

I. Introduction

A. Opening Activity: From Darkness to Light

Last week, we sat together in the darkness. We felt the weight of sin, the hopelessness of separation from God, the desperation of a world trapped in spiritual blindness and death. We walked through the Garden of Eden and saw how darkness entered the world. We listened to the prophets as they painted pictures of a coming Light with increasing detail. We felt the ache of 400 years of silence.

But we also held onto a promise. God said a Light was coming. A Redeemer. A Savior. One who would crush the serpent's head, bring peace without end, and shine on those dwelling in deep darkness.

For 4,000 years—from Adam to Abraham to Moses to David to the prophets—generation after generation waited. Mothers in Bethlehem wondered if their baby boys might be the Promised One. The faithful like Simeon and Anna spent their entire lives watching, praying, longing for "the consolation of Israel."

And then, on one ordinary night in an insignificant town, everything changed.

The Light arrived.

B. The Fulfillment of Ancient Promises

Think about what we studied last week—all those prophecies:

- Genesis 3:15: A descendant of the woman will crush the serpent
- Genesis 12:3: Through Abraham's offspring, all nations will be blessed
- 2 Samuel 7: A son of David will reign forever
- Isaiah 7:14: A virgin will conceive and bear a son called Immanuel
- Isaiah 9:6-7: A child born who is Mighty God and Prince of Peace

- Micah 5:2: He will be born in Bethlehem
- Isaiah 53: He will suffer for our transgressions
- Malachi 4:2: The sun of righteousness will rise with healing

Every single one of these prophecies—hundreds of them spanning thousands of years—converges on one moment, one place, one person.

God keeps His promises. Every. Single. One.

C. The Paradox of the Incarnation

But here's what makes this moment so stunning, so almost incomprehensible: the way the Light came.

The eternal God entered time. The infinite became finite. The Creator became a creature. The Word became flesh.

The King of Kings wasn't born in a palace—He was born in a stable.

The Light of the World didn't arrive with fanfare to the powerful—He was announced to shepherds in a field.

The One who hung the stars was wrapped in rags and laid in a feeding trough.

This is the scandal and the beauty of Christmas: **God becomes like us so there can be a great exchange. God takes what is ours (sin) so that we can have what is His (righteousness)**

II. The Announcement: Light Breaking Through

Before the baby was born, before the shepherds saw angels, before the wise men followed a star, God sent messengers to prepare the way. Let's look at how God announced that the Light was finally coming.

A. Gabriel's Visit to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

1. The Setting: Nazareth

Luke 1:26-27 ESV

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,
²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

Nazareth. This was a nothing town. So insignificant that when Nathanael later hears Jesus is from there, he asks: "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" ([John 1:46](#)).

And Mary? A young virgin, probably a teenager by our standards, betrothed (engaged) to a carpenter named Joseph. She's living an ordinary life in an occupied land, under Roman rule, just trying to survive like everyone else.

If you were writing a story about God entering the world, would you start here? In an insignificant town with an unknown girl? But this is how God works. He chooses the weak to shame the strong. He exalts the humble.

2. The Greeting: "Greetings, favored one!"

Luke 1:28–30 ESV

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

Notice Mary's response: she was "greatly troubled." The Greek word (diatarasso) means deeply disturbed, confused, agitated. An angel appearing in your room will do that!

But look at what Gabriel says: "**The Lord is with you.**" Right there in the greeting, we hear echoes of "Immanuel"—God with us. Mary doesn't know it yet, but she's about to become the vessel through which God Himself will dwell with humanity.

"Do not be afraid." This is what God's messengers always say when they break into human experience, because His glory is overwhelming. But fear gives way to faith.

3. The Announcement: You Will Bear the Son of God

Luke 1:31–33 ESV

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Let's unpack this verse by verse:

"You will conceive... and bear a son" – Mary will become pregnant and give birth. This is incarnation language—God taking on human flesh through natural human birth.

"You shall call his name Jesus" – The name Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) means "The Lord saves" or "Yahweh is salvation." This is the same name Joshua had in the Old Testament. His very name announces His mission.

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High" – Not just a great prophet or king, but the Son of God Himself. Divine identity.

"The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David" – Here's the fulfillment of 2 Samuel 7! God promised David that his descendant would reign forever. This is that King.

"Of his kingdom there will be no end" – Eternal reign. Isaiah 9:7 is being fulfilled: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end."

Every prophecy is converging right here, right now, on this teenage girl in Nazareth.

4. The Question: "How will this be?"

Luke 1:34 ESV

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

This is an honest question, not doubt. Compare this to Zechariah's response when told he'd have a son (Luke 1:18)—"How shall I know this?" Zechariah doubted and was struck mute. But Mary simply asks for clarification: "I'm a virgin. How is this physically possible?"

It's a fair question. She's not yet married to Joseph. She's never been with a man. This should be impossible.

5. The Explanation: The Holy Spirit Will Come Upon You

Luke 1:35 ESV

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

This is one of the most important verses in Scripture. Here's what it tells us:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you" – The same Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation (Genesis 1:2) will now bring about a new creation in Mary's womb.

"The power of the Most High will overshadow you" – The word "overshadow" (episkiazo) is referencing back to when the cloud of God's glory covered the tabernacle ([Exodus 40:35](#)). This is the Shekinah glory—God's presence—coming upon Mary.

"Therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" – Because of the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit, this child will be both fully human (born of Mary) and fully divine (conceived by God).

This is the virgin birth. [Isaiah 7:14](#) is being fulfilled: *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*

Why does the virgin birth matter? Because Jesus needed to be fully human to represent us and fully divine to save us. He had to be one of us but without our sin nature passed down from Adam. The virgin birth makes this possible.

6. The Response: "Let it be to me according to your word"

Luke 1:38 ESV

³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

This is one of the greatest statements of faith in all of Scripture. Do you realize what Mary is agreeing to?

- Her reputation will be destroyed (pregnant before marriage in that culture could mean death by stoning)
- Her engagement to Joseph could be ended
- Her family might disown her
- She'll be the subject of gossip and shame for the rest of her life
- People will always wonder about Jesus' legitimacy

But Mary says: **"Let it be to me according to your word."**

She surrenders completely. She trusts God's plan even when it costs her everything. She becomes the first person to "receive" Jesus by faith.

This is the posture we all need: "Not my will, but Yours be done."

B. The Prophecy of Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79)

Before Jesus was born, another baby was born to prepare the way—John the Baptist, born to Zechariah and Elizabeth (Mary's relative). When John is born, Zechariah, who had been struck mute for doubting Gabriel's message, suddenly has his speech restored and prophesies.

1. Filled with the Holy Spirit

Luke 1:67 – *"And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying..."*

After nine months of silence, Zechariah's tongue is loosened—not for small talk, but for prophecy. The Spirit fills him and he speaks truth about what God is doing.

2. The Lord Has Visited His People

Luke 1:68 – *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people..."*

"Visited" (episkeptomai) means God has come to check on, care for, and act on behalf of His people. This isn't a distant God sending help—this is God Himself coming in person.

"Redeemed" (lutrosis) means to release by paying a ransom, to set free. God is coming to buy back His people from slavery to sin and death.

3. Fulfillment of Ancient Promises

Luke 1:69-73 – *"...and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham..."*

Zechariah connects the dots:

- This is the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12, 22)
- This is the descendant of David (2 Samuel 7)
- This is what the prophets spoke about for centuries
- God is remembering His covenant—He's keeping His promises!

4. The Light Imagery Returns

And then Zechariah says something that should make us sit up and pay attention:

Luke 1:78-79 – "...because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

There it is! The light imagery from Isaiah 9:2!

"The sunrise shall visit us from on high" – The Greek word (anatole) means sunrise, dawn, or dayspring. After the long night, dawn is breaking!

"To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" – Direct quotation of Isaiah 9:2. The people walking in darkness are about to see a great light.

"To guide our feet into the way of peace" – The Prince of Peace is coming to bring reconciliation between God and humanity.

Zechariah understands: the Light is coming. The dawn is here. After 4,000 years of darkness, the sun is rising.

C. Joseph's Dream (Matthew 1:18-25)

While Luke tells the story from Mary's perspective, Matthew tells it from Joseph's. Let's see how God revealed the truth to this righteous man.

1. The Dilemma

Matthew 1:18-19 – "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."

Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. He's engaged to Mary. They haven't consummated the marriage yet (that's what "before they came together" means). And suddenly, Mary is pregnant.

The natural conclusion? She's been unfaithful.

Joseph has options:

1. He could publicly divorce her and expose her to shame (and possible death)
2. He could marry her and live with the scandal
3. He could divorce her quietly, sparing her public humiliation

Joseph, being a "just man" (righteous, law-abiding), chooses the merciful option: divorce her quietly. He's trying to do the right thing according to the law while also protecting Mary.

2. The Divine Intervention

Matthew 1:20-21 – *"But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'"*

God intervenes before Joseph can act on his plan. Notice several things:

"Joseph, son of David" – The angel addresses him by his royal lineage. This matters because the Messiah must be a legal descendant of David. Joseph will become Jesus' legal (though not biological) father, giving Jesus the legal right to David's throne.

"Do not fear to take Mary as your wife" – Joseph's fear is understandable. But God says: Don't be afraid. This is My plan.

"That which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" – The angel confirms what Mary told him. This isn't adultery—this is a miracle.

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus" – Joseph is given the honor of naming the child, establishing his legal paternity.

"For he will save his people from their sins" – Here's the mission statement. Jesus (Yeshua—"the Lord saves") will save people from their sins. Not from Roman oppression, not from poverty, not from sickness—though He'll address all those things. The primary problem is sin, and Jesus is the solution.

3. The Prophecy Fulfilled

Matthew 1:22-23 – *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)."*

Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, constantly shows how Jesus fulfills prophecy. Here he quotes Isaiah 7:14.

"The virgin shall conceive" – Impossible by natural means, but God specializes in the impossible.

"They shall call his name Immanuel" – Not a second name, but a title describing who He is: God with us. Deity and humanity united in one person.

This is the central miracle of Christmas: **God is with us.** Not distant. Not detached. Not watching from heaven. With us. Among us. One of us.

4. Joseph's Obedience

Matthew 1:24-25 – *"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."*

Joseph, like Mary, responds with immediate obedience. He takes Mary as his wife, protecting her and the child. He abstains from sexual relations until after Jesus is born, preserving the virgin birth. And he names the baby Jesus, just as instructed.

Joseph's faith is shown through his actions. He risks his reputation, accepts a situation he doesn't fully understand, and trusts God's word through the angel.

III. The Arrival: The Word Becomes Flesh

The announcements have been made. The stage is set. Now comes the moment the world has been waiting for.

A. The Journey to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-5)

1. God's Sovereignty Over History

Luke 2:1-3 – *"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town."*

Caesar Augustus was the most powerful man in the world. Emperor of Rome, ruler of the known world, worshiped as a god by many. He issues a decree for a census—probably for taxation or military purposes.

He has no idea he's being used by the true God to fulfill ancient prophecy.

Micah 5:2 said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But Mary and Joseph live in Nazareth, about 80 miles north. How do you get a pregnant woman from Nazareth to Bethlehem at exactly the right time?

You have the Roman emperor issue a decree that forces everyone to return to their ancestral hometown.

God uses empires to accomplish His purposes. God orchestrates history down to the smallest detail.

2. The Fulfillment of Micah 5:2

Luke 2:4-5 – *"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."*

Joseph, being a descendant of David, has to go to Bethlehem—David's town. And Mary goes with him, even though she's about to give birth. The timing is perfect. God's timing is always perfect.

"The city of David" – Bethlehem, where David was born, where he was anointed king by Samuel, where Ruth and Boaz's love story unfolded. This tiny town, this insignificant place, becomes the birthplace of the King of Kings.

B. The Birth in Bethlehem (Luke 2:6-7)

And now we come to the moment that divides all of history—B.C. and A.D., before Christ and after Christ.

1. "The time came for her to give birth"

Luke 2:6 – *"And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth."*

Simple words for the most significant event in human history. "The time came"—or as Paul puts it in Galatians 4:4: *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law..."*

The fullness of time. The perfect moment. Not a second too early, not a second too late. God's perfect timing after 4,000 years of waiting.

2. "She gave birth to her firstborn son"

Luke 2:7a – *"And she gave birth to her firstborn son..."*

The eternal Son of God, who existed before time began, enters time. The Word becomes flesh. The Creator becomes a creature. The infinite becomes finite.

Think about what this means:

- The One who hung the stars experiences birth
- The One who formed Adam from dust is Himself formed in Mary's womb
- The One who needs nothing becomes utterly dependent—needing to be fed, changed, held
- The One who gives life to all things becomes vulnerable to death

This is condescension beyond our comprehension. This is love beyond measure.

Philippians 2:6-7 – *"...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."*

3. The Humility of the Incarnation

Luke 2:7b – *"...and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."*

This is where the scandal really begins.

"Wrapped him in swaddling cloths" – Simple strips of cloth, the best a poor family could offer. The King of Kings wrapped in rags.

"Laid him in a manger" – Not a cradle. Not a bed. A manger—a feeding trough for animals. Probably filled with hay, smelling of livestock, in a stable or cave where animals were kept.

"Because there was no place for them in the inn" – Rejected from the start. No room for the One who created all space. No place for the King in His own creation.

From the very beginning, Jesus identified with the poor, the rejected, the marginalized. He wasn't born in Caesar's palace or Herod's fortress. He was born where the outcasts would feel at home.

Philippians 2:8 – *"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

The journey from manger to cross is a journey of humility. Born in poverty, died in shame, all for our salvation.

4. The Significance of the Manger

Why does God emphasize the manger? Luke mentions it three times in just a few verses (2:7, 12, 16). It's significant.

A manger is a feeding trough—a place where animals eat. And who is Jesus?

John 6:35 – *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger..."*

Jesus is the Bread of Life, laid in a feeding trough. He came to satisfy our deepest hunger—our hunger for God, for meaning, for life itself.

And Jesus is also the Lamb of God. He's born among animals who will be sacrificed. From the manger to the cross, Jesus is the sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world.

The manger is a cradle, but it's also a foreshadowing of the tomb. Both are borrowed. Both speak of humility. Both are temporary—He won't stay in either one.

C. The Angelic Announcement to Shepherds (Luke 2:8-14)

God could have announced Jesus' birth to anyone. Kings, priests, Roman senators, wealthy merchants. Instead, He chose shepherds.

1. The Recipients: Shepherds

Luke 2:8 – *"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."*

Shepherds in first-century Israel were at the bottom of the social ladder. They were:

- Ceremonially unclean (constant contact with animals made them unable to participate in temple worship)
- Socially outcast (considered unreliable, even their testimony wasn't accepted in court)
- Poor and marginalized
- Working the night shift while others slept

But there are beautiful connections here:

- **David was a shepherd** from Bethlehem before becoming king
- **Jesus is the Good Shepherd** who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11)

- **These may have been temple shepherds** raising lambs for sacrifice in Jerusalem
- **The Lamb of God** is announced to those who care for sacrificial lambs

God consistently chooses the unlikely, the overlooked, the lowly. He lifts up the humble.

2. *The Glory of the Lord*

Luke 2:9 – *"And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear."*

This is it! This is the moment!

"The glory of the Lord shone around them" – The Shekinah glory, the radiant presence of God that filled the tabernacle and the temple, now shines in a field!

LIGHT breaking into darkness!

For 400 years, no prophets. No visions. No glory. Silence and darkness.

And now, on an ordinary night, to ordinary men doing ordinary work, the glory of God erupts into their world!

Isaiah 9:2 is being fulfilled right before their eyes: *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; those dwelling in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."*

The Light has come!

"They were filled with great fear" – Of course they were! The glory of God is terrifying to sinful humans. This is holy fear, awe, wonder.

3. Fear and Assurance

Luke 2:10 – *"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.'"*

"Fear not" – Again, the consistent message when God breaks in. Don't be afraid. This is good news!

"I bring you good news" – The Greek word is *euangelion*—gospel! This is the first proclamation of the gospel. This is the good news the world has been waiting for.

"Of great joy" – Not just a little happiness. GREAT joy. Overwhelming, abundant, overflowing joy.

"For all the people" – Not just for Jews. Not just for the rich. Not just for the righteous. For ALL people. This Light is for the whole world.

4. The Message: A Savior Is Born

Luke 2:11 – *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

This one verse contains the entire gospel! Let's break it down:

"For unto you" – Personal. Not just born into the world, but born FOR YOU. This is for the shepherds. This is for you. This is for me.

"Is born this day" – Right now! Today! The wait is over!

"In the city of David" – Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 fulfilled. The royal lineage confirmed.

"A Savior" – The Greek word *soter* means deliverer, rescuer, preserver. He saves us from sin, death, Satan, and hell.

"Who is Christ" – *Christos* in Greek, Messiah in Hebrew—the Anointed One. The One all the prophets spoke about. The fulfillment of every promise.

"The Lord" – *Kyrios*—the divine name used for Yahweh in the Greek Old Testament. This baby is God Himself!

Savior. Christ. Lord. Three titles that tell us everything:

- **What He does:** Saves
- **Who He is:** The promised Messiah
- **His authority:** Lord of all

5. The Sign

Luke 2:12 – *"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."*

This is how you'll recognize Him. Not by a crown. Not by a palace. Not by royal robes.

A baby. Wrapped in strips of cloth. Lying in a feeding trough.

The sign of the King is humility. The sign of God is weakness. The sign of the Savior is poverty.

This turns everything upside down. The world says greatness is power, wealth, status. God says greatness is humility, service, love.

6. The Heavenly Choir

Luke 2:13-14 – *"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"*

One angel becomes a multitude—the heavenly host, the armies of heaven! They can't contain themselves. They burst into song!

"Glory to God in the highest" – The highest glory belongs to God for what He's done. Salvation brings glory to God because it displays His wisdom, power, love, justice, and mercy.

"On earth peace" – The Prince of Peace has come. Not just the absence of conflict, but *shalom*—wholeness, reconciliation, restoration. Peace between God and humanity through the One lying in the manger.

"Among those with whom he is pleased" – Or "peace to people of good will" or "peace to those on whom his favor rests." This peace is for those who receive the Savior, who believe in His name.

Heaven and earth unite in worship. The angels rejoice over what God has done. And the shepherds—lowly, outcast shepherds—are the first humans to hear the announcement.

D. The Shepherds' Response (Luke 2:15-20)

How do the shepherds respond to this incredible announcement?

1. Immediate Action

Luke 2:15 – *"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.'"*

They don't debate. They don't delay. They don't say, "Let's think about this."

"Let us go" – Immediate decision.

"See this thing" – They want to witness it for themselves.

"Which the Lord has made known to us" – They recognize this is divine revelation. God has spoken to them!

Luke 2:16 – *"And they went with haste..."*

"With haste" – They run! They rush! They can't get there fast enough!

This is how we should respond to the gospel—with urgency, with excitement, with immediate action.

2. Finding Jesus

Luke 2:16b – *"...and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger."*

Everything exactly as the angel said. God's word is always true. His promises are always kept.

They find the Savior, Christ the Lord—not on a throne, but in a manger. And that doesn't disappoint them. They don't say, "Wait, this can't be right." They believe.

3. Spreading the News

Luke 2:17-18 – *"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."*

The shepherds become the first evangelists! They can't keep quiet. They have to tell everyone what they've seen and heard.

"They made known" – They proclaimed, announced, declared.

"All who heard it wondered" – People were amazed. The word spread.

This is the pattern: encounter Jesus, then tell others about Him. We can't help but speak about what we've seen and heard ([Acts 4:20](#)).

4. Mary's Reflection

Luke 2:19 – *"But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart."*

While others wonder and the shepherds spread the news, Mary is quiet. She's taking it all in, storing it in her heart, meditating on it.

"Treasured" (suntereo) – kept safe, preserved carefully

"Pondering" (sumballo) – bringing together, comparing, contemplating deeply

Mary doesn't fully understand everything that's happening, but she holds onto these moments. She reflects on them. She lets them sink deep into her soul.

This is a model for us—especially during Advent. Don't just rush through the Christmas story. Treasure it. Ponder it. Let it transform you.

5. Worship and Witness

Luke 2:20 – *"And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."*

They go back to their fields, but they're not the same men. They return:

"Glorifying God" – Giving Him honor and praise

"Praising God" – Expressing worship and thanksgiving

"For all they had heard and seen" – Their encounter with the Light has changed them

"As it had been told them" – God kept His word

Worship is the natural, inevitable response to encountering Jesus. When you truly see who He is and what He's done, you can't help but worship.

E. The Theological Significance: John 1:1-14

Luke gives us the historical narrative of Jesus' birth. But John, writing his Gospel years later, gives us the theological meaning. Let's look at how John interprets what happened in Bethlehem.

1. The Eternal Word

John 1:1 – *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

"In the beginning" – This echoes Genesis 1:1, but John goes even further back. Before creation, before time, there "was" the Word. He already existed.

"The Word" – Jesus is called the *Logos*, the Word. He's God's ultimate communication to humanity. He doesn't just bring God's message—He IS God's message.

"Was with God" – Face to face with God, in relationship with God. Distinct person.

"Was God" – Fully divine. Not just godlike. Not a lesser god. THE God.

The baby in the manger is the eternal God who existed before anything was created.

2. The Creator

John 1:3 – *"All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."*

The baby Mary is nursing created the universe. He spoke stars into existence. He formed Adam from dust. Every atom, every galaxy, every living thing—made through Him.

Think about that: the wood of the manger was created by the One lying in it. The stars the shepherds saw were hung in space by the One they came to worship.

Mind-blowing!

3. The True Light

And now John uses the light imagery we've been tracking:

John 1:4-5 – *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

"In him was life" – Jesus is the source of all life—physical and spiritual

"The life was the light of men" – He brings light, illumination, understanding, truth

"The light shines in the darkness" – Present tense. Actively shining. The Light has come!

"The darkness has not overcome it" – The Greek word *katelaben* can mean "grasp," "seize," "overcome," or "comprehend." The darkness tried to extinguish the Light—and failed. The darkness can't even understand the Light, much less defeat it.

This is the fulfillment of every light prophecy! Isaiah 9:2, Isaiah 60:1, Malachi 4:2—all finding their "yes" in Jesus.

4. The Incarnation

John 1:14 – *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

This is one of the most important verses in all of Scripture. Let's unpack it:

"The Word became flesh" – *Became* (*egeneto*) doesn't mean He changed from one thing to another. He took on what He was not (humanity) without ceasing to be what He was (deity). He added human nature to His divine nature.

This is incarnation. God in flesh. The infinite in the finite. The eternal entering time. The Creator becoming a creature.

"And dwelt among us" – The Greek word eskenosen literally means "tabernacled" or "pitched His tent." It's the same word used when God's presence filled the tabernacle in the wilderness. God is dwelling with His people again!

"We have seen his glory" – John and the other disciples saw Jesus' glory—in His miracles, His teaching, His character, His transfiguration, His resurrection. The glory that shone around the shepherds was embodied in Jesus.

"Glory as of the only Son from the Father" – Unique glory. The glory of the one and only Son. No one else has this glory.

"Full of grace and truth" – Perfectly balanced. Grace without truth is sentimentality. Truth without grace is harshness. Jesus brings both in perfect fullness.

5. Grace and Truth

John 1:17 – *"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*

Moses gave the law, which reveals sin and demands perfection. But Moses couldn't provide the power to obey or the forgiveness when we fail.

Jesus brings **grace** (unmerited favor, undeserved blessing, divine enablement) and **truth** (reality, the way things really are).

The Light exposes reality (truth) and heals what's broken (grace).

IV. The Visitors: The Light Draws All Nations

The Light that came to Bethlehem didn't stay hidden. Like a city on a hill, it couldn't be concealed. And it drew people—both Jews and Gentiles, young and old, the faithful and the seeking.

A. Simeon: The Faithful Watcher (Luke 2:25-35)

1. A Man Waiting

Luke 2:25 – *"Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him."*

Meet Simeon. We don't know his age, though tradition says he was elderly. But we know four things about him:

- **Righteous** – He lived in right relationship with God
- **Devout** – He was pious, faithful in worship and obedience
- **Waiting for the consolation of Israel** – His whole life oriented around one hope: the coming Messiah who would comfort and redeem Israel
- **The Holy Spirit was upon him** – God's presence and power rested on him

Simeon represents the faithful remnant we talked about last week—those who held onto God's promises through the darkness and silence.

2. The Promise

Luke 2:26 – *"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."*

God made Simeon a personal promise: You will see the Messiah before you die. Can you imagine living with that promise? Every day wondering: Will today be the day? Every baby boy in Jerusalem: Could this be Him?

And then one day, the Spirit leads him to the temple at exactly the right moment.

3. Led by the Spirit

Luke 2:27 – *"And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law..."*

This is divine appointment. Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple for the purification rites ([Leviticus 12](#)). And at that exact moment, the Spirit leads Simeon there.

God orchestrates encounters with Jesus. He leads seeking hearts to the Savior.

4. Holding the Light

Luke 2:28-32 – *"...he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel!'"*

Simeon takes the baby Jesus in his arms. The 8-day-old infant who is the eternal God. And Simeon's whole life makes sense. Everything he waited for, everything he hoped for, everything he prayed for—right here in his arms.

Simeon sees in this infant what 4,000 years of history has been moving toward: **the Light of the World.**

5. The Prophecy of Opposition

But Simeon's prophecy takes a darker turn:

Luke 2:34-35 – *"And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'"*

Jesus will divide people. The Light exposes what's in the heart.

"For the fall and rising of many" – Some will stumble over Jesus and fall into judgment. Others will rise to new life through Him.

"A sign that is opposed" – Jesus will be contradicted, rejected, opposed. The Light will be hated by those who love darkness.

"A sword will pierce through your own soul also" – A prophecy to Mary. She will suffer watching her Son be rejected and crucified. The manger leads to the cross.

"So that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" – Jesus reveals what we truly are. Our response to Him exposes our hearts.

The Light doesn't just illuminate—it divides. It forces a decision.

B. The Magi: Gentiles Seeking the Light (Matthew 2:1-12)

While Luke focuses on the humble (shepherds, Simeon, Anna), Matthew shows us seekers from far away—wealthy, educated Gentiles following a star.

1. Following the Star

Matthew 2:1-2 – *"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'"*

The **Magi** (magoi in Greek) were likely Persian or Babylonian astrologers, scholars who studied the stars. They weren't kings (despite the Christmas carol), but they were wealthy, educated, and influential.

"We saw his star when it rose" – God used creation itself to announce the birth of His Son. Numbers 24:17 prophesied: "A star shall come out of Jacob."

"We have come to worship him" – Gentiles traveling hundreds of miles to worship the Jewish Messiah. The Light is drawing all nations!

This fulfills Isaiah 60:3: *"And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."*

2. The Witness of Scripture

Matthew 2:4-6 – *"...and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he [Herod] inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."'"*

Ironically, the religious leaders knew exactly where the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2), but they didn't go to worship Him. They had the Scriptures but not the seeking heart.

The Gentile Magi had a star but needed Scripture to guide them to the exact location. Creation and revelation work together to lead people to Jesus.

3. The Contrast with Herod

Matthew 2:3 – *"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."*

Herod, the puppet king installed by Rome, hears that a true King has been born—and he's terrified. The Light threatens those who love darkness and power.

This sets up the pattern that will continue throughout Jesus' life: some seek Him, others oppose Him. The Light divides.

4. Worship and Gifts

Matthew 2:11 – *"And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."*

By the time the Magi arrive, Jesus is no longer a newborn in a manger but a young child ("paidion") in a house. Time has passed—maybe months, possibly up to two years (see [Matthew 2:16](#)).

"They fell down and worshiped him" – Prostrate worship. Complete submission. They recognize deity.

"Gold" – A gift for a king. Acknowledging His royalty.

"Frankincense" – A priestly incense used in worship. Acknowledging His divinity and His priestly role.

"Myrrh" – A spice used for burial. Prophetically pointing to His death. The Savior came to die.

These gifts are deeply symbolic. They tell us who Jesus is and what He came to do.

V. The Meaning: What the Incarnation Accomplishes

We've seen the announcements, the birth, and the visitors. But now we need to ask the crucial question: **What does it all mean?** Why did God become a baby? What does the incarnation accomplish?

A. God With Us - Emmanuel

1. The Presence of God Returns

Remember what happened after the Fall in [Genesis 3](#)? Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden—from God's presence. The intimate fellowship they enjoyed with God in the cool of the day was broken.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's people longed for His presence:

- The **tabernacle** in the wilderness—God dwelling in a tent among His people
- The **temple** in Jerusalem—the house where God's glory resided
- But even then, God's presence was veiled, separated, dangerous. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and only once a year.

Then in Ezekiel's day, the unthinkable happened. Ezekiel saw the glory of God—the Shekinah presence—**leave the temple** ([Ezekiel 10:18-19](#)). God departed because of Israel's persistent sin and idolatry.

The temple was still standing, the sacrifices continued, but God wasn't there. The light had gone out.

For centuries, faithful Jews prayed for God's presence to return. "How long, O Lord? When will You come back to us?"

And then, in a stable in Bethlehem, the answer comes.

John 1:14 – *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."*

The word "dwelt" is *eskenosen*—literally "tabernacled." God is pitching His tent, making His dwelling, among His people again!

But this time it's not in a building made of wood and stone. It's in a body. **God is dwelling in human flesh.**

2. *The Longing Fulfilled*

What Adam and Eve lost in the Garden—**fellowship with God**—is now restored.

What Israel longed for—**God's presence**—is now embodied in Jesus.

Matthew 1:23 names Him **Emmanuel**—"God with us."

Not God far away. Not God occasionally visiting. Not God hidden behind a veil.

GOD WITH US. Among us. One of us.

This is what makes Christmas so glorious. It's not just that a good teacher was born, or a moral example, or a revolutionary leader. **God Himself entered human history.**

Colossians 2:9 – *"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."*

All of God—all His attributes, all His nature, all His glory—in a human body. First as a baby, then as a man.

3. *No Separation*

And here's what this means for us practically:

Hebrews 4:15 – *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

Because Jesus became human, He **knows what it's like to be us.**

- He experienced hunger (**Matthew 4:2**)

- He experienced thirst ([John 19:28](#))
- He experienced weariness ([John 4:6](#))
- He experienced temptation ([Matthew 4:1-11](#))
- He experienced sorrow ([John 11:35](#))
- He experienced physical pain (the cross)
- He experienced rejection ([John 1:11](#))

Jesus doesn't look down on us from heaven and say, "I have no idea what you're going through." He lived it. He walked in our shoes. He wore our skin.

The baby in the manger grew up to experience everything we experience—except sin.

This means **God understands you**. Whatever you're facing, whatever darkness you're walking through, God is not distant or disconnected. He's been there.

Emmanuel. God with us.

B. The Light Exposes and Heals

The incarnation means the Light has entered the world. And light does two things: it **exposes** what's hidden, and it **heals** what's broken.

1. Exposure of Sin

John 3:19-21 – *"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."*

Light reveals reality. When Jesus came, He exposed:

- The hypocrisy of the religious leaders
- The greed of the tax collectors
- The pride of the self-righteous
- The rebellion in every human heart

Some people **hated Him for it**. They loved their darkness and didn't want it exposed. They preferred the lies they believed about themselves to the truth Jesus revealed.

But others **came to the light**. They admitted their sin, their brokenness, their need. And they found healing.

The Light still does this today. When you encounter Jesus in Scripture, in worship, through the Spirit—He exposes what's really going on in your heart. He reveals sin you didn't know was there. He uncovers motives you were hiding even from yourself.

This can be uncomfortable. But it's also **merciful**. You can't treat a disease you don't know you have. The Light exposes so He can heal.

2. Healing and Restoration

Remember Malachi's prophecy:

Malachi 4:2 – *"But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."*

The Light doesn't just expose—He **heals**.

Look at Jesus' ministry. Everywhere He went:

- The **blind** received sight ([John 9](#))
- The **lame** walked ([Matthew 9:1-8](#))
- The **lepers** were cleansed ([Luke 17:11-19](#))
- The **deaf** heard ([Mark 7:31-37](#))
- The **dead** were raised ([John 11; Luke 7:11-17](#))
- The **demon-possessed** were freed ([Mark 5:1-20](#))
- The **broken-hearted** found comfort ([Luke 4:18](#))

These physical healings were signs pointing to something greater: **spiritual healing**. Jesus came to heal the deepest disease—sin. To restore what the Fall broke. To bring light into the darkness of death itself.

Isaiah 61:1-2 / Luke 4:18-19 – When Jesus began His public ministry, He read from Isaiah and said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then He closed the scroll and said: *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Luke 4:21).

The Light has come to heal. To set captives free. To give sight to the blind. To bring liberty to the oppressed.

Are you broken? Come to the Light.

Are you sick with sin? Come to the Light.

Are you enslaved to patterns you can't break? Come to the Light.

He heals. He restores. He makes all things new.

C. The Darkness Cannot Overcome It

This is the promise we've been waiting for since Genesis 3:15. The Light has come, and the darkness **cannot win**.

1. John 1:5

John 1:5 – *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

The Greek word for "overcome" is *katalabēn*, which can mean:

- **Grasp** – The darkness cannot grab hold of the Light
- **Seize** – The darkness cannot capture the Light
- **Overcome** – The darkness cannot defeat the Light
- **Comprehend** – The darkness cannot even understand the Light

All of these meanings work! The darkness tried to extinguish the Light at every turn, but it **failed**.

2. *Opposition From the Start*

From the moment Jesus was born, the forces of darkness tried to destroy Him:

- **Herod's massacre** – Killing all the boys in Bethlehem under age two, trying to eliminate the King ([Matthew 2:16-18](#))
- **Satan's temptations** – Trying to get Jesus to sin, to disqualify Himself as the sinless sacrifice ([Matthew 4:1-11](#))
- **Religious opposition** – The Pharisees and teachers of the law constantly trying to trap Him, discredit Him, stone Him
- **Demon resistance** – Evil spirits recognizing Jesus and crying out in fear
- **The cross itself** – The ultimate attempt to put out the Light. Kill Him. Bury Him. Seal the tomb.

But here's the stunning truth: **every attempt to extinguish the Light actually accomplished God's plan to save the world.**

Herod's massacre? It drove Joseph and Mary to Egypt, fulfilling prophecy ([Hosea 11:1](#): "Out of Egypt I called my son").

Satan's temptations? Jesus defeated them, proving He was the sinless Lamb.

The cross? The darkest moment in history became the **brightest revelation of God's love**. The Light appeared to go out—but it was actually shining most brilliantly, paying for sin, defeating death, crushing the serpent's head.

3. Victory Assured

The manger points to the cross. The baby born to die.

The cross points to the empty tomb. Death could not hold Him.

The resurrection proves the Light cannot be extinguished.

1 John 2:8 – "...the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining."

Present tense! The Light **is** shining. Right now. The victory is already won.

Yes, we still see darkness in the world. Yes, we still struggle with sin. Yes, we still face suffering and death.

But the outcome is not in doubt. **The Light has already won.**

Colossians 2:15 – "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

The baby in the manger grew up to defeat every enemy: sin, death, Satan, hell. The Light shines in the darkness, **and the darkness has not, cannot, will not overcome it.**

D. The Invitation to Come to the Light

All of this—the incarnation, the Light coming into the world, the victory over darkness—it's all an **invitation.**

1. Jesus' Own Words

John 8:12 – *"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"*

Notice: He doesn't say "I bring light" or "I show the way to light."

He says: **"I AM the light."**

And then the promise: **"Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

This is for anyone. Whoever. You don't have to be smart enough, good enough, religious enough. You just have to **follow Him.**

Stop walking in darkness. Stop trying to create your own light. Come to the Light that has come into the world.

2. The Gospel Call

Isaiah 60:1 – *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."*

The Light has come! The waiting is over! Now the call is: **Arise! Shine! Respond!**

John 1:12 – *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

Receive Him. That's all you need to do. Receive the Light. Believe in His name. Trust that He is who He says He is and did what He said He would do.

And what happens when you receive Him?

You become a **child of God.** You're adopted into the family. You're brought out of darkness into light. You're transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son.

3. From Darkness to Light

Acts 26:18 – Paul describes his mission as "...to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Turning from darkness to light. This is conversion. This is salvation. This is what happens when you receive Christ.

1 Peter 2:9 – "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Called out of darkness into marvelous light.

If you're in Christ, this is your story. You were in darkness—blind, lost, dead in sin. But God called you. The Light shone on you. And you came to the Light. You received Him. You believed in His name.

And now you're in the light. **Marvelous light.** Wonderful, beautiful, glorious light.