

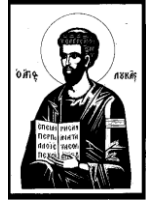


Luke's Christmas Chronicles

December 2023

Luke 2:1-21 The Divine Delivery

(sermons: Dec 24/25)



Introduction

We know from Luke's sequel to his gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, that he was with Paul when he returned to Jerusalem from his third long missionary journey, when Paul was kept in prison in Jerusalem and Caesarea for two years. This would have given Luke plenty of opportunity to meet Mary herself, who was with the leaders of the early Church – some details that we read in Luke 2 can only have come from her.

Luke 2: 1-7 The Birth of Jesus

- v.1 *Caesar Augustus – Augustus was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. He became the first Roman Emperor, ruling from 27BC to AD14. After a period of civil war he brought peace and justice and was seen by some as the 'saviour' of the Roman world and its 'lord'. He claimed that his father Julius Caesar had become divine, so Augustus was seen as 'son of the divine one'.*
- v.3 *everyone went to his own town – not the usual practice for a Roman census but there are other examples. Whenever scholars point out possible differences between the way an event is described in the Bible and other sources, it must be remembered that we have very limited information about procedures in a small, remote part of the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago; scholars would usually regard a source such as Dr Luke as one of their most reliable records, even if they don't believe in divine inspiration of the Bible.*
- v.4 *Nazareth in Galilee – a small town about 65 miles north of Jerusalem*
- v.4 *Bethlehem – the hometown of King David, 7 south of Jerusalem. The prophet Micah wrote that a new leader of God's people would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).*
- v.4 *the house and line of David – Luke 3 gives the genealogy of Jesus, 'the son, so it was thought of Joseph...' 3:23. There are Old Testament promises of another King in succession to David, the greatest of Isarel's kings, which were not completely fulfilled in David's son Solomon (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16).*
- v.5 *pledged to be married – a more serious commitment than a modern engagement: the agreement could only be broken by divorce, with serious financial and social consequences. Although Matthew 1:24 says that Joseph 'took Mary home as his wife' after the angel appeared to him, Matthew 1:25 makes it clear that they had not consummated the marriage before Jesus was born.*
- v.7 *no room for them in the inn – the word translated 'inn' means any room for visitors: it could be in someone's house ('guest room') rather than in a commercial establishment. Since people were going to their home towns for the census, most would be staying with their families; if there wasn't enough space in the normal sleeping accommodation on the upper floor, visitors would have to find somewhere to sleep on the ground floor, which is where the animals were kept overnight.*
1. How is the birth of Jesus linked to events in the wider world?
What does this show us about how God works in his world?
 2. Why was it important for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem? How did this come about?
 3. What were the conditions in which Jesus was born? Is this what you would expect for the Son of God? What does this show us about God? How might this part of Jesus' life affect us if we, or someone we know, were going through challenging circumstances?

Luke 2: 8-21 The Angels and the Shepherds

v.8 *shepherds – Shepherds were usually regarded with suspicion: they moved around with their flocks so were often accused if something went missing – their testimony was not accepted in the law-courts; they couldn't attend synagogue or go to the Temple regularly; their contact with animals, especially dead ones, could make them ceremonially 'unclean'. But God was happy to choose these particular shepherds to be the first to hear about the birth of his Son.*

v.9 *an angel of the Lord – an 'angel' is literally a 'messenger'; their appearance is not described.*

v.9 *the glory of the Lord – in the Old Testament God uses both cloud and bright light to make people aware of his presence, his greatness and his holiness (otherness); being 'terrified' is an appropriate response.*

v.9 *for all the people – in the Bible this usually means 'the people of God', at this time, the Jews; so the message of a Saviour would be taken to refer to being saved as a people, from Roman oppression for example, as well as to individual salvation.*

v.11 *in the town of David – Bethlehem, see notes on v.4*

v.11 *a Saviour – a rescuer. The name 'Jesus' means 'God saves'. In Matthew 1:21 the angel says to Joseph: 'You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' At the time they would take this to include rescuing the people from the results of their national and communal sins, as well as individual forgiveness.*

v.11 *Christ – this is the Greek title which means 'anointed one', just like the Hebrew title 'Messiah'; both kings and priests were anointed with oil when they took up their roles.*

v.11 *the Lord – in the Bible, this title is usually applied to God himself.*

v.12 *lying in a manger – this unusual setting is how the shepherds were to recognize the special Baby; verse 20 records their joy at finding everything 'just as they had been told'.*

v.13 *a great company of the heavenly host – literally an 'army' but one that announced peace*

v.19 *Mary treasured up all these things – so she could have passed them on to Luke when he was in Judea about 40 years later (see Introduction).*

v.21 *on the eighth day – all Jewish boys were circumcised when they were 8 days old; it was the sign of belonging to the Old Testament covenant community. So Jesus identified with his people.*

4. How were shepherds regarded in Jesus' time? Who might be regarded in a similar way today?
What does it tell us about God that he chose to reveal the meaning of the birth of Jesus first, after Mary and Joseph, to these shepherds?
5. What titles for Jesus does the angel reveal to the shepherds? What did each title mean at the time?
What does each title mean to us today?
6. Who praises God around the birth of Jesus? Why was it 'good news of great joy'?
How can we react with fresh joy to the story of Jesus' birth? Is there anything that makes this hard for us?
Which Christmas carols help us to enter into the deeper meaning of these events?
7. What can we learn from the shepherds?
What can we learn from Mary and from Joseph?