

Christmas 2025 2

Luke 2:8-18

Merry Christmas and thank you for joining us! Would you please turn in your Bibles to Luke 2?

Christmas time is a time of joy, and excitement, and even nostalgia as we remember Christmas' past. But 2k years ago, in the nation of Israel, there was no such joy, and merriment was nowhere to be found.

At the time of Jesus' birth, Israel had been under Roman occupation for about 60 years. **SHOW PIC** And the Roman empire operated by a very simple principle. Conquer, then force peace among its citizens by never allowing dissensions against Rome. **CLOSE PIC**

These were dark days in the history of Israel.

Over the last 500 years the Jews had survived the Babylonian exile, they'd survived the Persian reign. The Jews maintained their identity amidst Alexander the great and the Greeks ruling over them. But now, on this first Christmas, the long spear of Rome casts its menacing shadow across the promised land.

But that wasn't the only reason it was a difficult time. 400 years had now passed since God had spoken to the Hebrews, since the end of the book of Malachi. Times were dark.

But we know everything changed that incredible night that Jesus was born! The light of the world has come! **John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."**

There's a wonderful verse in the psalms about light in

Psalm 104 1 Bless the LORD, O my soul!

**O LORD my God, You are very great:
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
2 Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment,
Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.** God Himself is so bright, so pure, so holy, so righteous, He clothes Himself with light just like you and I might put on a jacket.

And that same God, humbled Himself to become a little child.

Let's read v1-7 **Luke 2 1 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.
4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and**

wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In just 7 verses we see the greatest event in history had just occurred! The Messiah has been born! For ages the Jews had waited for the birth of the messiah. Tomorrow during our study we're gonna focus on versus 1-8, but this evening we're going to focus on the shepherds in Bethlehem.

Luke 2:8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

It's thought by scholars that these shepherds were the temple shepherds. The temple, which was just a short hour walk away from these fields of Bethlehem had their own temple shepherds who kept the lambs for these temple sacrifices.

This is very significant. These shepherds are watching over the lambs that were to be used for sacrifices in the temple, sacrifices that pointed to the future perfect sacrifice of Jesus.

Lets read v8 again.

8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

History tells us during those days shepherds were society's outcasts. Shepherds were considered unreliable and weren't even allowed to give testimony in the courts. And even though they were so close to the temple, the very nature of their work caused them to be declared ceremoniously unclean, which means they would always be treated differently.

I bet in a crowd like this, there's at least a few of you who can relate. You know what it's like to spend much of your life feeling like you're on the outside looking in.

These shepherds were average, nameless faces that were overlooked by society and ignored by the religious folks. But God did not forget about them, just like our God does not forget about you.

9 And behold,[fn] an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Suddenly the black sky bursts with an announcement. Trees that were just shadows became fully visible. Sheep that had been quietly sleeping became curious. One minute a shepherd is dozing off, the next moment he's rubbing his eyes because he's staring at an angel.

This was no ordinary night.

Notice in v9 it's 1 angel who arrives on the scene. This angel was probably Gabriel, who back in Luke chapter 1 had also appeared to Zechariah and to Mary to deliver a message from God.

And as Gabriel declares the glorious news, the glory of the Lord lights up the night sky.

It's fascinating that the announcement of God in human flesh went first to lowly shepherds. Ever wonder why?

Had the angel announced Jesus' birth to theologians or religious folks, they would've first consulted their commentaries.

Had the angel gone to society's elite, they would have looked around to see if anyone was watching.

Had the angels gone to the financially successful, they would've first looked at their calendars.

But the angels went to the shepherds. Men who didn't have a reputation to protect, or an ax to grind, or a ladder to climb.

The angel went to men who didn't try to tell God that angels don't sing to shepherds and the messiah shouldn't be in a feeding trough.

10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

Good tidings is an old fashioned word for recent news. It means the angel has information.

And here the news is great joy for all people,

11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. There is no mistaking who Jesus is and His purpose. He came to be our savior, saved from the tyranny and punishment of our sins. Saved from an eternity in hell.

But Jesus also came to be our Lord, the one who is directing our paths and steps in life. And who knows better how we should live our lives than the One who created us?

A lot of people want Jesus as their savior, but they refuse to let Him be Lord of their life.

The angels continue...12-14

12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”[fn] After the single angel’s announcement, a whole group of angels appeared, proclaiming the amazing news of Jesus’ birth.

Isn’t it strange the angels were busy worshipping Jesus and didn’t give Mary a nice bed? The angels didn’t give Jesus a nice cozy bassinet.

At first we’d think- didn’t these angels know what was needed that night? Stop singing-go get baby Jesus a heated blanket!

But these are angels, and who knows Jesus better than angels? So their top priority was to worship-giving glory to God in the highest.

It’s interesting that in v14 the angels sing about peace. We read this and think-peace? What peace? How could they declare peace when the Roman tyranny hung over their heads?

Even for us today it seems impossible to find peace. Just look at the headlines all around us. Better yet just look at the hearts of those who struggle and wrestle with inner turmoil. Where can we find peace?

Well there’s another more important, more pressing need for peace. It’s peace with God. Jesus came to make peace between God and us.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sins so that we could have peace with God. And this peace and forgiveness are available to anyone who trusts Jesus for salvation **Romans 5:1 Therefore, having**

been justified by faith, we have[fn] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

15-16

15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. I’d like us to just pause and try to imagine this scene as these verses unfolded. The shepherds are keeping watch. They watched the sheep b/c those sheep were for the sacrifices-they were valuable. And as a shepherd there would be danger all around. All sorts of predators would be prowling, trying to snatch a little lamb.

And just a few miles away, religion and rituals abound in the temple.

Now you remember Jesus overthrew the tables in the temple because they had corrupted the whole thing. They were more concerned with making a profit than allowing people to worship God.

When folks came to worship at the temple, there were 2 things they needed to do. 1st they had to pay the tax required by the law of Moses, and they had to sacrifice an animal.

Now if you remember, whenever an animal was to be sacrificed, it had to be without blemish or defect.

And when the men would bring their sacrifice to the Temple, it first had to be inspected. In fact 104 times in the OT it tells us the animal sacrifices had to be animals without blemish.

But the priests would purposely declare a blemish on the animal, so then the man was left without a sacrifice. So, you had to buy a pure animal for the sacrifice from the Temple inventory - at a jacked-up price. The priests turned this into a money-making scheme, an ancient bait and switch.

And guess where the pure animal would come from-these shepherd's fields in bethlehem.

Think about this. The Jewish mishnah tells us that the animals from the priests would be here in these fields, just a little over a mile or 2 away. When the priests examined these lambs, if they found a good one, one without spot or blemish, they would wrap that lamb in swaddling clothes and lay it down in a manger. Why? Because that lamb would be carried back to Jerusalem so it wouldn't be injured or marred in the journey.

Here's why I mention that. These shepherds were used to seeing spotless lambs wrapped in swaddling cloths. They would be carried to the temple to be sold for sacrifice.

But on this night, think about what these shepherds saw when they got there that first Christmas. They're used to seeing a lamb wrapped in white linen laying in one of these stone troughs waiting to be picked up to go to Jerusalem.

And the shepherds come, and they look at Joseph and they lock eyes with Mary.

And as their eyes drift, there they see Him. Jesus, the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. This babe who is Savior, Messiah, Jehovah, Emmanuel, God with us.

They'd been so used to seeing a lamb wrapped up in linen, waiting to be taken to Jerusalem for sacrifice. Now they've seen the lamb of God. This is why years later JTB cried out **John 1:29**
The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said,
"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely^[fn] known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. The shepherds were so overwhelmed they just had to share Jesus with others.

Jesus' humble birth conveys an amazing message to all of us. Instead of coming to earth as a pampered, privileged ruler, Jesus was born in meekness, as one of us.

Which reminds us that Jesus is approachable, accessible, available. No palace gates bar the way to Jesus; no ring of guards prevents our approach.

If the king of kings was willing to enter the world of animals and shepherds and swaddling clothes, don't you think Jesus is willing to enter your world?

No matter who you are, or what you have done, Jesus wants to be Lord of your life and savior of your soul. You just have to let Him.

How does that happen? Look, it's not religion. It's a relationship.