

Luke 2:1-20
July 1, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When your first child was born, what did your birth announcement look like, and who did it go to? [Let people have fun with this]

Q: Why was it important to you to announce the birth of your child? [Let people engage]

Transition: In today's story, the first announcement of the Messiah's birth was given by an angel to some anonymous shepherds! As we study this passage, let's observe what they do with this birth announcement and then determine how we can imitate them. Let's begin by reading the first seven verses.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.1:

- In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

V.2:

- (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

V.3:

- And everyone went to his own town to register.

V.4:

- So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

V.5:

- He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

V.6:

- While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

V.7:

- and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.1: Let's be a journalist for now. Who is the ruler of the Roman Empire? [Caesar Augustus]

Q: What did he order the people to do? [The people had to go to the town they were from and register.]

Q: Hmm...Why couldn't they just register where they were living at the time? Why travel to register? [Rome took some census every 14 years for both military and tax purposes. Each Jewish male had to return to the city of his fathers to record his name, occupation, property, and family.]

Q V.4: Where is Joseph and Mary located at the time of Augustus's decree? [Nazareth]

Q: Where did Joseph have to travel to register? [Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.]

Q: Does anyone know what the word "Bethlehem" means? ["Bread of Life" or "House of Bread"]

Q: Why is that significant in this storyline? [Because Jesus is the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35)]

Q V.5: What did Joseph and Mary do next? [He and Mary made the trip to Bethlehem because she was pledged to be married to Joseph and was pregnant.]

FACT: It was 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

Q: Ladies, for those who have been pregnant, picture how you felt in your last trimester. How hard or uncomfortable would you imagine it to be to travel 80 miles when you couldn't hop on Southwest airlines, or get in a car and drive? [Let people engage.]

Observation: When God is accomplishing His will through us, it might feel uncomfortable, or disruptive, or inconvenient.

Q: How open are we to God inconveniencing us?! [Let people engage]

Q: So far, this storyline on the surface seems innocuous. You're a Roman citizen. Your ruler says you have to get your family registered in the city your father was from, so you do it. But what makes this storyline providential? [God used an ordinary event to fulfill the prophecy all along that our Savior would be born in Bethlehem!]

Q: Given what we know about Joseph and Mary, how do you think they were processing this turn of events? [Let people engage. Do you think they were saying, "Isn't God good? I knew He'd lead us to Bethlehem in His time!"]

Transition: Joseph and Mary may have been tuned into the prophetic fulfillment taking place by giving birth to Jesus in Bethlehem. But now let's see how God chooses to make the birth announcement so that the word would get around.

[Read Luke 2:8-20]

V.8:

- And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

V.9:

- An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

V.10:

- But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

V.11:

- Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

V.12:

- This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

V.13:

- Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

V.14:

- “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

V.15:

- When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

V.16:

- So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

V.17:

- When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

V.18:

- and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

V.19:

- But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

V.20:

- The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.8: Once Jesus was born, how was it announced? [An angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds living in the fields nearby who were keeping watch over the flocks at night.]

Q V.9: What did the shepherds experience while the angel was present? [The glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified.]

Q: Can you imagine that?! What do you think the glory of the Lord looked like? [Let people engage. A radiant light that lit up their fields?]

Q: Why do you think the shepherds were terrified? [It’s nighttime and all of a sudden a radiance is all around you and you hear an angel speaking to you!!]

Q V.10: How did the angel comfort them? [“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of **great joy** that will be for **all the people.**”]

Observation: “All the people” most likely referred to the people of Israel, but perhaps Luke also hinted that the Savior would be for all mankind.

Q V.11: What is the birth announcement? [Today in the town of David (Bethlehem) a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.]

Q V.12: What sign did the angel give the shepherds to confirm the news? [They will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.]

Q: Why do you think the angel came to shepherds out in the fields nearby instead of someone like a rabbi or priest or scribe? [Let people engage - By visiting the shepherds, the angel revealed the grace of God toward mankind. 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. **He also wanted to make sure witnesses testified to Christ’s birth.** Perhaps it was because the Messiah would become both the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the Lamb of God (John 1:29)]

Q V.13-14: How does God amplify the birth announcement? [He sends a great company to appear with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **peace** to men on whom his favor rests.”]

Q: When a great company appeared, what did the shepherds notice the angels doing? [Praising God, giving glory to God.]

Q: Why do you think the great company of angels praised God in front of the shepherds? Couldn’t they have done it later when they returned to heaven? [They were modeling the importance of praise. When God fulfills His prophecy and brings a Savior, the most natural response we should have to PRAISE Him!]

Observation: The word “peace” in the original language is “shalom,” which means well-being, health, prosperity, security, soundness, and completeness

Q V.15-16: After the shepherds heard the announcement, what did they decide to do? [Go to Bethlehem to see the baby the Lord had just told them about. They believed the message from the angels and went to confirm it for themselves. They found Joseph and Mary and the baby, who was lying in the manger.]

Q V.17-18: After seeing the baby, what did the shepherds do next? [Spread the word!]

Q: How did “all who heard it” react? [They were amazed at what the shepherds had heard and seen.]

Q V.19: How did Mary react to all of this? [She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.]

Q: When should we spend time treasuring what God is doing in our lives and ponder them in our hearts? How many of us are even spending time reflecting on what God is doing in our lives?

Q V.20: What did the shepherds do when they returned to their fields? [They glorified and praised God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.]

Observation: Isn't that the beauty of prophetic fulfillment? The fact that prophecy is fulfilled "just as we've been told" reveals a God who is trustworthy, praiseworthy, and powerful. Just think about the hundreds of years before when He shared what He would do, and then see it be fulfilled exactly the way He described it.

LOOK:

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!*

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 175–177). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Newborn Baby (Luke 2:1–20)

“As weak as a baby!” is a common expression that could not be applied to the Baby Jesus in the manger. While He was as weak as any other baby humanly speaking, He was also the center of power as far as heaven was concerned.

His birth drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem (vv. 1–7). Augustus Caesar was ruling, but God was in charge, for He used Caesar's edict to move Mary and Joseph eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill His Word. Rome took a census every fourteen years for both military and tax purposes, and each 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).

All of this occurred just as the Scriptures said, and Caesar unknowingly played an important part. A.T. Pierson used to say, “History is His 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. “I am watching over My word to perform it,” promises the Lord (Jer. 1:12).

Mary and Joseph were already husband and wife but since they did not consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born, she is called his “espoused wife” (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.

Mothers in that day wrapped their infants in long bands of cloth to give the limbs strength and protection. The word translated “manger” (Luke 2:7, 12, 16) is translated “stall” in Luke 13:15, and can mean either a feeding trough or an enclosure for animals. You see ancient stone troughs even today as you travel in the Holy Land, and it is probable that such a trough cradled the Infant Jesus. Many scholars believe that our Lord was born in a cave where animals were sheltered and not in a wooden shed such as you see in modern manger scenes.

Bethlehem means “house of bread,” the ideal birthplace for the Bread of Life (John 6:35). Its rich historic heritage included the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin (Gen. 35:16–20; also see Matt. 2:16–18), the marriage of Ruth, and the exploits of David. It is worth noting that the name *Benjamin* means “son of my right hand,” and the name *David* means “beloved.” Both of these names apply to our Lord, for He is the Beloved Son (Luke 3:22) at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1).

His 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).

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 mankind. 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." He used the word which means "to preach the Good News," a word Luke uses often in both his Gospel and in the Book of Acts. We see here Luke's emphasis on a worldwide Gospel: the Good News is for everybody, not just the Jews.

What was the Good News? Not that God had sent a soldier or a judge or a reformer, but that He had sent a Saviour to meet man's 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 man yearns more than even for outward peace."

The Jewish word *shalom* (peace) means much more than a truce in the battles of life. It 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 men's hearts. Then, God sent His Son!

The angels praised God at Creation (Job 38:7), and now they praised Him 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!

His birth drew the shepherds from the fields (vv. 15–20). The phrase "even unto Bethlehem" suggests that these men were located some distance away, but they were willing to make the trip in order to see the newborn Messiah. Certainly they arranged for others to care for their flocks while they hastened to Bethlehem. Halford Luccock called this "the first Christmas rush," but it was certainly different from the Christmas rushes we see today!

The verb *found* in Luke 2:16 means “found after a search.” The shepherds knew what to look for: a newborn Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And they found Him! They worshiped Him and marveled at God’s grace and goodness and the miracle He had wrought for them.

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 some 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.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 207-208)

2. THE BIRTH AND MATURATION OF JESUS (CHAP. 2).

a. *Jesus’ birth (2:1–7).*

2:1–2. Jesus’ birth was dated by Luke as falling in the reign of **Caesar Augustus**, who was officially made the ruler of the Roman Empire in 27 B.C. and ruled to A.D. 14. (See the list of Roman emperors.) Because Herod the Great’s reign ended in 4 B.C., Jesus was born before that time. The mention of **Quirinius** as **governor of Syria** poses a problem. He was governor in A.D. 6–7, much too late for Jesus’ birth. Therefore does the word **first** (*prōtē*) refer, to a first, that is, an earlier, **census** by Quirinius? If so, one would have to posit a previous governorship for Quirinius at about 4 B.C. Perhaps a better solution is to take “first” to mean “before,” as it does, for example, in John 15:18. Luke 2:2 would then read, “this was the census that took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria” (i.e., before A.D. 6).

2:3–5. For the census **Joseph** and **Mary** went to **Bethlehem**, Joseph’s ancestral home. Joseph was a descendant of **David** (cf. 1:27), who was born in Bethlehem. Some have argued that it seems strange that people were not registered in the places where they currently lived. However, other instances of the same practice are known (see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 101–2). 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).

2:6–7. The Child was born during their time in Bethlehem. The fact that Jesus was called Mary’s **firstborn** implies that later she had other children. The couple was housed in quarters which were not private. According to tradition, they were in a cave near the inn. The Child was **placed ... in a manger**, from which livestock fed. Being wrapped **in strips of cloth** was important, for this was the way the shepherds would recognize the infant (v. 12). Some infants were bound up in that way to keep their limbs straight and unharmed.

b. *The shepherd’s worship of the baby (2:8–20).*

2:8–14. An announcing **angel** and other angels appeared **at night** to a group of **shepherds** and heralded the birth of the **Savior in the town of David**, that is, Bethlehem (v. 4). The shepherds may have been caring for lambs which were destined for sacrifice during the time of Passover. The appearance of the angel and of the radiant **glory of the Lord ... terrified** them. The Greek for “terrified” (lit., “they feared a great fear”) stresses the intensity of this fear.

The angels’ message was comforting. The shepherds were told **not to be afraid** (cf. 1:13, 30). The message was that “a Savior,” **Christ the Lord**, was **born**. This was **good news of great joy**. Throughout Luke “joy” (*chara*) is often associated with salvation. This news was to be proclaimed to **all the people**. These were specifically the people of Israel, but perhaps Luke also hinted that the Savior would be for all mankind. The **angel** was then joined by **a great company** of other angels engaged in **praising God** in the highest. The **on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests** (NIV) is preferred to the “**good will toward men.**” (KJV) God’s peace is not given to those who have good will, but to those who are recipients of God’s good will or favor.

2:15–20. **The shepherds** went to see **the Baby**, and they told what **the angels** had related to them. The shepherds understood that the angels were speaking for **the Lord**. They believed the message and went to confirm it for themselves. This was much like the action of Mary after she had heard the message of Elizabeth. Such an attitude contrasts sharply with that of the religious leaders who knew where the Baby was to be born but did not take the time or the effort to confirm it for themselves (Matt. 2:5).

After seeing the Baby, the shepherds were the first messengers to proclaim the arrival of the Messiah: **they spread the word**. Those **who heard ... were amazed** (*ethaumasán*). The theme of amazement at the proclamation of the Messiah runs throughout the Book of Luke. (The Gr. verb *thaumazō*, “to be amazed, to wonder, to be astonished,” occurs in Luke 1:21, 63; 2:18, 33; 4:22; 8:25; 9:43; 11:14, 38; 20:26; 24:12, 41. Two other words for amazement were also used by Luke; see 2:48.) **Mary** reflected on this momentous event in history. Of all the women of Israel *she* was the mother of the Messiah! **The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God**, much as the angels had done (vv. 13–14).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1514-1515). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

2:1 We have no evidence that Augustus ever issued a decree resulting in an empire-wide registration (census), though several censuses were conducted during his reign having this effect. Luke may have been merely summarizing the intention of these registrations or referring to a decree that expressed such an intention. Evidence exists that the Romans sometimes took registrations of client kingdoms, as Palestine was at this time, and may even point to the existence of tax rolls in Samaria prior to Herod’s death. Herod had fallen out of favor with Augustus toward the end of his life, and Augustus may have pressured Herod to conduct the registration in view of his advanced age and the possibility of Roman acquisition of at least some of Herod’s territory upon his death.

2:2 The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that Quirinius became governor of Syria and instituted a registration in Judea in A.D. 6, too late for a supposed birth of Jesus under Herod the Great (Mt 2:1; Lk 1:5), who probably died in 4 B.C. Luke clearly knew of this registration (Acts 5:37), so that calling the registration of chapter 1 “the first” (in apparent opposition to the later census) strongly suggests he did not have his facts mixed up here. The verse is to be read as either (1) dissociating

Quirinius from the registration (i.e., this was a former registration, taken before the famous one under Quirinius), or (2) positing two registrations administered by Quirinius (i.e., this is the registration taken by Quirinius the first time he was governor [or some other administrator] of Syria). Our knowledge of the relevant historical facts is too incomplete to determine a more definitive solution.

2:3 The Romans did not normally require people to return to their ancestral homes to be registered, so this detail may support a registration under Jewish methods while Herod was still king. Similarly, if Luke were referring to the registration of Quirinius in A.D. 6, it is unlikely Joseph was required to leave Galilee, ruled by Herod's son Antipas, to register in Judea, administered by a Roman prefect under the authority of the province of Syria. This detail makes much more sense if Galilee and Judea were at the time under one administration, such as during the reign of Herod the Great.

2:7 Some argue that Bethlehem would not have had an inn since it was not on any major road, and that this story is therefore fictitious. But attempting to claim the nonexistence of an inn in Bethlehem is mere conjecture, and besides, the Greek term translated "inn" (*kataluma*) simply means "lodging" and can refer to a guest room in a private home. Animal stalls, with their mangers, were normally located inside the one-room residence of peasant families. Animals were sometimes kept in caves, and an early Christian tradition places the birth of Jesus in a cave.

2:11 The Greek term *kurios* ("lord") in the Bible has the same range of meaning as the English term *lord*, from simple social status to divinity. It is probably intended to explain "Christ" (Gk *christos*, meaning Messiah, meaning "anointed") more fully as "the sovereign."

2:19 In Mk 3:20–35, Mary appeared with other family members wishing to restrain Jesus' ministry, believing Him to be mad. Though Mary mulled over the incredible events of Jesus' birth, she apparently did not come to any firm resolution about them until later in Jesus' life. The 30 years between birth and ministry, with only occasional reminders (Lk 2:51), may have softened the impact of these events.