

Session 3

December 19, 2021

THE SAVIOR WHO CAME TO US

Luke 2:4-12,16-20

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed...”

Few passages of Scripture are more iconic than the Christmas story found in Luke 2. I was introduced to it as a child by Linus in Charles Shultz’s 1965 classic *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. It showed up on my final exam in Greek back in seminary (Once I recognized where it came from, the translation was a breeze!). I still read the King James Version of it each year at our church’s Christmas Candlelight service. Luke’s words are heavy with expression, and like all of the historian/physician’s accounts, filled with important facts. In this week’s lesson, let’s focus on the characters involved in this drama, and the rich emotions displayed at the announcement of Christ’s birth.

Incarnation (vv. 4-7). That Jesus would be born in Bethlehem was announced by the prophet Micah 700 years earlier (see Micah 5:2). In God’s providence, He moved Joseph and the expectant mother Mary from their hometown of Nazareth to Bethlehem—the city of David’s birth—by having the governor decree a census. The word for “tax” in the older translations is a generic word for *registration*. Hence, Joseph led his betrothed on a five-day journey south to the city of his lineage (v. 4). When the fullness of time had come (in God’s economy [Gal. 4:4] as well as Mary’s, I bet!), Jesus was born. That the King of Kings was also the Son of Man is emphasized by His humble earthly beginnings: strips of cloth for a covering; a manger of straw for a cradle; and a stable for shelter. That there was *no room* for Him at birth signaled the rejection He would face for most of His life (see John 1:11). For reflection: *Surely Mary and Joseph knew Micah 5:2. Do you think they understood their journey to Bethlehem was for the purpose of fulfilling that prophecy?*

Explanation (vv. 8-12). The celebration of Christmas in December has long been in dispute because of Luke 2:8. Typically, even today, the shepherds of Bethlehem most commonly keep watch at night in the open pastures in the warmer months of spring. But the time of year we celebrate is of no consequence! It seems fitting that the humble birth of Christ was first announced to the humble shepherds, especially since He would be declared the Lamb of God (John 1:29). The clueless and fearful shepherds were both calmed and excited by the angel’s announcement. Notice the scope of the announcement: the good news is *for all people* (v. 10) yet is equally *personal*. The Messiah was born *for you* (v. 11); there was a sign *for you*; and “*you will find*” (v. 12). For reflection: *Why do you think the shepherds received such a detailed explanation of the Christ event?*

Exultation (vv. 13-14). It is fascinating to me that the angels, who have no part in Christ’s redemption (see 1 Pet. 1:12), are still so excited about it! Imagine the spectacle: on a hillside outside of Bethlehem, the tiny group of humble shepherds are treated not only to the initial announcement of Christ’s birth, but to a multitude of angels praising God in chorus. For

reflection: *Can you find other times in Scripture when the angels rejoice? How do they compare to this text?*

Proclamation (vv. 15-20). In the midst of the spectacular, the shepherds never lost their focus. While I would have been rushing out to tell people about the *angelic choir*, they were far more interested in the *announcement of the Christ*. Clearly, they knew the city well, and no doubt sprinted through back alleys from stable to stable in search of the baby. While Mary understandably continued to contemplate the miracle of Christ's birth (v. 19), the shepherds shouted the news to the amazement of all who heard (v. 18). For reflection: *Looking at the key words I used as headings, can you see your own spiritual journey outlined as well? Does your journey continue in the "proclamation" phase?*