

Christmas Day—Luke 2.1-20—The Savior is Born

I. Introduction

- a. “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?” Any idea who asked this famous question? That’s right, Charlie Brown. He’s just been raked over the coals about the puny tree he found for the play. He’s at his wits end which seems to cause him to ask what is this all about anyway.
- b. Linus has an answer for him and it’s the right answer. He walks out on the stage, asks for a spotlight, quotes Luke 2:8-14, picks up his security blanket and walks over and says, “That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.” Suddenly, that tree has significance and purpose even though it’s pitiful and lowly.
- c. Amid the hustle and bustle of this holiday, let’s not miss what makes it significant—the birth of the Savior who will be found in a lowly feeding trough. This event is the most significant event in all of human history—the day God came in the flesh to save his people. Let’s take a look.

II. Main Point

- a. We have anticipated his coming the last four weeks of Advent. Today, He is here. The Savior is born who is Christ the Lord. His coming will bring peace and praise in heaven and on earth!

III. Outline (There are 3 clear sections)

- a. The first one is verses 1-7—the historical setting in which Mary gave birth to Christ
- b. Second...verses 8-14—we see the heavenly announcement to lowly shepherds
- c. And the third section is 15-20—we see the lowly shepherds making the heavenly announcement on earth

IV. Exposition

- a. The anticipated coming of this child began at the Fall in the Garden of Eden when God promised that a child would be born of a woman and he would crush the head of the serpent. That child’s identity was given throughout history. There were certain things that had to happen to identify this child. Of all the events in history, this is the most important of all. Because after the fall, the hope of humanity rested on his coming. And that day has come! Mary gives birth to this child right smack dab in the middle of Roman history.
 - i. This story begins like most important stories do, with a historical setting.
 1. This is extremely important. The gospel cannot save if it is not also historical fact.
 2. Notice how Luke sets this in Roman history.
 3. We begin with Octavius who is Caesar Augustus. He was the great nephew of Julius Caesar. He ruled with Mark Antony and Lepidus before taking full reign in 31 B.C.
 4. Luke also mentions that these events happened when Quirinius was governor of Syria.
 5. The reason for this is to say very clearly that what is about to happen is not a myth but concrete historical fact.
 - ii. Not only did Luke set this within Roman history but those in power are seen as unknowing agents of God.
 1. The first thing Luke tells us is that a decree went out. Certainly, that decree has a purpose but a decree must come from someone powerful. And we learn that it came from Caesar Augustus.
 - a. This decree will lead to the fulfillment of this promised Child being born exactly where the prophet Micah had said it would—in Bethlehem.
 2. We could talk a lot about Octavius. He was a savior of sorts like many rulers were thought of.
 - a. His reign was known for its peaceful character and he put an end to a long period of civil strife. But he died in A.D. 14. (Bock 203)

- b. Yet he knew not what his actions would bring about—the real Savior. He sends out a decree which is like another day at the office. Just another email.
 - c. But the Roman government needs money to operate. Therefore, a decree that all the world should be registered and this registration was for tax purposes not to build their military.
 - i. These normal or even “little actions have great significance, for the real ruler of peace was to be born in Bethlehem and this decree puts the parents in the right place.” (Bock 203)
 - 3. The subtle irony in this opening is that God Almighty moves Caesars to accomplish his divine purposes within the normal events of life in a Roman government.
 - a. This isn't a myth. It is historical fact arranged and carried out under the sovereign sway of the Lord.
 - b. Take heart, God is in control of the world.
- iii. This story begins like a funnel. It begins with a Caesar and a governor sending out a decree for all the world but then it narrows its focus to one man in the crowd—a man named Joseph.
 - 1. Notice beginning in v. 3, “And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem.”
 - a. Of all the people, this story highlights, a man who lives in the backwoods town of Nazareth.
 - b. He is going to be registered because of the decree from Caesar Augustus.
 - c. And because he was of the house of David, he must be register in the city of David.
 - 2. No big deal, right? Well, Joseph went to be registered and Mary is with him.
 - a. As you should already know, she's pregnant. An angel came to her with the announcement and we are here to see if it happens as it was foretold.
 - b. The normal route from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 90 miles.
 - c. And when it said they went up, they literally went up. Bethlehem's elevation was higher than Nazareth's.
 - d. Pregnant. 90-mile journey. Walking up hill. But we shouldn't read too much into that. This is normal activity for them.
 - 3. V. 6 reveals what you have already expected—“While they were there, the time was fulfilled for her to give birth.”
 - a. To us the journey might be amazing or that she wasn't safely at the ER in Nazareth.
 - 4. It's said that Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
 - a. Before we talk about the details, I'd like for you to notice there aren't many details. There's not even a picture in the local paper. This is a very short explanation for such an important event in history.
 - b. And that's the way it was meant to be. The eternal Son of God entered the world very quietly and lowly.
 - 5. Now let's take note of this humble beginning. This baby of all babies was born in a barn. Laid in a feeding trough and not a crib, nor a palace.
 - a. But if what we've talked about is true, that God moved a Roman emperor to send out a decree that Joseph and Mary would go to Bethlehem because that's

where he was supposed to be born according to Micah 5:2, then why didn't God also provide a place to stay in the inn?

- i. Well, he could have but this is how God planned it.
 1. There have been thousands of babies who grew of to be kings but never has the King become a baby.
 2. He, the Son of God, will later not have a place to lay his head.
 3. In (2 Cor. 8:9) Paul tells us: ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.
 4. Mark tells us that Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.
 5. His life begins in a feeding trough and dies among criminals.
- ii. Why didn't God just choose a wealthy girl from Bethlehem?
 1. The Lord wants you to see that he works in the lowly and weak things of the world. His ways are not our ways. These are the things that please God—a humble and contrite heart. And God is showing us that our salvation began in this lowly estate.
 2. And God wants you to see that “the birth of Christ is not controlled by mindless fate but by the sovereign God who rules empires.” (Piper Look at the Book)
- b. That's it. No parade in Bethlehem. No one knows what's going on in the small town of David's city. The whole earth is oblivious to this great event! And yet, we see God announcing on earth what heaven has been longing to see to some lowly shepherds who sleep in the field with their sheep.
 - i. Again, more providential events happen that are connected to the coming of this Child. An angel descends from heaven to announce the birth that occurred in a barn in Bethlehem.
 1. And God sends his messenger not to kings or rulers or even the high priest of Israel. He sends the angel to some shepherds.
 2. It's nighttime. The shepherds are rotating throughout the night keeping watch over their flock and then a bright and glorious figure stands before them.
 - a. The contrast must be blinding! The heavenly light shines around them. Glorious light shining into the darkness while the rest of the world sleeps.
 - b. Yet the protecting shepherds are afraid. The phrase literally says, “They feared with great fear.”
 3. Yet another contrast comes. The angel commands them not to fear.
 - a. Why? Because he came not with grave news but glad tidings! Shepherds, you have no need to be afraid because I bring good news of great joy from heaven!
 - i. This heavenly message of joy is for all the people!
 1. Here, the focus is on God's people. These people are the sheep of his pasture.
 2. Later we find out that some of God's sheep are not of this fold. But he will call them and they will hear his voice later!
 4. But why should they not fear? What's good about this good news?
 - a. The heavenly announcement is that the Savior is born in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord.
 - i. The first description is that of Savior. If you recall, I mentioned that many thought of Octavius as a savior but he died. Many think of doctors as saviors of sorts. The list could go on and on.

- ii. This word savior has its clearest beginning in the book of Judges. God’s people would abandon God and his ways then God would punish them for doing evil by sending another nation to destroy them but the people would suddenly feel their need for the true and living God and cry out for help. He would raise up a savior who would come and deliver them. This happened over and over again because as soon as the savior/judge died the people would turn away from God again.
 - 1. It stood to reason that if the savior would stay with them then they would continue to follow the Lord and be saved.
 - 2. But the saviors were unrighteous too. Therefore, they died.
 - 3. So, if they had a righteous savior who lived forever then maybe the people could be saved forever.
 - b. Well, that’s exactly what God had planned. But the problem is, no one is righteous, no not one. Only God is righteous.
 - i. That means the Savior must be God himself! That’s why the angel says that this Savior is also Christ and Lord.
 - 1. Now, there was plenty of anticipation of the Messiah/Christ coming. The people longed for the Davidic King to come and save them from their enemies. To rule with might.
 - 2. But what they didn’t see coming was the fact that God himself was coming.
 - 3. Wrapped up in this good news of great joy needs to be a permanent fix. Because if not, then at best this news is just temporary joy for a few people.
- 5. Luke uses the word, “today” which usually has significant meaning.
 - a. It means the dawning of an era of messianic salvation and the fulfillment of the plan of God” to rescue his people.
 - b. “Everything we celebrate at Christmas pulls us into the promise that, in Christ, God will finish what he has started—that the new creation that dawned in Jesus’ birth from the womb and from the tomb will usher in...the rebirth of the world.” (Trevor Laurence)
- 6. The messenger has delivered the heavenly message of good news of great joy. And he wants this message delivered to others. And in doing so, this angel tells the shepherds where to find this Child who is the Savior.
 - a. He gives them a sign in v. 12. “You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”
 - i. The swaddling cloths are not surprising. I think all three of our kids came home with the same swaddling blanket. That’s normal. If this were the only sign then these guys might have a heavenly task before them.
 - ii. But this baby is lying in a feeding trough. I doubt there are any other babies recently born who are sleeping where the sheep have been eating.
 - b. The implication of this sign is—go find him!
- c. But before they even consider how they respond by confirming and sharing this heavenly message to more earthly beings, a multitude of heavenly hosts breaks out in praising God!
 - i. This host reveals to the shepherds through praise what the result of Jesus’ coming should mean. Heaven addresses earth about Jesus’ significance on earth.

1. Let me share with you a very familiar prayer: (Matt. 6:9-10) "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 - a. How will God's name be hallowed? How will God's Kingdom come? What is the will of heaven to be done on earth?
 - i. This is it!!! The Savior was born who is Christ the Lord!
 - ii. This heavenly salvation is now being praised/hallowed to God right here on earth!
2. These angels sing, (Lk. 2:14) ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"
 - a. The harmonious relationship that can exist between God and man is the peace this praise is expressing!
 - b. It is the only peace that brings everlasting peace and everlasting joy because this peace is provided in this Child, this Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Only this Child can accomplish this kind of peace.
 - c. And that peace is for his people. Or as the angels say, "among those with whom God is pleased." It is for those whom God pours out his favor on.
 - d. It will be for those who humble themselves before the humble and exalted King. God in the flesh. They come with broken hearts and with a need that no one else can meet but Jesus. They need salvation from their sins. And Jesus came to accomplish that for his people.
- ii. Finally, this last part could be summed up by the song, Go Tell it on the Mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!
 1. When the angels leave, the shepherds say to one another, "Let's go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."
 - a. They know the City of David is Bethlehem.
 - b. They have heard this word from the angels but they have not seen it so they go in haste and make a diligent search for this child.
 - c. They also know that this heavenly announcement was made known to them by the Lord.
 2. In v. 17 they see with their eyes what they had heard with their ears.
 - a. It is just as the Lord had said.
 - b. They made known the saying that had been told them concerning this Child.
 - c. All who heard this word wondered at what the shepherds told them.
 - i. This wonder is a common response. In fact, it's the response almost anyone would have had.
 - ii. But Mary's response is different. She treasured up all these things. She ponders them in her heart.
 1. No matter the miracle of what has happened, it feels so normal.
 2. And yet, God is consistently making it known to her that there is something amazing about this child.
 3. And, like the heavenly praise that came down with resounding worship of God, so too the shepherds return glorifying and praising God.
 - a. For what? All that they had seen and heard, as it had been told them.
- iii. They were telling it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!

V. Response

- a. What is the true meaning of Christmas? Christmas is for sinners. Christmas is for the lowly. Christmas is for bringing joy to a sorrowful, broken world.
- b. If you are broken, guilty, sorrowful, in need Jesus can meet every need. And when he does, you will never be the same.
- c. You will praise God in the highest for the Savior who was born!