that Jesus claimed headship over the entire redeemed body of believers, which He calls His family. So He was firstborn in His literal family and He was firstborn among the redeemed.

The circumstances of Jesus' birth show the result of His descent from "glory". Scriptures call this Jesus' "humiliation". The language indicates that there was none but Joseph to help Mary during childbirth. She was the one that wrapped the small baby, (who in reality had been from everlasting), in swaddling clothes. These were snugly wrapped strips of cloth to keep the body straight.



Though He was the son of David, He had not inherited a palace and was not born in a palace but in a lowly stable because there was no room for Him in any inn. We do not have much information about the inns in those days except that there were such awful places that people traveling preferred to stay with friends. To understand the verses' explanation of where Jesus was born it is noted:

“Because there was no room for them in the inn” (Greek: *katalumati*) (v.7c). The word “inn” which suggests a place of public accommodation is not an adequate translation of *katalumati*, which is the same word translated “guest room” in 22:11.

The typical home is joined to a manger which is used for storage or to shelter animals. Above the manger would be a room that could be used for guests. Given his ancestral connections to Bethlehem, Joseph would expect to obtain lodging in such a room on his return to Bethlehem, but he arrives after accommodations are full. Therefore he and Mary spend the night in the manger area where the birth takes place.

Luke places Jesus in the midst of those whom he will serve—the poor, the marginal, the vulnerable. He begins life in a borrowed feed stall and later in life, will warn a prospective disciple that he has no place to lay his head (9:58).

The owner of the house would act differently if he understood that the baby is destined for greatness. He would make room, even if it meant giving the Holy Family his own room—but he does not understand the significance of this baby.

Spiritual opportunities come to us in this way. It is not easy to recognize Jesus in the face of a homeless person or in a Third World baby or a prisoner, but that is where we often meet him. God provides us with daily opportunities to meet Christ face to face”.

Some speculate, because of traditional beliefs dating back to at least A.D.140, that Jesus was actually born in a cave. It is clear though that a large crowd gathered in Bethlehem to be registered and that since there was no place to stay, the place where animals were probably kept was the only place available. Note however that many families kept their animals in a section of the house. So when Jesus was born, He was laid in a manger, a cattle's feeding trough, since He had no cradle.

The treatment of Mary, Joseph and the child shows the low level to which the people had fallen. Even though they were all gathered in Bethlehem, the birthplace of the famous King David, nobody seemed to have paid any attention to those in the direct line of David, and certainly made no provision to house them.

Note that people nowadays similarly neglect Christ, and care nothing about Him. They care little or nothing for those in His family and more often than not end up abusing them, lording it over them.

The circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus showed that God had no particular regard for material wealth and glory. God apparently wants us to treat the world and its possessions in the same way He did. This is of course extremely difficult for us. God's actions led to the disclosure that the world did not regard Him or his Son and tells us that we should not expect the world to have regard for His people.



We are reminded in Scripture that He came to His own and His own did not receive Him or know Him. The world was not prepared to give Him the ceremonies, adulation and crowns that the mighty Son of God truly deserved. Accordingly Jesus came and was little regarded, was of no reputation, and little noticed.

Men who knew nothing about God and His Christ had made arbitrary decrees and God had used them to carry out His plan.

The all-powerful God had made a body for His Son, and yet, though He allowed Mary to bear His Son, had ensured that no taint of sin would be passed on to Him. That is a display of immense power.

In addition we should note that God had showed His faithfulness in fulfilling His promises made in Genesis 3 to send the *“seed of the woman”* to save the Earth. God was also upholding His statements in many Scriptures as well as that in Micah 5:2.

God had showed us His love and His grace in sending His Son to save sinful and unworthy men. And in addition God had showed us the woman that He considered blessed over all other women, thus revealing what God loves His people. All of us can study this model of excellent behavior and pattern our lives according to that of Mary and Joseph.

The next section of our story stands as a constant rebuke to us for we seem to be on the opposite course to that of God. We seem to glory in luxury, and we pay special attention to the so-called “great” men and women of the world. We forget that they all have feet of clay. We think that those who have the applause and recognition of the world and seek after the materialism and vain style of the world are the “better people”. But every believer who reads the Scriptures knows full well that that is not how God thinks.

Verse 8. We are told that shepherds were out in the field at night keeping watch over their flocks. These were working people. They were on the job; they were not lounging around aimlessly.

Shepherds did not have a great reputation, and at this time in the history of the nation, most were considered unreliable and crooked and were not allowed to give testimony into law courts. Though in the past the patriarchs were shepherds, and even Moses looked after sheep, this great reputation had not stayed with the shepherds of those times. Their occupation had fallen on hard times.

These shepherds were clearly different from the rabble, for they seem to have been among those whose minds were ready to receive and accept the first announcement that the infant Saviour of mankind was born. It was very possible that these men, though poor and probably uneducated, waited for the coming of the Messiah and often spoke about it. They were not difficult ‘believers’, and did not turn out to be afraid to share their new information despite the lack of interest they encountered.



These were lowly people, but they were chosen to first see the Blessed Child. The other favorite group was of course the Wise Men, who on the other hand were well-educated and well-off, but from a different country altogether from Israel. The high status, well-educated, chief priests and elders in Israel were left out, since they were not mentally or spiritually prepared to receive any message from God.

The fact that the shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks raises the matter of the time of the birth of Christ. It seems apparent that a late December date for the birth of Christ is highly improbable, because shepherds would not have been out in the fields at night at that time of year.

But in any case, we know that the present dating of the birth of Christ is of later origin. One writer comments:

“The celebration of Christmas was not introduced in the Church till after the middle of the fourth century. It originated in Rome, and was probably a Christian transformation or regeneration of a series of kindred heathen festivals, the Saturnalia, Sigillaria, Juvenalia, and Brumalia, which were celebrated in the month of December in commemoration of the golden age of universal freedom and equality, and in the honour of the unconquered sun, and which were great holidays, especially for slaves and children.

In the primitive church there was no agreement as to the time of Jesus’ birth. In the East the 6th of January was observed as the day of his baptism and birth.

In the third century, as Clement of Alexandria relates, some regarded the twentieth of May, others the twentieth of April, as the birthdate of our Lord.”

Verse 9. There was a stirring and a joy in Heaven at the birth of Jesus for angels knew God’s steps to redeem mankind was on its steady course.

The angel of God surprised the shepherds by suddenly appearing and standing over them. There must've been a tremendous contrast between the glory of the angels and the humble circumstances of these shepherds. The language indicates that the shepherds did not expect this kind of visit.

But they saw the brightness and dazzling appearance of the glory of God which now appeared all around them. They were encircled in the light of God, the brilliant white light of God's glory.

This of course made them terribly afraid. We are told literally that they *“feared a great fear”*. No one is accustomed to running into supernatural creatures and seeing a sudden burst of blazing light in the darkness of the night. Even if these men were men of God, they would be afraid.

We can just imagine what would have happened if they were men who always feared the wrath of God and who instinctively felt that this kind of divine visit would expose their guilt and sin, and bring judgment.

Let us pay attention to the fact however that though we are strictly forbidden to worship angels it is not forbidden to love them.



The angels of God, not the angels of Satan, are kind toward men, love men, protect men and fight for men. They do this without envying men, even though they know that their Lord took on the nature of the seed of Abraham, but did not take on their form to save their lost brethren.

Though they are more powerful than men, and behold the face of God, they are not proud, but willingly and gladly minister to men, and now came down to tell men about the birth of God, and express their heart felt and complete joy that God had come down to men to save them.

We should love angels because they guard us twenty-four hours a day, keep us in all our ways, bear us up in their hands, so that we do not dash our feet against stones. They encamp around us who fear God, and minister to us constantly. We love them because they love God so fervently and always obey him.

Verse 10. These beloved beings were there to bring joy, having traveled from the courts of Heaven through the expanse of the galaxies all the way to Bethlehem, to visit the shepherds and to point them to their Messiah.

The powerful angel which appeared first immediately or suddenly comforted these lowly and fearing shepherds, telling them that they had nothing to fear, but instead had occasion for great joy. Their news would bring joy to all the people of Israel, and not to Israel only but to all men. Indeed, true joy had now come to men.

It has been said by some word counters that the words "*Fear not*" appear in the Bible exactly three hundred and sixty-five times. In this case it was necessary to make the shepherds understand that they were not to be terrified at the heavenly visit, for now their Deliverer would change the situation in the world. No matter what the Romans or their crooked leaders did, they were free from 'real' danger.

The angel tells the shepherds using a single word which means he brings "good news". (Greek *euangelizomai*). This "good news" or "good tidings" is "*for all the people*".

Verse 11. The reason for this was now stated. Christ had now come to earth to bring salvation. Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the one who had been promised in Genesis 3 and He had now come to be born on that day. He was the Lord of all, the Sovereign, God Himself who was called Jehovah. The Saviour was now born, as predicted in the city of David.

Joy was concentrated in a baby, God's gift. He was as promised born in Bethlehem, the "House of bread".

This clearly was a matter of great joy, for He the Saviour was born '*to you*', that is to you Jews, to bless the people of Israel, and all mankind. The silence of four hundred years was broken. Prophecy was now fulfilled.



Note that He was not born to be a Saviour, but instead was “born a Saviour”. His role was pre-determined. This coming of joy meant that fear and anxiety about future and about the unknown would be removed.

Let us remember why Christ was now born. It was because God the Father had stated that He would send one to be born a ruler in Israel, born in Bethlehem Ephratah, *though His goings forth had been from old, from everlasting* (Micah 5: 2).

The child had been sent by the Father, with **‘His permission, authority, consent, and assistance’** to be the Saviour of men. The work of sending Jesus was done because the Father had sent Him to show His great love.

Let us never forget therefore that our Saviour came because of the will of the Father, and everything needed was approved of by His Father.

Not only was He a savior but His title was **“the Lord”**. This meant that He was the supreme authority. He was powerful and would rule and reign. He was well able to face down and dispose of all principalities and powers, no matter where or who they were. He was sovereign, totally in charge of everything and everyone.

Jesus was as prophesied born in Bethlehem, where the mighty hero David was born. This Bethlehem was literally the “House of Bread”. It was small and inconspicuous among the thousands in Judah and had no royal palaces, remaining humble but it was revered and great.

Jesus was born to be a ruler in Israel, born to be King of the Jews. He came to command our wills, rule our hearts, and guide us in all activities. We are His servants because He is our ruler.

Note also that this was not an accident but something God had established before the foundations of the earth. One writer tells us the implications of all this, and why we must have great joy.

“His goings forth as our surety were from everlasting. Pause, my soul, and wonder! Thou hadst goings forth in the person of Jesus from everlasting. Not only when thou wast born into the world did Christ love thee, but his delight were with the sons of men before there were any sons of men. Often did he think of them; from everlasting to everlasting he has set his affection upon them. What! believer, has he been so long about thy salvation, and will he not accomplished it? Has he from everlasting been going forth to save me, and will he lose me now?

I am sure he would not love me so long, and then leave off loving me. If he intended to be tired of me, he would have been tired of me long before now. If he had not loved me with a love as deep as hell and as unutterable as the grave, if he had not given his whole heart to me, I am sure he would have turned from me long ago. He knew what I would be, and he has had long time enough to consider of it; but I am his choice, and there is an end of it; and unworthy as I am, it is not mine to grumble, if he is but contented with me”.



This must certainly be a matter of great joy to all the children of God. This is what the birth of Christ meant. The one that men had long looked for had come.

Verse 12. The angel gave the shepherds a sign to strengthen and confirm their faith in what he was saying. They did not ask for a sign, but God in His wisdom gave them one. They were told they would find someone in poor circumstances, one to whom they could relate. The baby *“wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger”* meant that God had marked out these circumstances as circumstances that we should not look down on. Do not therefore believe the poor circumstances in which you were born and in which you grew up are to be regarded as a curse. The shepherds as well as us were assured that God's ways were not the ways of men.

Verse 13. Suddenly, to add weight to the message, an innumerable army of Angels, heavenly beings which are described in military terms, suddenly appeared, joining the divine Messenger.

These were angels from the **“army of God”**, but instead of coming to fight, they came to praise, and to add their melodious voices together for the glory of God. One angel could not express the glory of God. They must have been awesome in appearance and the sight of them would have been overwhelming.

Satan must have been overwhelmed and taken aback, for now he knew the armies of heaven were there and ready for anything he might try.

Verse 14. The angels sang, because song expresses best the gladness of the heart and the emotions of joy that comes from the depths of the soul.

They sang that this salvation gave glory to God. They had seen God create the world and fashion the universe, and then they had sung together and shouted for joy.

But now they had seen the glory of God reach its highest point, when He came from His throne, became a baby, all to achieve the great good for mankind. One writer puts it this way-

“When they saw God stoop from his throne, and become a babe, hanging upon a woman's breast, they lifted their notes higher still; and reaching to the uttermost stretch of angelic music, they gained the highest notes of the divine scale of praise, and they sung, “Glory to God in the highest” for higher in goodness they felt God could not go. Thus their highest praise they gave to him in the highest act of his godhead...

Though creation may be a majestic organ of praise, it cannot reach the compass of the golden canticle- Incarnation! There is more in that than in creation, more melody in Jesus in the manger, than in the worlds on worlds rolling their grandeur round the throne of God. Pause Christian and consider this a minute. See how every attribute is here magnified. Lo! What *wisdom* is here. God becomes man that God may be just, and the justifier of the ungodly. Lo! What *power*, for where is power so great as when it concealeth power?



What power, that Godhead should unrobe itself and become man! Behold, what love is thus revealed to us when Jesus becomes a man. Behold ye, what *faithfulness*! How many promises are this day kept? How many solemn obligations by this hour discharged? Tell me one attribute of God that is not manifest in Jesus.

We must learn from this, that if salvation glorifies God, glorifies him in the highest degree, and makes the highest creatures praise him, this one reflection may be added- then, that doctrine, which glorifies man in salvation cannot be the gospel. For salvation glorifies God. The angels were no Arminians, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest". They believe in no doctrine that uncrowns Christ, and puts the crown on the head of mortals. They believe in no system of faith which makes salvation dependent on the creature, and. Which really gives the creature the praise, for what is it less than for a man to save himself, if the whole dependence of salvation rests upon his own free will? The only glad tidings that make the angels sing, are those that put God first, God last, God midst, and God without end, in the salvation of his creatures, and put the crown wholly and alone upon the head of him that saves without a helper."

Because of this act of God there was now peace, because peace is only found in the message of Jesus.

There is peace between the soul that is pardoned and God who pardons the sinner. God had shown His good-will by sending Messiah to bring peace to the world, eliminating the enmity that sin caused between man and God.

Peace was proclaimed with great fanfare, so that anyone who wants peace with God could have it. This good-will shown by God to men brings the highest glory to Him and peace on earth.

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God thus invites men to turn to Him and live.

Verse 15. The Angels disappeared as quickly into Heaven as they had come. The demonic forces had been warned and stayed away.

The shepherds did not hesitate. They had been told that the Savior of the world would be found in the manger, and they believed it. They felt a great deal of urgency and they consulted among themselves and acted immediately. They were in full assurance of the truth spoken by the angels. They had no doubts or misgivings.

Verse 16. They did not go slowly but made haste, and found Mary, Joseph and the baby exactly as the angel had said. The poverty did not shock them, for they being poor, knew that God would have relationship with the poor. They found what they were looking for, because God told them where to look for their salvation.

Verse 17. The shepherds were very anxious to spread the news of the birth of Jesus. They were satisfied that Angels had told them the truth. They believed and they told their story. They preached the gospel.



Verse 18. Note carefully the impression their preaching made on the people. The people certainly wondered but note that they never inquired any further about their Savior. There is no record of any discussion as to what they should do, whether it was all right to visit their savior and worship him. They simply *“wondered”* and filed it away as a strange but interesting event. One writer looks at this word:

“Many people “wondered”. This is an unusual word in the New Testament. It means “vague surprise”, mild curiosity, or superficial interest, whether emotional, intellectual, or religious. The same word was used to describe the response of the neighbours at John the Baptist’s circumcision when God gave Zechariah back his voice, and he gave an amazing prophecy about what God was going to do with his son in Luke 1:63-67. Luke says that “all these things were talked about through the hill country of Judea” Jesus was born six months later in the same Judean hill country, and again the response was mild interest”.

They wilfully shut their eyes. Truly it was as the prophecies stated. *“Who had believed our report?”*

They might not have disbelieved in the same way as the chief’s priests who answered the questions of the Wise Men correctly but never bothered to look further. But there is no record that they actually joined the shepherds in going to see the Messiah for themselves.

Many today wonder at the story of salvation, listen carefully to the fantastic nature of prophecies which have come to pass, but stop there.

Verse 19. But Mary was different. She meditated on these matters and constantly thought about them. She kept evidence. She took satisfaction in everything that was done.

May we ponder the things of God in our hearts and keep them there.

Verse 20. Undeterred by the reaction of others, the shepherds returned to their posts, glorifying and praising God for His goodness toward them. They thanked God for what they had heard, seen and experienced.

The humiliation of Christ was not foolishness and a stumbling block to them. They saw, loved, praised and thanked God for His wisdom and power

CONCLUSION

Jesus, Saviour, was born in the fullness of time.

God showed us His sovereignty making the actions of secular rulers and the people of God come together so that Messiah would be born where Scripture had predicted. These showed that events were not just coincidences, and the angelic choir edified and encouraged Mary and Joseph and those few that longed for the coming of Messiah.



We are shown how to communicate the “good news”, the gospel. We should never try to change it

The Scriptures might have first told us of the non-threatening story of the coming of Christ in sweet, cuddly terms to comfort us before it tells us of the not so pretty sight of His arduous ministry and His hanging on the Cross.

Treasure the Word of God. One writer advises that you keep the experiences of blessing you have had and like Mary reflect on them in ongoing meditation.

Ponder them in your heart.

Watch for signs of God’s sovereignty. You will need to draw on these signs and the word you have been given when the certain difficult times come.

This Study of the birth of Jesus teaches that God gives “ordinary people” a chance to speak about the greatness of God.

We expect those we term “ordinary disciples” to speak joyfully of their encounters with the Living God.

It forces us to decide what kind of God we want to serve and worship. Do we want a weak helpless God who needs us, or do we want a sovereign God **“who demands our obedience, our worship, our all?”**

So one writer asks:

“What kind of God do you serve, my friend? What is the Christ like whom you worship? Worshipping the “babe in the manger” is not enough, for this is the way he came. The way he will be for all eternity is the way he is described in the book of Revelation”.

The angels’ words of praise recognized the birth of Messiah as the greatest gift of God. In Messiah we see God the Father's glory, His Holiness, His love and grace, His faithfulness, wisdom and power.

We know that this prophetic song of angels has not been totally fulfilled. We therefore look forward for the Second Coming of the Lord, so that He will bring complete peace, destroy those who destroy the earth, eliminate all heresy and idolatry and bring about His millennial reign.

We look forward to Him coming with clouds of glory, the sound of the trumpet, and with the angelic hosts.

We know we will see our loved ones again coming to enjoy with us the brighter days ahead.

Do we fear even though we know that Christ has brought joy and angels have comforted us? Are we spreading the report of His coming and His glory?

Are we so concerned about material things and the glory of men, that we cannot understand and appreciate what God is doing?

Let us turn to God and take hold of His Good Will to men.



Led us anoint our head with oil and rejoice in the Lord always, fully confident of His truth and His Good- will. Let us straighten those weak knees.
The angels are watching our behavior with interest. Let us not disappoint them.

