

GOSPEL OF THE MESSIAH

Message 7

Text: Luke 2:1-20

Date: 3/9/2014

INTRO: The passage that was just read for you, Luke 2:1-20, is the only account of the birth of Christ. In Matthew 1 we saw that Matthew, presenting Jesus as the King of the Jews, gave evidence that Jesus qualifies as far as genealogy is concerned. This is an essential requirement. Matthew knew the Jews would require such evidence before they would even listen to his account of the life of Christ. Then we looked at Joseph's dilemma when he found out Mary was expecting and his decision to divorce her instead of having her stoned. We saw how the angel informed him of the truth of the matter and that he married her.

This morning we want to now look at the birth of the Messiah. We are in the section I have titled, "The Preparation Of The Messiah For The World." We left off in our last message at Matthew 1:25. Go to it briefly as we introduce this message (read). Now look at 2:1. This verse says, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea..." Now, in between Matthew 1:21 and 2:1 a lot happens that Matthew does not tell us. But Luke 2:1-38 will fill that information in for us. Part of that information is our subject this morning. Luke will tell us about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and His presentation in the temple in Jerusalem, which would be eight days after His birth. Since I have covered this section in recent years at Christmas, we will go through this rather quickly but what I want us to get is the flow of the story of the early days of the life of Christ. For anyone wanting more detailed information on this section, you can check our Christmas messages on sermonaudio.com/lhec.

So, without more ado we will go to Luke 2.

3. The birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 2:1-20)

We begin with Luke 2:1-3 (read). Now there are some historical difficulties in connection with the name of Quirinius in 2:2. The McClintock and Strong Cyclopedia says, "The mention of the name of Quirinus in connection with the census which was in progress at the time of our Lord's birth presents very serious difficulties, of which,

from the want of adequate data, historical and critical: inquiry has not yet attained an entirely satisfactory solution."

But, in a message I did some years ago which I called *Ten Proofs That the Bible is the Word of God*, I wrote this, and I quote, "Sir William Ramsey who was for many years the professor of Humanity at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland and the world's most eminent authority on the geography and history of ancient Asia Minor, studied every available early document concerning that period and area. He wrote of the book of Acts that it was 'A highly imaginative and carefully colored account of primitive Christianity.' But after many years of intensive study the absolute historical accuracy of Luke's writings, even in minute details captured both his brain and then his heart. He now wrote this of the book of Acts, 'I take the view that Luke's history is unsurpassed in regard to its trustworthiness...you may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historians' and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment'", end quote. We need not question the accuracy of Luke's account here.

Let me just make note that the KJV says this was a taxing. However, the word here is *apographo* and means to *write out* or *enrol* or *register*. It is a registration rather than a taxing. In our day we call it a census.

So consider now at verses 4-5 (read). Verse 4 then says, "Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David..." Notice that Bethlehem is called the city of David. Judea is somewhat like a province within a country, at the heart of which was Jerusalem. Bethlehem is only a few miles out of Jerusalem.

It is very interesting that our text points out that Joseph was to go to Bethlehem, and that it calls this place the city of David. Elimelech and Naomi, in the book of Ruth, were also from here. They moved to Moab in a time of drought and

Elimelech died in Moab. Ruth's two sons Mahlon and Chilion both married wives there, but they also both died. Naomi then moved back to Bethlehem with her one daughter-in-law, Ruth. Here Ruth met Boaz and they married, and had a son and they called him Obed. Obed also had a son and called him Jesse. Then when Jesse had a family he called one of his sons David. Since David became the highly respected king of Israel, Bethlehem became known as the city of David.

Now, there was another town called Bethlehem in the land of Zebulun (Josh. 19:15). To distinguish the Bethlehem we are talking about from that Bethlehem, it is called Bethlehem Judah, because it is in the land of Judah. Now Elimelech and Naomi were from Bethlehem Judah. Now Ruth 1:2 says they were Ephrathites. Ephrathah is the small locality in which Bethlehem lay. The name *Ephrath* means fruitful.

Amazing then, is it not, that Joseph and Mary will go back to this same place, and there David's great, great, great...ect... grandson, Jesus, the Messiah will be born! So Matthew 1:5-6 says, "Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse and Jesse begot David the king." No wonder this land is called fruitful. No wonder this city is called Bethlehem, House of Bread. And Luke 2:4 says that Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to be registered because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David! Now turn to another wonderful and familiar Christmas passage, Micah 5:2 (read).

Now it is fascinating that Mary went with Joseph. We know that she was not far from her due date. Why would she not stay home? Historians tell us that it was not necessary for the wife to go along with her husband. Why did she too go? We do not know. I suspect she had relatives or friends there. Maybe she expected to be able to go there and come back in time for the birth of her child. We do not know. We do know that God knew long ago that she would go because Micah 5:2 is full proof of this.

Luke 2:6 says, "So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered." We have already learned that Jesus would be divine. But here we learn further that He was also human. The gestation and birth was just like any other human birth.

And so, in verse 7 we have the greatest birth that ever happened among mankind (read). I have told you recently that some speculate that Jesus was born during the fall feast of Tabernacles because of Zacharias being of the course of Abijah. If one can determine that date, and there is some possibility of it, then one can at least determine the month Jesus was born. This would make His birth somewhere between our month of mid September to mid October.

I tend to think rather, that He was born somewhere between mid-March and mid-April. Let me quote from a Christmas message I did some years ago. I said, "For me, I think I would place some stock on determining the time of the birth of Christ on the time of year when it was lambing season. Why is that? Well, From Micah 4:8 we learn that Jesus was born WHERE the Passover lambs were born, that is Migdol Adar, or the Tower of the Flock. Then, He is CALLED the Lamb of God, that is a sacrificial lamb. He was wrapped in swaddling cloths as these lambs were. Jesus traveled the same road into Jerusalem that the Passover lambs travel when they are brought for the Passover and He would have entered the same gate, the sheep gate. He also came in on one of the same days that the lambs were brought. He was also crucified at the same time that the Passover lambs were slain. His blood was also shed for the sins of man.

"From all of that we would have some ground to think that He would also have been born when the lambs were born. Historically, it seems evident that the time of year the shepherds would have watched their flocks by night would have been between November and late February. That would account for the shepherds watching their flocks at night. If He was born when the lambs were

born, when would His birth then have been? Well, lambing season, so I have learned recently, took place in February. This seems right since the lambs used at Passover were about a year old" end quote.

Let me quote also from an internet article called, "Why We Believe Jesus Was Born On Passover." It says, "Whilst many commentators who have remarked on the impossibility of Messiah being born on 25 December because the shepherds have opted for an autumnal birth, they have invariably overlooked one vital piece of information which in my opinion gives us an important key to a spring birth for the Messiah, namely the fact that spring is the lambing season. In Israel and in surrounding nations lambing occurs over a two week period from late March to early April. During this season the flocks require the constant attention of their shepherds, who keep careful watch over their sheep and their newborn for their own safety. At no other time of the year are shepherds so closely tied to their flocks."

Well, no doubt God did not have a record written of when Christ was born for some very good reason. But in Luke 2:7 we have a most astonishing verse (read). Now, we now note that Mary laid her Son in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. No doubt, Bethlehem was filled with people who were registering for the census. Now I want us to pause to consider one of the greatest proofs that the Bible is the Word of God. God had foretold that Jesus would be born of a virgin. Only two kinds of persons would make a prophecy like that; only a fool or a divine Person who knows the future. But not only had God foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin, but He had also foretold where He would be born. We saw this in Micah 5:2 earlier. Let us go to it since we will be looking at another verse close by it (read). Here the Lord foretold that the Messiah would be born at Bethlehem, Ephratha. That addition of Ephratha leaves no doubt as to which Bethlehem is meant. But very significantly, Micah 4:8 tells us

precisely where at Bethlehem this birth would take place (read 4:8).

Now, this name, Tower of the Flock is most interesting. Let me quote again from one of the Christmas messages, "Now the words translated 'tower of the flock' are 'migdal eder'. There are various interpretations as to where this Migdal Eder was. Was it in Bethlehem? Was it in Jerusalem? Or is it a reference to Jerusalem itself? But after some study, I believe, as do many others, that it refers to the tower of the flock at Bethlehem.

Now let me say just a few words about towers in the Bible. You see, in ancient times they would sometimes build towers to protect wells or flocks or towns or vineyards. In time of danger, people would run to these towers for protection. It is from this picture that we sing Psalm 18:10, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous run into it, and they are saved.

At Bethlehem, there was such a tower. Cooper P. Abrams says, "This watch tower from ancient times was used by the shepherds for protection from their enemies and wild beasts. It was the place ewes were brought to give birth to the lambs. In this sheltered building/cave the priests would bring in the ewes which were about to lamb for protection.

If that is correct, it would explain how the shepherds knew exactly where to go when the angels said you will find Him in a manger wrapped in swaddling cloths. From the research I have done, I think it can be safely said that Bethlehem became a very important place for sheep and shepherds. According to Alfred Edersheim, the sheep that were raised here were raised for the temple sacrifices. They were raised by very special shepherds who raised sheep that were without blemish, as the law required.

Let me quote to you from an internet article by Rabbi Mike L. Short, who quotes from the well known writer, Alfred Edersheim, "According to

Edersheim in ***The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah***, in Book 2, Chapter 6, this Migdal Eder was not "the watchtower for the ordinary flocks that pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but it lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem." A passage from the Mishnah leads to the conclusion that 'the flocks, which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices...' (***Shekelim 7:4***) In addition, Migdal Eder is also mentioned by the Targums. Thus, Targum Yonatan, cited by Rabbi Munk, paraphrases Genesis 35:23 and Micah 4:8, '***He spread his tent beyond Migdal Eder, the place where King Messiah will reveal Himself at the end of days.***' What are we to make of all of this information from the writings of the rabbis? First, we know that Migdal Eder was the watchtower that guarded the Temple flocks those who were being raised to serve as sacrificial animals in the Temple. These were not just any flock and herd. The shepherds who kept them were men who were specifically trained for this royal task. They were educated in what an animal that was to be sacrificed had to be and it was their job to make sure that none of the animals were hurt, damaged, or blemished."

Cooper P. Abrams gives a little more information. I have not been able to verify this elsewhere, but if it is correct, it is very significant. He writes, "First, we know that Migdal Eder was the watchtower that guarded the Temple flocks that were being raised to serve as sacrificial animals in the Temple. These were not just any flock and herd. The shepherds who kept them were men who were specifically trained for this royal task. They were educated in what an animal, that was to be sacrificed, had to be and it was their job to make sure that none of the animals were hurt, damaged, or blemished" end quote. These lambs were apparently wrapped in *swaddling cloths* to protect them from injury and were here used to wrap the Lord Jesus.

Not only had the Lord foretold that Jesus would be born of a virgin, and that He would be born at Bethlehem, but also that He would be born at the

Tower of The Flock. So let me continue to quote Cooper a little further, "Thus, with the establishment of Temple worship in Jerusalem, the fields outside of Bethlehem became the place where a special group of shepherds raised the lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. Being themselves under special Rabbinical care, they would strictly maintain a ceremonially clean stable for a birthing place. The Tower of the Flock was used for birthing ewes, and the surround[ing] fields were where these shepherds grazed their flocks. These shepherds customarily kept their flocks outdoors twenty-four hours a day every day of the year, but brought the ewes in to deliver their lambs where they could be carefully cared for. It was to this place that Joseph took Mary. It was in this special stable at "Migdal Edar" that Christ was born! How do we know? The Micah 4:8 tells us so!"

We go now to verse 8 (read). If my reasoning is correct, and we do not have proof of it, only some evidence, then the shepherds mentioned here are specially trained shepherds. They are raising sheep for sacrificial purposes and these sheep had to be without blemish. And I propose they were watching these sheep to bring them into the lambing barn, or the tower of the flock, where I believe Jesus was born as well. I would suppose that whenever a ewe was close to giving birth, the shepherds would quickly bring them into the tower where other shepherds would oversee that part of lambing.

So we go to verses 9 (read). Verse 8 has told us about how things were when all things were as normal. The shepherds were out in the field watching their sheep. Verse 9 then begins like this, "And behold..." It is something like saying, "Take note" with four or five exclamation marks after it. Why take note? An angel of the Lord stood there. And the glory of the Lord shone all around them. All of a sudden in the night, light shines all around them and an angel of the Lord is standing there! Well, these shepherds were afraid. No, they were greatly afraid!

When angels appear like this, they appear in bodily form. They do not have bodies. Angels are spirits. But they can take on the form of a body and they can be seen and heard. And this angel speaks to the shepherds. So look at verses 10.

First of all, the angel says do not be afraid. Then he tells them why they are not to be afraid. It is because he has come to bring them good news, not bad news. And this news is news of great joy. And this great joy will be for all people. We have already had several hints that the Gospel will be for others than just the Jews as well, and here it is again. Then the angel gives the good news in verse 11 (read). Now there could not be much more shocking news! For 4,000 years God's people had been waiting. They were now in the darkest of night. For 400 years God had not even sent a prophet, and the nation and the religious leaders are far off the right path. And now the angel says the Messiah has been born. This is absolutely most incredible news!

The angel tells them where the Messiah, the Christ has been born. It is in the city of David! And this child is 'Christ' the Lord! Now notice this wording. It does not say He is the Christ of the Lord. No, He is Christ, the Lord! He is the Messiah who is God! Now go with me briefly to Daniel 9:26 (read 26a). Note that word 'Messiah'. It is the Hebrew word for the word 'Christ' in Luke 2:11. God has come to earth in this child! That is why He was to be called "Immanuel", which means God with us.

One of our folk just brought to me several 'Watch Tower' magazines. These come from the cult known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. And this cult, like all other cults denies the deity of Christ as I pointed out to you in John 1. But the shocking thing is that these magazines were written in Low German.

But notice now most carefully that the angel said in verse 12, "And this will be a sign to you: You will find the Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." Here we have a two-fold sign.

The babe will be wrapped in swaddling cloths. "Well", someone will say, "what kind of sign is that. Were not all babies wrapped in swaddling cloths?" Well, history seems to indicate that. But this baby would be lying in a manger. Now, what kind of manger would that be? A donkey manger? A manger for milk cows? Where would they go? Well, to a place where animals were kept where they used swaddling cloths. And where was that? Well, shepherds knew. Passover lambs were wrapped in swaddling bands! The signs the angel gave them is all they needed to go right to the right place!

One of our folk brought me a book by Michael Norton who wrote a book called, "Unlocking The Secrets Of The Feasts." In it he mentioned that Jimmy Dejong in Israel had said that the swaddling bands made for the lambs were made from worn out garments that priests had worn. If that is truly the case, all of this is very significant!

Well, our text says that all of a sudden a whole band of angels joined the other angel and they gave a very significant message. So look at verses 13-14 (read). If you would like greater detail on verses 13-14 I did one message on the first part of verse 14 in 2005 in a Christmas message and the second part of verse 14 in 2006. These messages are available on Sermonaudio.com/lhec.

Well, we are given a number of the results of all that in verses 15-19. We begin with verses 15-16 (read). The first result is that they went to Bethlehem and found things just as the angels had told them. There, where they took the ewes that were about to give birth to the sacrificial lambs, they found Joseph and Mary and the baby, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Who can possibly know what feelings must have gone through these shepherds?

The second result is recorded in verse 17 (read). Three months earlier, when John the Baptist was born, talk went all around the hill country of

Judea. Now once more, all over the country, new news is being spread abroad. And you know who they said had been reported to tell this news? None other than the highly respected temple shepherds!

The third result is recorded for us in verse 18 (read). When people heard what these highly respected shepherds had experienced, they marveled. They were astonished!

We find the fourth and last result in verse 19 (read). When you think back to the life of Mary, what all must have gone through the heart of that young lady, beginning when the angel first approached her until she saw this Son crucified?

Well, we have the conclusion of this matter in verse 20 (read). I expect that shepherding took on a new dimension from that time forward. I wonder, did these shepherds, or those that followed after them remember these things when Christ began His ministry 30 years later? Or were they like we are so often, that they forgot?

CONCL: Well, we have looked this morning at the only account of the birth of Christ recorded in Scripture. If this story were not so old to us, it might come to us with greater force. But the facts are still all there. It was here that God sent His Son into the world. It was here that our redemption story began. It was for us that all of this took place. Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word. Then let me learn to live my life in such a way that it will bring pleasure to Him.