

The True Story of Christmas: A Message of Certainty

I. The Historian's Objective: The Quest for Certainty

To understand the account of Jesus' birth, we must first understand the man who recorded it. Luke was not spinning a myth or a feel-good holiday tale. He was a meticulous historian who compiled his narrative with a specific, Greek-style precision that differs significantly from traditional Hebrew Narrative formats. This book is very Greek and precise in detail.

Luke's goal, stated in his prologue, was to provide a rock-solid foundation so that readers would have certainty about the exact truth of what they had been taught. This was not a casual collection of stories; it was a deliberate, consecutive accounting. Luke writes in 1:1-4:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

There was an effort in the First Century to draw up an accurate account of the events that took place concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

Verse 1 indicates that there were many individuals who were writing down the events, but this accounting had to have certain qualifications.

1. Eyewitnesses
2. Servants of the Word

Luke endeavored to compile all that was handed down to him. He did so in a very descriptive fashion

1. From the Beginning – In fact, he begins not with Jesus but with John the Baptizer.
2. Investigating Everything Carefully – Read the details—family line, specific dates and locations, quotes of people, including women (unusual for those days).

Notice in Luke 1-3 the significant people who are recorded. Herod, Caesar Augustus, Quirinius of Assyria, Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod II, Philip, Lysanias, Annas, and Caiaphas

3. Written in Consecutive Order – there are a few that contest that Luke is chronological. They state that it is written in an orderly sequence. But the word indicates consecutive or that which comes next. There is nothing in Luke that would lead us to believe that it is not in chronological order
4. So that you would know for certain concerning the exact truth of what you have been taught.

This account is a work of the most complete historical account, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to preserve the most detailed account of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

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Luke 2 speaks of details that would have been lost except that God desired to preserve them from a historian's point of view. Details of:

1. Timing (Luke 2:1-2)
2. Reason for travel (2:3-5)
3. Announcement to the humble (2:8-12)
4. A godly army praising God (2:13-14)
5. Mary musing all the details (2:17-19)
 - a. Who relayed the account to Luke?
 - b. At least Mary, perhaps more
6. Jesus' circumcision and naming (2:21-24)
7. Simeon – Prophecy given to him and the words spoken to Mary (2:25-35)
 - a. Who provided these details?
8. Anna – Proclamation (2:38)
9. Return to Nazareth (2:39-40)

What we read as a simple account cannot be overlooked regarding the miracle of details. The words passed down to Luke were to be investigated and placed into chronological order.

The details of the virgin birth were unknown to the Jews at the time Jesus was born; to make this story up only serves to disgrace Joseph and Mary and does not enhance the claim of Jesus. Only many years after these events, when the account is written from beginning to end, can we see the full plan of God being unfurled from Genesis 3:15 to this account in Luke (and Matthew).

II. Objective Reality of Jesus

The narrative of Luke 2 begins not with a miracle but with a decree from the vast Roman Empire. Emperor Caesar Augustus ordered a census for taxation and control. While this seemed like a standard bureaucratic power move, it served as the mechanism to uproot Joseph and Mary from Nazareth.

Luke 2:1-5:

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

Joseph traveled to Bethlehem because he was of the lineage of David. This ninety-mile journey was grueling, especially for a pregnant woman, yet it was the sovereign fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. When they arrived, the time came for her to give birth.

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Luke 2:6-7:

While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

When they arrived, there was no room in the κατάλυμα (kataluma) - guest room. While often translated as "inn," this word refers to a specific guest chamber, likely within a relative's home. The lack of space suggests they were in a crowded house during the census.

Jesus was placed in a manger – φάτνη (phatne) - animal stall or feeding trough. Placing the child there likely provided the family with more privacy and comfort than was available in the main guest quarters. This detail underscores that the Messiah King entered our world not with guards and glory, but in an accessible, humble environment.

III. The Proclamation of the King

The first report of this birth was delivered to shepherds. These were men on the night shift who were often despised in Jewish society, but God chose to bring the news first to them.

Luke 2:8-12:

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The angel used the verb εὐαγγελίζω (euangelizō) - to announce good news. This was a propositional announcement. Notice the specific terminology:

Do not be afraid – Stop being afraid; the wonder and spectacle of the angel would evoke fear in anyone.

Great joy – the Greek word for *great* is “μέγας megas,” mega joy is the announcement, not one of warning or judgment, but finally, salvation.

Savior, Christ the Lord – The angel does not give His name but speaks to His title and function. *Savior* refers to what He will do, where *Messiah* refers to His divinity, and *Lord* refers to His birthright as the King.

Sign – The sign is not a baby wrapped in cloths, but that He was lying in a manger.

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Luke 2:13-14:

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

There are four points we need to observe

A host of angels appeared, "praising and saying." Neither word indicates singing; this was a formal, objective declaration.

Glory to God is for His provision. God was not obligated to save, but because of His great love, He provided grace through a Savior.

Peace is the goal. Mankind is at odds with God, naturally we are enemies, sinful, and ungodly. We declared war on God, but God brought peace. Once you believe in Jesus, you have peace with God (Romans 5:1), and it is through Jesus that peace is realized. This is not an internal feeling but a positional reality.

The rest of verse 14 has some questions.

The NASB, NET, and ESV have "with whom He is well pleased." The KJV states "good will toward men," the NIV states "On whom His favor rests," and the CSB has "To people He favors." What is going on here?

This translation question comes from one word, "εὐδοκία *eudokia*." This word has three definitions:

1. state or condition of being kindly disposed (*goodwill*)
2. state or condition of being favored (*favor*)
3. desire, usually directed toward something that causes satisfaction (*desire*)

This is a compound word that combines the words "eu," meaning good and "dokeō," which means to think, be of the opinion. The etymological roots indicate the primary thoughts are to be well-intended or have good intentions, but to be well thought of (well pleasing) is not out of the question. So how do we decide?

Here is the question I asked. "Is God well pleased with mankind?" The obvious answer is no. Man is at enmity with God until reconciled. Now the other question: "Does God have good intentions about mankind?" Yes. He loves the world and purposes from the foundation of creation to reconcile anyone who believes through sending of Himself, the Son, to die for the sins of the world.

Most who do not know the will of God and even some who believe in the Bible think that God is mal-intended to mankind, is vindictive, has animosity toward people in general or even toward them individually. The Bible presents a just and holy God who must carry out justice but is also loving and desires that all are saved and avoid punishment, judgment, and death.

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God's intentions are good, loving, and merciful. It is we who are evil, malevolent, and by nature children of wrath.

IV. The Role of Legal Witnesses

The first legal witnesses were the shepherds.

Luke 2:15-20

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

The significance of the shepherds as legal witnesses is rooted in their objective role as the first to verify and report the propositional facts surrounding the birth of Jesus. Their testimony provides the following legal and historical weight:

- **Verification of the Propositional Sign:** After receiving the specific sign from the angel, the shepherds went with haste to Bethlehem specifically to "see this thing that has happened." Their role was to verify that the physical evidence, a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger, matched the objective announcement they had received.
- **The First Public Proclamation:** Upon seeing the child, the shepherds "made known the statement which had been told them about this Child." In a legal sense, they served as the initial human witnesses to the fulfillment of the divine announcement.
- **Awe and Establishment of Record:** The text indicates that "all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds." Their testimony was not private; it was a public report that entered the historical record and the collective memory of the community.
- **Direct Reporting to the Parents:** The shepherds told Mary and Joseph exactly what had been said by the angels. This reporting likely provided the specific details that Mary subsequently "treasured in her heart" or "pondered," which were eventually handed down to Luke during his investigation.
- **Qualification of the Unlikely Witness:** While shepherds were often regarded as the lowest class in society, their inclusion demonstrates God's plan to utilize those who are persuaded by truth and ready to see the good news. Their lowly status makes the objective nature of their report even more striking, as they had nothing to gain by fabricating such a claim.

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Luke's record continues with the family's precise adherence to the Law of God.

Luke 2:21-24:

And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS."

In the temple, two additional witnesses; first, there is Simeon.

Luke 2:25-35:

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed-- and a sword will pierce even your own soul--to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Then there was Anna, described in Luke 2:36-38:

And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

What we have in Luke 2 is the testimony of the lowly, the testimony of the Law, and the testimony of two of the most respected persons in Jerusalem, a devout and revered man and a prophetess, a devout and revered woman.

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The Role of Simeon: Prophetic Verification

Simeon provides a righteous and devout witness to the identity of Jesus. His testimony is significant for several reasons:

- **The Fulfilled Promise:** Simeon had received a divine revelation that he would not see death until he had seen the Messiah. His presence in the temple at the exact moment of Jesus' presentation serves as an objective fulfillment of that promise.
- **Identifying the Mission:** Simeon identifies Jesus not only as the consolation of Israel but as a light for revelation to the Gentiles. This expands the legal claim of Jesus' messiahship beyond a local Jewish context to a global one.
- **Foretelling the Cost:** Simeon provides a warning to Mary about future sorrow, which foreshadows the cross. This moves the narrative from a simple birth account to a redemptive plan involving sacrifice.

The Role of Anna: Public Proclamation

Anna, an eighty-four-year-old widow and prophetess, provides a distinct and public testimony.

- **Continuous Devotion:** Her credibility as a witness is established by her decades of devotion, fasting, and prayer within the temple.
- **Immediate Recognition:** Like Simeon, she immediately recognizes Jesus as the promised one.
- **Wide Dissemination:** Anna began speaking of Jesus to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. This indicates that her testimony was not a private musing but a public proclamation that reached a wide audience of those waiting for the Messiah.

The Significance of Multiple Witnesses

In a legal and historical sense, the inclusion of the Shepherds, the Law, Simeon, and Anna fulfills the requirement for multiple witnesses to establish a fact.

- **Independent Verification:** They were two distinct individuals who independently recognized Jesus' identity without prior consultation with the parents or the shepherds.
- **Historical Validation:** Their recording by Luke provides a historical framework for readers to verify the claims of Jesus' birth against the testimonies of respected temple figures.

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V. The Conclusion: The Meaning of Christmas

Luke's detailed investigation was preserved so that we would have certainty. The story of Christmas is not an end in itself; it is the beginning of a redemptive plan that concludes with salvation. Salvation is a 100% free gift, given by the grace of God, applied to anyone who believes. To believe is to be convinced or persuaded that a proposition is true and valid. The proposition of Christmas is this:

God is the creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them. He loves us, and even though we are rebellious, sinful, and ungodly, He decided to send of Himself the Son, Jesus Christ, not just to live and be an example, but to give His life as an atonement for our sins. He offers salvation from judgment, not based on a promise, a work, a dedication, or any human effort, but based on a gift being received when you believe this proposition to be true, not only for the world but for you as a person.

When you believe it, the promise of God has now been applied to you. You now have eternal life, you are now part of God's family and co-heir, with Jesus, of all that God has prepared for the sons of God.