

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/15/91
Luke 2:1-7 "The Humble Birth of the Sovereign King"

Intro: (of service)

Present Series: "Whatever Happened to the Christ of Christmas?" Luke 1-2

December 8 (AM) "Is Christmas More Than a Sentimental Story?" 1:1-4

December 8 (PM) "Getting Ready for the Baby" Luke 1:5-80

December 15 "The Humble Birth of the Sovereign King" 2:1-7

December 22 "The Correct Response to the Christ of Christmas" 2:15-20

Intro: (of message)

Illust: US News "Curing Kids Who want it all"

I read this week, "Christmas is often so commercialized many forget its real meaning." Christmas is a mixture of biblical truth, church tradition, folk custom, and commercialism.

Q: Where can we turn to find the real meaning of Christmas? The Bible.

Last Week: Dr. Luke wrote the gospel of Luke. He dedicated it to a special friend named Theophilus. It's not clear whether Theoph was a believer. Undoubtedly he had heard about Jesus. But apparently he had doubts. Maybe he couldn't buy the part he heard about Jesus being born of a virgin. Or maybe he had questions about Jesus' resurrection. Maybe it all sounded far-fetched to him.

This much we know. Luke was burdened for his friend. He wanted Theoph to come to know personally the security that comes to a person who meets the Historical Jesus. So Luke set out on an investigation. He researched. He interviewed people who were eyewitnesses of Jesus. And finally he wrote a biography of Jesus Christ.

Why? 1:4 "That thou mightest know the certainty. . ."

What did Luke want his friend to find? Certainty. That involves intellectual conviction. But more than that. It has to do with Security. True security is available only to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

****Goal of our Study in Luke 1-2:**

Luke is not writing to entertain us. Luke never intended his treatise to be reduced to children's bedtime stories. Luke wants to help us to get to know the real Christ of Christmas. And once we do, we'll gladly place our complete confidence and trust in Him.

Illust:

Q: Do you know the Christ of Christmas as the Savior and Lord of your life?

This morning: Last week, we studied an unfamiliar passage. But this morning, the passage before us is very familiar. Many of us learned to quote it as children.

Many of us read it every year as part of our family Christmas tradition. Luke 1:1-7

Problem: For many people, the story of Jesus' birth is practically all they know of Christianity. But think about something. How many verses did Luke devote to the

story of the birth of Christ? 7. Do you know how many verses are in his entire gospel? Over 1000! Here's our problem. We don't see the connection between the Christ of Christmas and the rest of our lives.

Quote: J.R.H. Moorman, "When Christ first came among us we pushed Him into an outhouse; and we have done our best to keep him there ever since."

Proposition: In Luke 2:1-7, Luke presents us with 3 scenes surrounding the birth of Christ. Each scene presents an important characteristic of our Lord.

I. Scene #1 The Decree (1-3)

Attribute: Behold the Sovereignty of Christ.

II. Scene #2 The Destination (4-5)

Attribute: Behold the Majesty of Christ.

III. Scene #3 The Delivery (6-7)

Attribute: Behold the Humility of Christ.

I. Scene #1 The Decree (1-3)

Attribute: Behold the Sovereignty of Christ.

V 1 "And it came to pass"

Illust: Man's favorite verse

V 1 "in those days"

In what days? Luke told us in ch 1.

1. In the days of Herod the Great (1:5).

2. In the days of a priest named Zacharias (1:5b).

Those were dark days religiously. God had not spoken to His people for 400 years since Malachi was prophet in Israel. Judaism had turned into an oppressive religious machinery. But it was in "those days" that it would soon change.

3. In the days of 2 magnificent announcements from angels.

--To Zacharias: You'll have a son named John (1:13)

--To Mary: You'll have a son named Jesus (1:31)

Q: What came to pass in those days? See 2:1

V 1 "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus. . . registered"

You need to know that Caesar Augustus was the #1 man in the world at that time. His real name was Caius Octavius. He was a great nephew of Julius Caesar. The word Augustus is significant. When he became ruler of Rome, he didn't want to be called Dictator or King. Those titles weren't good enough. So he consulted with the Roman senate and created a new word, Augustus. It was a word with religious connotations. Augustus was a title which eventually involved the claim to Deity.

Augustus Caesar was the most powerful man in the world. What he said went. He issued a decree around the year 8 B.C. What was it?

V 1 "that all the world should be registered"

In the Roman Empire, a census was taken every 14 years. The purpose was twofold. One, the census served for tax purposes. And two, the census served to discover the names of people who were liable for compulsory military service. Since

the Jews were exempt from serving in the Roman military, the census in Palestine was primarily for tax purposes.

Note: Some in the past have objected that Luke 2:1 is not historically accurate. But archaeologists have actually discovered census documents in dust heaps of Egyptian towns.

Dr. Luke, being the analytical investigator that he was, was a stickler for details. See v 2.

V 2 "And this registration was first made when Quirinius. . ."

Someone has said that this was the darkest hour the world has ever seen. On the throne in Rome sat a man . He ruled with totalitarian authority. No man or woman dared object to his order. When he commanded "all" the world to be registered, it was so. No exceptions, not even a pregnant woman.

V 3 "And all went to be registered. . ."

Caesar Augustus ruled with absolute sovereign power.

But did he really?

He thought he did. He thought he alone made the decree that would send a peasant man and his wife to the village of Bethlehem. But little did he know that he was merely a pawn in the hands of the Sovereign King of the universe! He was oblivious to the fact that the womb of a Jewish girl named Mary was the tabernacle of the Son of God Himself. He had no idea that his edict was already predetermined, 650 years before he uttered it.

Micah 5:2 "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth. . ."

There's Scene #1--The Decree

Q: What attribute of Christ do we see in this episode?

Attribute: Behold the Sovereignty of Christ!

Did you realize that the babe Mary carried in her womb simultaneously held the universe in His hands?! See Col 1:15-19 Did you realize that Jesus Christ is sovereign over the affairs of this world today? He is sovereign over the whims and fancies of Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's and Bush's. And did you realize that Jesus Christ is sovereign over the details of your life right now? You are here today by His decree.

Illust:

Tran: Scene #1 in the Christmas story--The Decree.

II. Scene #2 The Destination (4-5)

Attribute: Presents the Majesty of Christ

The decree of Ceasar Augustus obviously applied to Joseph too. Notice what he did.

V 4 "And Joseph also went up from Galilee"

The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was 80 miles. Means of travel for a peasant carpenter like Joseph were primitive. But Bethlehem was the city of his ancestors, so to Bethlehem he must go.

Notice the geographical terms used by Luke:

"went up"--heading south, but going up in elevation

"Galilee" and "Judea" = regions in Palestine

"Nazareth" and "Bethlehem" = villages/towns

Luke introduced us to Joseph in 1:27. We really know very little about this man of God. Matthew informs us that he was a just man (Mt 1:19). He was a kind man, not willing to see Mary endure public disgrace. Yet for the most part he was a behind the scenes man.

Notice 2 important factors Luke tells us about Joseph in vv 4-5.

1. Joseph was betrothed to Mary (5).

V 5 "to be registered with Mary"

Just think of it. We don't know how far along Mary was in her pregnancy when Joseph left Nazareth. But undoubtedly the townspeople knew she was with child. And the rumors and gossip must have been vicious. The embarrassment would continue when this "engaged" couple reached Bethlehem. When Joseph filled out the registration papers, while next to him stood his 9 month pregnant espoused wife, what could he say? No explanation would make sense to carnal minds.

note: Later in Jesus' ministry, He was called a "glutton" and a "drunkard" (Mt 11:19). If you investigate the Jewish background of these terms, you'll discover something. Among Palestinean Jews, these terms were flung at a person who was illegitimate.

2. Joseph was of the house and lineage of David (4).

Q: Why does Luke want us to know that Joseph was a descendent of David?

A: Because Joseph was Jesus' legal guardian. Joseph belonged to the royal line. So did Mary (see Lk 3 genealogy).

Q: What does Luke tell us about Bethlehem in v 4? City of David

Q: Why is that important?

A: Never before or since has Israel known a king like David! A man of God. A Shepherd over God's flock Israel. And a man to whom God gave this promise.

II Sam 6:8 "I took thee (David) to be ruler over my people. . ."

II Sam 6:12 "And when thy days be fulfilled, I will set up thy seed after thee. . . and I will establish His kingdom."

II Sam 6:16 "And thine house and thine kingdom shall be established forever"

By Joseph's day, it had been many years since a son of David had ruled in Israel. Anticipation of the Messiah was at fever pitch. The Jews awaited the Promised Deliverer, the Messiah.

Scene #2--The Destination = Bethlehem

Q: What attribute about Christ do we see in this episode?

Scene 2 presents the Majesty of Christ! He is Royalty. He is worthy. He has the necessary credentials to rule the world. He is the son of David. He has the necessary credentials to rule your life. He is the Son of God!

Bethlehem means "house of bread." How fitting that the Bread of Life would enter the world there. And how suitable that the city of Israel's greatest king ever would be the place where the King of Kings would be born!

Q: Is Jesus the King of your life?

Illust:

Tran: Scene 1--The Decree, gives us the Sovereignty of Christ. Scene 2--The Destination, gives us the Majesty of Christ.

V 5 ends with an important factor--"being great with child"

III. Scene #3 The Delivery (6-7)

Attribute: Presents the Humility of Christ

The next 2 verses are tremendous. Luke calmly relays the greatest news ever told. God entered human history. Luke's record is quiet, matter of fact. . .

Vv 6-7 "And it was so. . ."

How long were Joseph and Mary in Jerusalem? We don't know. But finally the day came. The day of her delivery.

V 7 "And she brought forth her first-born son"

Notice 3 things Mary did in v 7:

1. Brought forth her firstborn son

Luke is very specific. This was "her" son, not Joseph's. And this was her "firstborn" son. He was firstborn in 2 senses. He was first in TIME, since others would come later. And firstborn in another sense. The word means first in IMPORTANCE. In the NT Jesus is called: firstborn of creation, firstborn from the dead, and the firstborn among many brethren.

2. Wrapped Him in swaddling clothes

Luke again is very graphic. Mary wrapped the child. Mary herself did it. There was no one to do it for her. Think of the loneliness of the occasion!

I can't help but wonder what Joseph and Mary were thinking as they beheld the birth of this child. Joseph had heard the angel say to him, "that which is conceived of her is of the Holy Spirit. . . He shall save His people from their sins (Mt 1:20-21)." And Mary heard the angel announce, "Behold, thou shalt conceive and bring forth a son. . . He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest. . . (Lk 1:31-32)."

They both knew this was God's anointed Deliverer! The long awaited Messiah. Yet when He was born, there was no fanfare, only poverty and obscurity and rejection. They must have thought, "He deserves better than this!"

Notice the 3rd act of Mary recorded by Luke.

3. Laid Him in a manger

When God entered the world, He did not come to the household of Caesar, or Herod, or the High Priest. In fact, He chose that which was reserved for animals.

"manger" = the same word is translated "stall" in Lk 13:15; It can mean either a feeding trough, or an enclosure for animals. Some scholars feel Jesus was born in a cave where animals were sheltered. Others feel Jesus was born in a peasant home. It was common in such homes for the animals to live under the same roof as the people (for two reasons, for added heat, and to keep them from being stolen). Still others suggest that Jesus was born in the open air, under the stars, in some roofless cattle pen.

Illust:

Well, why? Why was Jesus born in a manger?

V 7 "there was no room in the inn."

What a sad account! No room. The only available place for the little family was one usually occupied by animals.

There's scene #3--the Delivery.

Q: What attribute of Christ does this scene convey?

A: His Humility. Everything associated with His birth rings with humility: Peasant parents, the donkey trip, the feed trough cradle, the absence of a nurse to help Mary. What a humble birth! What a humble Savior!

Phil 2:5-7 "Let this mind be in you which also was in Christ. . ."

Christ humbled Himself. Do you see His humility in this story?!

Did you realize that God expects us to humble ourselves. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Jm 4:6)."

*You must humble yourself to be saved.

It's humbling to admit, "I'm lost. I'm a sinner. I'm helpless. I can't save myself. I need help." That's humbling. Some here today refuse to humble themselves and admit that.

*You must humble yourself to live the Christian life.

Problem: We have a problem. Christmas for Jesus was humbling. Not for us. Did you ever stop to think of all the things we do at Christmas that bring attention to ourselves? We receive new clothes and wear them to church and want everybody to notice. We give gifts, sometimes in order to get a gift in return.

For us Christmas is showy, sensational. For the Lord it was humbling. No fancy lights, no elaborate decorations. Just a stable. No audience but a few animals. In fact, His first visitor which we'll see next week was not Ceasar, not Herod, not the High Priest, but some lowerclass, unclean shepherds.

Challenge: Let's humble ourselves this Christmas.

Illust:

Summary: Three scenes--The Decree, the Destination, and the Delivery. And three attributes of our Savior--His Sovereignty, His Majesty, and His Humility.

There was no room for Jesus in the inn. In fact, throughout his life, there was no room for Jesus anywhere, except one place. Do you know where that was? On the Cross.

And He went there willingly. For me. For you.

Q: Is there room in your life today for Jesus?