

Arrived: The Humble Arrival of Our Saviour

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- [0 : 00] Morning, morning, morning. Do you have your Bibles?! If you don't, there's some spares at the back that we can give out. So last week, Simon preached on the promise.
- This week, that promise becomes a reality in the arrival. So before we start, shall we pray? Lord, thank you for your word.
- Thank you for the truth that lies within it. Thank you that you have revealed your word to us. Thank you for your presence here. And just pray, Lord, that the amazing work that you are doing by your Spirit and each one of us will continue today and tomorrow and into the future.
- In Jesus' name, amen. Okay, if you open your Bibles to chapter 2 of Luke, which is paid \$857 in my Bible, which is no help at all to anybody else.
- And it's the birth of Christ, chapter 2. And we're going to read from verse 1 to verse 20. It says, It says, In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.
- [1 : 16] This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 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, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.
- While they were there, the time came for her to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.
- And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.
- And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy, that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
- And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.
- [2 : 48] When the angel went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that is happening, which the Lord has made known to us.
- And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.
- And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God, for they all had heard and seen, as it had been told to them.

This is probably one of the best known stories in the whole Bible, especially at Christmas time. But when you sit, and you seriously consider these words, what Luke is actually saying, they deepen our perception of the person of Christ, and also the nature of God himself.

The passage has been divided up into kind of six parts. Verses 1 to 3 is about the decree that's happening.

[4 : 06] Verses 4 to 5 is about their journey to Bethlehem. And then on verses 6 and 7, we have the incarnation, the birth of Christ.

Verses 8 to 14, we'll go on to look at the announcement, the angelic announcement to the shepherds. And then verses 15 to 16, the shepherds visit. And verses 17 to 20, the response.

But Luke, or Dr. Luke, is a man of detail, a man of precision. And he places these events, not only in chronological order, but also in a historical context.

So if we look at verse 1, Luke states, in those days, well, what days? If we go back to the end of chapter 1, it tells us, in the days of John's birth, or early childhood, Luke carefully constructs the narrative to highlight the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, to realize God's plan of salvation, and the humble beginnings of the Messiah.

It builds on, chapter 1, that Luke describes how Mary was informed by an angel that she has found favor with God, that she's going to conceive a child, and not just any old child, but the Son of the Most High, who will be given the throne of David.

[5 : 34] Chapter 2 begins, the days. The days when Augustus was Caesar over the whole earth. It's not exactly the whole earth. It's the Roman Empire, or the whole known world, as it was then.

Caesar Augustus is the nephew of, or the great nephew, of Julius Caesar. He's a man of great power, great authority over the Roman Empire, and when he decrees something, it is done.

He's not the kind of person you're going to argue with. You just do as you are told. The days are when there's a new policy is decreed, and a census should be taken.

Why is the census being taken? Taxes. It's usually economically driven to ensure all the people in the Roman Empire are paying their taxes. Luke then narrows the story down geographically from the entire world to the Middle East, to an area around the region of Syria, where he says Quirinius was governor in verse 2.

Verse 3 then states that all were to proceed to their own city, which is kind of unusual for Roman decrees, but it is within the Jewish tradition that that should take place.

[6 : 49] And in 1904, they discovered a papyrus. A Greek papyrus was discovered by archaeologists, which does then state that when a census is taken, people return to their own towns, their own villages, their own cities, that is there, which is their lineage.

So Joseph and Mary, obedient as they are, leave Nazareth in Galilee and travel some 80 miles. I put a map up so you can kind of see the kind of distance that these two are traveling.

Not down nice M3 motorways, but over the terrain to Bethlehem, to the city of David in Judea. And our focus now is on this small town, the old city of David, or in the Old Testament called Zion or Jerusalem.

Why? Because it tells us that Joseph is of the house of David. However, somewhere in the temple in Jerusalem would be an old scroll of the prophet Micah, who prophesied some 700 years prior to this event, the word of the Lord.

And he says in Micah 5, it says, but as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah. From you, one will go forth from me to be ruler in Israel.

- [8 : 09] His goings forth are from long ago, from the day of eternity. And the prophecy actually goes on in verse 4 to say, he will arise and he will shepherd his flock.
- Here in Bethlehem, the word of the Lord is actually being fulfilled. They are actually seeing the reality of something that the Lord had said 700 years ago.
- Caesar might well have authority on earth at that time in terms of his power and authority over people, but he is simply a puppet at the hand of the Lord God Almighty.
- God is on the throne, not Caesar or any other government or king or personality. This is God's plan, it's God's timing, and he reveals that to the prophets of old.
- Joseph and Mary are bearing the cost of being obedient and submitting to the Lord. They're traveling, probably alone, some 80 miles, walking or on the back of a donkey.
- [9 : 13] Mary feeling the impact, perhaps, of disgrace by her family and friends as she is pregnant outside of marriage. Although she's betrothed or engaged, as we would say today to Joseph, it meant a lot more then than it does now to the people.
- There's no consummation of the marriage. However, this teenage girl, probably 14, 15 years old, nine months pregnant, third trimester, is making that arduous journey 80 miles from Bethlehem for a census, which I find quite incredible.
- Us men have no idea the impact, this journey, all the social circumstances around this pregnancy that Mary is bearing.
- I suspect the ladies in the room are in awe of wonder that somebody would walk and go on donkey 80 miles over rough terrain, nine months pregnant that was there. But these are the circumstances.
- It speaks of Mary's faith, her hope, her humility, her obedience to God and to Caesar who actually called her to the census.
- [10 : 23] In verse 6, Mary arrives and it's time to give birth. The contractions are fairly regular and Joseph is in the background telling us to breathe, Mary, breathe, which seriously is not working at this moment in time.
- Verse 7 then has this series of ands, these conjunctions, that Mary gives birth to her firstborn son and she wraps him in cloth and she lays him in a manger.
- And when I read that I kind of thought, was she all alone? Was she all alone giving birth in that dark, that cold place near some animal feeding trough?
- Was Joseph outside still saying, breathe, Mary, breathe? But did she have no midwife there? No mother there to help? I don't know. It doesn't tell us.
- But it's just a thought when I read those verses that the King of Kings and that the Lord of Lords is not born in some palace dressed in some lovely silk sleep suit with satin bedding in a lovely warm cot.
- [11 : 32] No. The Son of God was placed in a feeding trough, born into a poor family, birthed in some back alley or stable or cave at night.
- And it made me think that even from birth the humility of God can incredibly be seen and present. What Jesus later preached to us and demonstrated about the depth of his humility was manifest in his very first breath on the earth that he created.
- Created in the image of those that he made from the dust of the earth. This is literally what John says the word became flesh in John 1.
- The word humble or humble servant or servant king is not some false humility or some descriptive term but it's at the very heart and the very character of who God is.

This is a well-known story but sometimes we miss some of these deep aspects that come through because when God in the form of our Lord Jesus kneels at the feet of his disciples and washes them as a servant or when he sits and he eats with prostitutes and tax collectors or when he touches the leper or when he's silent before his accusers like the lamb to the slaughter.

[13 : 05] His humility is not just a teaching method it's actually who he is. His identity and shouldn't it be ours as we submit to him as Mary and Joseph did?

In Luke 1 38 it says behold the bond slave of the Lord be it done to me according to your word or as Jesus later says in the Garden of Gethsemane in Luke 22 42 it says Father if it's your will take this cup of suffering away from me yet not my will but yours be done.

This surely as the disciples of Christ should be our response. to be a bond slave of our Lord and to say not our will but your will be done.

That's quite hard when you really think about it that is hard with the busyness of life and everything that's going on to actually say I am 100% yours. So 500 years earlier the angel Gabriel appeared to the prophet Daniel in Daniel 9 24 to 27 I'm not going to go into that but he told him the time when the Messiah would come some 483 years later and now this prophecy is fulfilled now the reality of the promise is actually here at the time of the birth of Jesus the Messiah not far away there were some shepherds they were up late probably around a fire protecting and looking after their herd of sheep as they've done every single night shepherds in those days were pretty low class people they were they were classified as unclean they weren't allowed to testify in a court their job was simply to look after and protect the sheep from wild animals from thieves and so on these are strong skilled men who can fight just think of

David who fought bears and lions and through his line the son of God would be born the first announcement was not to religious leaders not to Caesar or some political leader but to these shepherds sat around a fire having a conversation whatever they were doing looking after their sheep at night when suddenly an angel appears out of nowhere this angel appears could this be Gabriel again we don't know Gabriel appears to Mary appears to Zachariah in the temple we don't know whether this it just says an angel an angel appeared but these watchmen looking after their sheep were more than startled by what they saw it seems to be the angels usual practice when they suddenly appear before someone and say do not fear it seems to be with Mary do not fear it seems to be the line they are equipped to say in their training manual but Luke describes these guys as terrified terrified that the holiness of God the

[16 : 30] Shekinah glory of God was shining around them the darkness is gone the field and the sheep were lit up by the presence of God I mean I think I find that pretty terrifying terrifying in verse 14 the angel tells them that he brings good news that he brings great joy who for for all people that's quite amazing this is not just for Israel for all people this news goes beyond Israel the good news the gospel of salvation is for all nations for Jews and for Gentiles in verse 11 he goes on about today today the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies is taking place today what Isaiah spoke in Isaiah 714 what Micah said in Micah 5 2 what Hosea said in Hosea 11 1 and what of course what Daniel said in Daniel 9 this unique time in history in God's plan and God's timing is when the Messiah arrives that the preaching of the gospel is going to begin to all nations today it says is born a saviour a messiah and a lord

God is once again in the midst of his people a place God always desires to be he longs to be with us he longs to be with his people since the beginning of creation in the garden of Eden we read that he is walking in the garden with Adam and Eve as the first Adam became sin through disobedience Jesus was born not at the seed of man but at the seed of God and he represents the sinless second Adam fully obedient to the father he that is holy took on himself our unholy flesh yet remains sinless so we could be with him we can be in his father's house this is the heart of God that he longs to be with us that we are created in his image in this city of

David is born a saviour who is none other than Christ the Lord one day we will see him return and one day all prophecies will be fulfilled one day we will be sat here in church or busy in our work or whatever it might be and we will hear that trumpet and we will see Jesus return just as these shepherds were in the field doing what they've done every day for the last 20 years 30 years whatever the time frame is going about their normal business with their sheep having a conversation lighting a fire and suddenly an angel appears and tells them that I bring good news and great joy there will come a time when suddenly we will hear the trumpets when suddenly we will see our Lord come again in verse 12 it goes on to say the angel says here the sign or a sign depending on which translation you got the sign and goes on to describe exactly where the shepherds are to go and what they will find just as when

God spoke to Moses in Exodus 3 11 Moses asked God who am I to go to Pharaoh but God tells Moses that he will be with him and there will be the sign that you will see and when you have done God commands you will go away worshipping and serving him in verse 13 as if one angel isn't terrifying enough for these poor shepherds all heaven now opens and thousands of angels appear or multitude as it's written in here of exuberant exciting worshipping angelic angels across the skies so quadrupling whatever it is the light that is coming out from this place all heaven now is overflowing the choir is singing and it's saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace amongst men with whom he is pleased and we read in Isaiah 9 6 that Jesus is named the prince of peace and those who are found in him united in him obedient to him are given this peace if you believe in Jesus the good news of the gospel then peace will reign in your hearts and minds as you trust in him completely and that's what we're called to do that's Mary's bond servant bond slave to completely trust in him our hope is in

Christ it is not in anything this world can give us our hope is in him and him alone in Isaiah 9 7 it goes on to say of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end these events some 2,000 years ago are the beginning of the end as it were they are ushering in the kingdom of God on earth God in the form of created man came as a baby that in 33 years time he would give his life for each one of us in the room and millions of people around the world and throughout history he would willingly give his life so that those who believe in him shall have eternal life John 3 15 in verse 15 as the angel disappear back into heaven and the shepherds are recovering from their near heart attacks they quickly move and there's no discussion here they're not talking about what was all that about they get up and they start moving there's no hanging around they move with faith and they move with speed it says they move with certainty in their steps to see the sign the angel had described how quickly do we move how quickly do we respond to God do we have the faith to move with that kind of certainty that that kind of obedience to God something to ponder on over Sunday lunch when the angel describes what the angel describes to the shepherds is exactly what they find when they arrive they find

[23 : 13] Mary and Joseph and a baby they came they saw with their very own eyes it says in verse 16 a baby in a manger they see the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies which is the very point that Luke is making here it's the very point of what he's writing about in this gospel for us today to understand that this is not just a nice story to read at Christmas when they had seen Jesus the Christ child they couldn't keep this news to themselves I expect they woke a few people up in the middle of the night with the incredible words and the experience that these angels had said the incredible news that Christ was born the incredible news that prophecy had been fulfilled and what the angel had said in verse 10 that this baby brings good news and great joy for all people he is one born in the city of David of the royal line of David a saviour who is Christ our Lord it is not a message our world it is a message our world desperately needs to hear today we don't want to hear nice stories about

Christmas but we need to hear the truth of the gospel which brings deep joy an incredible peace it is an offer nothing in this world can even match verse 18 then goes on to tell us that all who heard this incredible news wondered at what these shepherds were saying they didn't laugh at them they didn't just close their doors at them they didn't dismiss them they considered they pondered the words that these men were saying it was a time when they were expecting the Messiah to come but only those who were watching only the watchmen and watch women were actually those that could see what God was doing that God chose to make this announcement to these shepherds he chose the people that he wanted to use and Luke concludes this section by saying in verse 19 and Mary treasured up these things pondering them in her heart the message

Gabriel had given to Mary nine months previously that she would carry and has now given birth to the son of God the angelic revelation that the shepherds had heard the fulfillment of old testament prophecy possibly wondering what next why me what a huge responsibility this is and much much more yet God chose Mary for a reason a woman of character just as he calls David in 1 Samuel 13 14 a man after his own heart so is Mary someone God can trust and use whilst the shepherds are returning worshipping and serving God just as God had told Moses in Exodus 3 when you see the sign then you will worship and serve him Moses on a mountain shepherds on a hill they are excited by what they have seen and what they heard but Mary humbled by what she has what is occurring chosen amongst women to be one to carry the son of God sits quietly before her God

Jesus was and is and shall be our Messiah our Savior our Lord there is no another in John 17 21 Jesus prays and they and that could also be us all may be one as you father are in me and I in you that they also may be one in us that the world may believe that you sent me surely this is good news for all nations for all people just like the angel said we are all sons and daughters of God almighty who came in all humility as a baby to die for each one of us sat here that we can be with him for eternity this is how God this is how much

God who created each one of us in his image loves us the scale of sacrifice that he is willing to make for each one of us sat here the question I suppose is how much are we willing to say yes Lord use me yes Lord I am your bond servant I am a servant of the Lord in Philippians 2 1 to 11 I'm not going to read the whole passage but it says have the mind of Christ that the mind of Christ dwell in you do all things in humility have the attitude of Christ and let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God our Father Amen God