

## The Birth of Our Savior

- Luke 2:1-20
- I am glad we have the meet and greet time every week. I heard about one church where the announcement is something like, "Ok, this is the time in the service when you turn around and take a selfie with someone you don't know!"
- On the TV show, Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader?, they took a poll of 8 to 12 year olds and asked them, "What do you most enjoy about the holidays?" A) Decorating the house B) Spending time with family and relatives C) Receiving presents. What do you think most of the children said? Answer: B.
- Maybe that's something we can all learn from 8-12 year olds. But what can we learn today from the birth of our Savior? You know, because all of you are smarter than 5<sup>th</sup> graders, even the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in here are, you know that the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all wrote about the death of Jesus. His arrest, trial, death, burial and resurrection take up the last three chapters of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the last four chapters of John. What about the birth of Jesus? Matthew covers it in one verse, basically: "(Joseph) knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus." (Matthew 1:25) Then he tells us about the visitation of the wise men, which would have most likely happened when Jesus was around 2 years old. Mark doesn't even mention the birth; the first time we see Jesus in Mark's Gospel, John is baptizing Him in the Jordan. John doesn't mention the birth in his gospel, either, except to say "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) Were it not for Luke, we wouldn't know anything about the actual event of Jesus' birth. We would have the prophecies from the Old Testament, but we would not see their fulfillment as clearly. For that reason, among many others, I am thankful for the good doctor. Let's look at this very familiar story again today, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, with just two main points to guide us: birth, shepherds/angels.
- **Birth**
- After Luke gives us the time and the place, the history and the geography, he tells us the birth story simply in verse 7: "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." There's no mention of how much Jesus weighed, and how long he was, you know, the data we always ask for when a baby is born. No mention of whether he had his mother's eyes. And maybe you have wondered like I have if God made Jesus to look like Joseph, even though he had none of Joseph's genes in him at all. I would think God did that. Maybe he had Joseph's chin. We don't know and it doesn't matter. There's a ridiculous article this week in the news about how scientists have been able to figure out what Jesus looked like. They can take a guess, based on the time and place in which he lived, but nobody knows. In fact the Bible tells us nothing about what Jesus looked like, except this: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." (Isaiah 53:2) So, if you were going to cast someone in a movie to play Jesus, would you go for Gimli or Aragorn? John Rys-Davies or Viggo Mortensen? You'd have to go with Gimli, if you consider Isaiah's prophecy: "no form or majesty that we should look at him."
- And think for a moment about the details of Jesus birth: who was born on that night and to whom, and where?! This is one of the many examples in the biblical narrative that has a ring of truth and encourages us to believe it. I mean, if you were going to write a fictional account of the birth of the Savior of the world, who would his parents be? And where would he be born? You wouldn't pick Joseph and Mary, a betrothed couple from Nazareth, he a carpenter and she a peasant girl. You wouldn't decide to make the birthing room a stable, and the bassinet a manger. You just wouldn't do it! Jesus would have royal parents, or at least powerful and important ones, and he would be born in the finest house in the land, and be laid on a pillow made of silk, and have dozens of attendants to wait on him and make sure he needed nothing and wouldn't even have reason to cry. A carpenter and his fiancée, in a stable? No way. Look, don't miss the point. Luke didn't write it this way to make it sound

true. He wrote it this way because it was true. This is how it happened. You have to wonder though if Mary had some questions in her mind when all of this was going on, because of the words of Gabriel ringing in her ears: **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.** Alistair Begg says that Mary may have thought as she held Jesus in her arms, “My son is going to sit on the throne of King David and his reign will never end...and Joseph couldn’t even manage to get a hotel reservation?”

- That’s the birth and a glance at the star, Jesus our Savior. Let’s look at the supporting cast in this real drama.
- **Shepherds/Angels**
- The story continues without fanfare, as Luke tells us that in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Again God surprises us with this. Even though we know the story and this is what happened, it still surprises us that God would give the first and only birth announcement to lowly shepherds. These guys were working class poor. They smelled bad. They didn’t get to come to social events or to church much at all, because they were always with the sheep. Don’t let anybody pull the wool over your eyes: nobody looked up to a shepherd. It was just a baaad job. But when God decided to tell the world that His Son had been born, He chose to do it by sending His angel, and then a multitude of angels to shepherds outside Bethlehem. Think about it. God didn’t have to send an angel. He could have just given one of the shepherds a word of knowledge. You know, all of the shepherds are sitting on the hillside, when one of them, let’s call him Ralph, all of sudden starts to shake and his face gets red and he stands up and says, “Good news of great joy! There’s a baby born in Bethlehem, ya’ll, and it is the Lord!” The rest of the guys would have looked up from their beans long enough to tell him to stuff a sock in it.
- No, God sent angels as He often did when there was very important news. But why send his heavenly messengers to shepherds? I would suggest there are two reasons for that.
- First, because of what God had already said to Mary in what is called the Magnificat, Luke 1:52-53: “He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.” Nebuchadnezzar knew about this. This is what the once proud king said after God put him out to pasture, literally, for a good long time: “I praise and extoll and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” (Dan. 4:37) That’s what God was doing and still does. **He brings down the mighty and He exalts the humble.** Let’s be careful that we don’t do the exact opposite, as if to say to God, “You know, Lord, you’ve got it all wrong! The really cool people, the mighty and the rich and the famous and the powerful, those are the ones I think about and admire and want to become!” No! When God sent His Son to earth as a baby born in Bethlehem, He gave the great news about the birth to the humble, the simple, the plain everyday people like you and me. He still does.
- Paul said it kind of like this to the church at Corinth, and to you and me, and I paraphrase: “Look around at the lot of you...not many of you are wise, not many of you are powerful, not many of you came from big shot parents. But that’s OK, because God uses those who appear to be foolish to shame the wise; he uses the weak in this world to shame the strong; He chose the lowly and the despised in the world in order to show us that nobody can boast in the presence of God.” (1 Cor. 1:26-28, paraphrased) Notice that he doesn’t say, “Not ANY of you are wise.” That’s good because that would leave out people like CS Lewis and Sir Isaac Newton, and Daniel Kemp, and other wise people who are called to follow Christ and do so using their great intellects to serve Him. But the shepherds were not intellectuals, and unless you understand God’s economy and how He works, you would be shocked that lowly shepherds got the news first.
- Not Mary and Joseph. I really don’t think they were surprised to see the shepherds show up, given the messages THEY had each received from the angel, and given who THEY were themselves! I really don’t think Mary and Joseph expected Herod to come visit them in the stable, or even the High Priest, or for that matter, any priest. But shepherds? That’s about right.

- The second reason why God sent angels to shepherds was because He wanted THEM to be the first human evangelists. The first people the first evangelists brought the good news to were Joseph and Mary. **Verse 17** Yes, I know Mary was sitting there HOLDING the good news, but think about it like this. The angels had told the shepherds the same things that Gabriel had told Joseph and Mary separately. **Look at: Matthew 2:20-21; Now look at: Luke 1:30-33.** This was a third confirmation that the baby that had just been born was indeed the Son of God. We could ask, with Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene, “Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation, Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations? Did you know that your baby boy is heaven’s perfect Lamb? This sleeping child you’re holding is the Great I Am.” I believe Mary would say, Yes. Especially after the shepherds came and gave their testimony, a confirmation to what she and Joseph had heard.
- What do the first evangelists do next? They didn’t just keep the news in the first family. **Look at verse 20:** “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” What a story they had to tell. These were the first men in history that were confronted by an army of angels that had not been sent from heaven to destroy them but to give them life-saving news. These were the first men besides Joseph to lay their eyes on the Son of God, the Word become flesh, the Savior and King! These were the first men to hear from heaven that the birth of the long-expected Messiah, from the line of David, born of woman, born under the law, was good news of great joy for ALL the people!
- We have the same story to tell. And to live.
- Prayer (Micah and Jesse sing “This Baby”)