

The Adult Teacher

LESSON 12- THE SEASON OF WONDER: JESUS IS BORN!

DECEMBER 20, 2020

Background Scripture: Luke 2

Lesson Passage: Luke 2:1, 4-14 (HCSB)

Introduction: If ever there was an opportunity for God to enact His plan with a majestic flourish, it was at Jesus' birth. There was no pretense in this arrival. Rather, God chose to identify in the humblest way with those made in His image. The story of Jesus' birth in Luke mixes praise with simplicity. Its contrast to the birth of John the Baptist is remarkable. John's birth was announced in the capital, at the temple, in the center of the Jewish nation. But Jesus arrives in rural anonymity. John is the child of a priest and his righteous wife; Jesus belongs to Jews of average social status. Yet it is Jesus' birth that draws an angelic host. Once again, appearances are deceiving. As humble as the setting is, His birth is accompanied by the attention of the heavenly host. The shepherds who are privileged to share in the moment become bearers of a story full of wonder. Jesus' birth is more than a cosmic event; it is the arrival of divine activity that should provoke joy, reflection and attentiveness.

Scripture Reference: Luke 2:1, 4-14 (HCSB)

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. 4 And Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, 5 to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 Then she gave birth to her firstborn Son, and she wrapped Him snugly in cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough—because there was no room for them at the lodging place. 8 In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 Today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. 12 This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a feeding trough.” 13 Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 14 Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!

Memory Verse: “But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people”: (Luke 2:10) HCSB

Topic Explored: “The Season of Wonder: Jesus is Born!” ~ Of all the events that have shaped human history, one moment stands above the rest. The moment was not filled with fanfare or frills but fantastic nonetheless. It is a moment when the temporal and the eternal came together. It is a moment that seems so utterly absurd that it could not be real but it was. It is a moment too good for this world because it was touched by the next. It is a moment when two worlds came together to create a hope that has never died. It was the day when God became a man.

Lesson Focus: Luke 2:1, 4-14 (HCSB)

Verses 1, 4-6 ~ A regional *census* leads Joseph and his betrothed, Mary, to the city of David, better known as Bethlehem. The decree comes from Caesar Augustus. This census probably sought to produce a registration list for taxes. A journey to the ancestral home would have fit Jewish practice, so that the custom was done in a culturally inoffensive manner (2 Samuel 24). This was important,

since the tax itself would have been a painful reminder of Israel's position before Rome. Nazareth to Bethlehem was about a ninety-mile trip, assuming that Samaria was bypassed. Such a journey would have taken around three days.

That Bethlehem is *the town of David* indicates the birth's connection to promise (Micah 5:1-2; the Greek is literally "city of David"). Luke makes the connection less directly than Matthew 2:6 does, but the association of David with the birth sounds a regal note, even if the allusion is made subtly. As the couple arrives in the city, the time comes for the child's arrival.

Verses 7-12 ~ Many of the details supplied in this Christmas story do not come from Luke. There is no indication of a long search for a place to stay or of an insensitive innkeeper who made Mary and Joseph stay outdoors. The text merely describes the arrival in simple terms: *She gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.* In all likelihood, the manger is an animal's feeding trough, which means the family is in a stable or in a cave where animals are housed. Swaddling clothes were cloth wrapped around the baby's arms and legs (Ezekiel 16:4). They kept the limbs covered and protected. The contrast between the birth's commonness and the child's greatness could not be greater. The promised one of God enters creation among the creation. The profane decree of a census has put the child in the promised city of messianic origin. God is quietly at work, and a stable is Messiah's first throne room.

Jesus' birth sparks joy, surprise and wonder. All these emotions flow from the experience of the shepherds, who observe with amazement as heaven confesses the child's identity. The major offices of Jesus are confessed in one sentence: he is *Savior, Lord and Christ*--that is, deliverer, master and anointed king. As unbelievable as it may seem, the one with authority over salvation spends his first nights not in a palace but in the open air among simple people like the shepherds. Born in the ancient equivalent of a tent village, Jesus arrives to fulfill God's promise. All the imagery shows God's concern for people regardless of their social status or vocation. He cares for all and identifies with all.

Joy comes with an angelic proclamation of good news. The message is for *all the people*. Though in the original context such a messianic announcement would have been understood as being for the people of Israel, the development of Jesus' ministry shows that Jesus' work reaches beyond such national boundaries. The two volumes of Luke-Acts tell the story of how Jesus, the Savior, Lord and Christ, brought salvation to all people regardless of nationality. They need only turn to Him (Acts 10:34-43).

Verses 13-14 ~ The praise of the heavenly host offers honor to God and peace to *men on whom his favor rests*. This last phrase is not a declaration of universal salvation but refers to those who are the special objects of God's grace. They are like the God-fearers Mary mentioned in Luke 1:50-53, whom God will exalt with his blessing. They are the "saved" or the "elect," those on whom God has bestowed the favor of His grace. The shepherd's curiosity leads them to *go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened*. As they see God's word honored in the presence of the sign, they come to testify to God's work and tell the story of the child. Their response exemplifies the awe that should fill anyone who hears Jesus' story.

In addition, there are the shepherds' *glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen*. This birth is no mere arrival of a just new life. The story is not told so that hearers can identify with the new mother and father or enjoy a story of hope, of a touching birth in humble surroundings. This birth has value because of whose birth it is. The shepherds have found that the angel's words were true, that events have transpired *just as they had been told*. God's word is coming to pass; His plan is strategically at work. They break out in praise to God because He has sent Jesus, the Savior, Lord and Christ!

Let's talk about it. . .

1. What do we learn about life from that stable in the backwater town of Bethlehem?
2. How do you cope when God fails to do what you have 'reasonably expected Him to do'?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where God has told you something and then confirmed it through someone else?

Making it Personal:

- For many people the celebration of Christmas will end in another week. They will start putting things away and their focus will turn to the changing of the calendar and then to other matters. They will forget about Christmas until the madness begins again next year. What about you?
- The virgin birth must be the central miracle of the New Testament, absolutely everything else depends on it. It is the link that holds the chain between heaven and humanity together.
- Jesus traded all of heaven for humility of human life. It was not enough for Jesus to come to earth, but He came to humble circumstances. Even in earthly terms Jesus came to a humble life.

Closing Prayer: *"Lord Jesus, everything that the angel said about You was true. And I believe that everything in the Bible about You is true. Help me to tell other people about You as the shepherds did, in Jesus' Name. Amen!"*

Notes:
