

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Luke 2:1-20 | Savior, Messiah, and Lord
Sunday December 24, 2023

WELCOME:

Merry Christmas!

For those visiting, my name is Dustin Daniels, and I'm the pastor/teacher here at RBC.

Let me give you a rundown of what we're doing tonight as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We are going to worship Jesus by singing several Christmas songs.

I will teach on the birth of Jesus from Luke's Gospel.

And then we'll sing one more worship song and have fellowship, coffee, and treats next door.

PRAY:

So if you would like to stand and join us as we sing these Christmas songs, please do.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC:

INTRODUCTION:

We are celebrating one of the two most significant days in world history.

The first being Jesus—God’s Son—the second person of the Trinity—is born in human flesh—and we call this—Christmas

The second most significant event in world history also focuses on Jesus—

- If we fast forward 30+ years later*
- Jesus was murdered on a Roman cross, *-innocent man*
 - laid in a borrowed grave for three days,
 - and then on the third day was resurrected back to life—Jesus walked out of his own grave after being dead for three days.
 - And by doing so, Jesus conquered sin and death on our behalf.
 - And we call this—Easter.

So we celebrate the birth of God’s son and the temporary death of God’s son.

Both Christmas and Easter.

In a world that, at best, puts up with this notion about Jesus being God and Savior of the world—

And, at worst, the world openly mocks Jesus and denies His existence—*except* expect to take His holy name in vain.

Let me ask you—what does all mean for you today?

What’s it means for the New Year? Eternity?

Well, we’re going to address those questions by studying Luke’s Gospel.

I’d like to read it to you, explain it, and then we’ll apply it to our lives.

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God’s Word.

SCRIPTURE:

- + **Luke 2:1 NLT**—At that time the Roman Emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.
- + **Luke 2:2 NLT**— (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.)
- + **Luke 2:3 NLT**—^{So} All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.
- + **Luke 2:4 NLT**— And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.
- + **Luke 2:5 NLT**— He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.
- + **Luke 2:6 NLT**— And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.
- + **Luke 2:7 NLT**— She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.
- + **Luke 2:8 NLT**— That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.
- + **Luke 2:9 NLT**— Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified,
- + **Luke 2:10 NLT**— but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people."

+ **Luke 2:11 NLT**— The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!

+ **Luke 2:12 NLT**— And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

+ **Luke 2:13 NLT**— Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

+ **Luke 2:14 NLT**— “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

+ **Luke 2:15 NLT**— When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

+ **Luke 2:16 NLT**— They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.

+ **Luke 2:17 NLT**— After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.

+ **Luke 2:18 NLT**— All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished,

+ **Luke 2:19 NLT**— but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.

+ **Luke 2:20 NLT**— The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

+ **PRAY:**

EXEGESIS:

+ **Luke 2:1 NLT**—At that time the Roman Emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.

+ **Luke 2:2 NLT**— (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

+ **Luke 2:3 NLT**—^{so,} All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.

The Christmas story begins with the world's history.

It's important to note that even though we are learning the story of Jesus' birth, it doesn't start with "Once upon a time."

In fact, it starts with, "At that time."

This narrative is no fairy tale.

Luke reveals the names of real people with actual facts that took place at a particular time in world history.

Luke mentions one of the most powerful men in the world, Augustus.

Caesar Augustus is not this man's name but rather his title.

Gaius Octavius is his birth name.

Gaius is the grand nephew of Julius Caesar.

Regardless, Caesar means "emperor,"

Augustus means "revered," "honored," or "esteemed,"

It's interesting because Gaius' ascension to the throne marked the beginning of the Roman Empire.

He is arguably one of the most significant people in Roman history.

Several reasons for that.

First, he restored unity to the country after many years of civil war.

Second, he ushered in the Pax Romana— an time of peace and prosperity throughout the Greek and Roman world that lasted two centuries.

The irony is that he held peace through violence.

And yet, as powerful as this man was—

Almighty God, in His sovereignty and perfect timing, moved the heart of Augustus to fulfill the prophecy that the Lord/Messiah/Savior would be born in Bethlehem.

In fact, the prophet Micah prophesied this—

+ **Micah 5:2 NLT**—*But you, O Bethlehem, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel (Jesus)*

whose origins are in the distant past,

(eternal—Jesus as the second person of the Trinity has always existed)

will come from you on my behalf. — Fathers behalf

This statement was written 600-700 years before Jesus was physically born!

In other words, God providentially set the world stage to get Joseph and Mary (two no-names) to Bethlehem so His Son would be born exactly when and where the prophet Micah predicted.

God did the same thing with King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:21–26) and King Cyrus (Isa. 45:1–4).

In other words, God installs Kings, uses them for His purposes & Also removes them.

Proverbs 21:1 NLT—The king's heart is like a stream of water directed by the Lord; He (the Lord) guides it (King's Heart) wherever he pleases.

Rom 13

So, to honor that prophecy, God moved the heart of the most powerful man in the world to take a census.

A census (survey) was taken for two reasons:

- 1. To register young men for military service
- 2. Or for purposes of taxation.

This particular census was for taxes because the Jews were exempt from serving in the Roman military.

Now, think about God's invisible hand orchestrating all this.

Does the Roman Emperor care about a tiny village called Bethlehem? No.

Does the Emperor even care about Yahweh God? No.

Does he care about money and military power? You bet!

~~So~~ And God used the ^{worldly} ~~ill~~ motives of the Emperor's wicked heart to conduct ^{God's} ~~His~~ own will!

God's predetermined purposes simultaneously became the Emperor's purposes.

Luke 2:4 NLT— And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.

Traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem is about 70 miles.

That's like walking from here to Anthem.

So it's no easy hike when you're in good health, but look at this.

+ Luke 2:5 NLT— *He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.*

Luke tells us how scandalous this Christmas story is in verse five.

Mary was engaged— and already with child.

That doesn't sound good! This is starting to sound a like a shot-gun wedding!

Not only that, can you imagine walking from here to Anthem being nine months pregnant?

Ladies, can you visualize yourself trying to ride a donkey while nine months pregnant—for about a week?

+ Luke 2:6 NLT— *And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.*

+ Luke 2:7 NLT— *She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.*

Verses six and seven state the greatest miracle in the history of the world at that time. (Second to Easter)

God is stepping down off His throne in Heaven, where angels continually worship and praise Him by singing,

***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies!
The whole earth is filled with his glory!"*** (Isaiah 6:3)

Jesus was conceived of a virgin and now Mary is ready to give birth.

Here's the thing—

And no one is there to witness this miracle of God being born.

There is no pomp and circumstance.

There are no parades. There is no paparazzi.

No angels appeared, no heavenly trumpets rang, and no voice from heaven announced the birth of the Son of God to mankind.

The birth of God happens quietly in some obscure tiny village in Israel.

But while Jesus' birth was like that of every other child, Jesus was unlike any other child ever born.

This child was the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, deity in human flesh, Israel's long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world.

The creator of the universe became a man—His own creation.

Jesus enters the world He created as a helpless baby.

Luke only provides a few details...

Luke 2:7(a) NLT— *She gave birth to her firstborn son.*

Talk about an understatement!

Somebody needs to show Luke how to write a headline!

I guess they didn't have Marketing 101 while Luke was getting his MD.

The humility in which the God of the universe arrives is breathtaking—unnerving. Luke points out that this is Mary's firstborn son.

Being the firstborn indicates that Jesus has certain obligations and rights. Practicality speaking, the firstborn was the primary beneficiary of the family.

Theologically, the 'firstborn' is a way of God speaking "humanese" to us.

- Jesus is "the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15 ESV)
- Jesus is the firstborn of God (Heb 1:6)
- Jesus is "the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29 ESV)
- Jesus is "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5 ESV)

All that sounds kind of weird and creepy. What does it mean?

"Firstborn" is not about time or chronology—it's about preeminence, supremacy, distinction, and transcendence.

Jesus has preceded all others in time or space.

I can't say it any better than the apostle Paul

Colossians 1:15(a) NLT—Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

If you want to know what God looks like, talks like, and acts like—look to Jesus.

Colossians 1:15(b) NLT—He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

Paul restates what the prophet Micah said: "Jesus' origins are in the distant past/eternal."

Colossians 1:16 NLT— for through him (Jesus) God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He (Jesus) made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:17 NLT— He (Jesus) existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

Colossians 1:18 NLT— Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body.

He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.

And there's the key, Jesus is first in everything—meaning that Jesus is preeminent—Jesus is God who spoke the creation into existence.

And that's the miracle—this same God- who was in the beginning- who created the Heavens and the Earth—now has flesh and bones like me and you!

John's Gospel says this...

John 1:1—In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God (the Father), and the Word was God (The Son).

John 1:2— He (Jesus) was with God (The Father) in the beginning.

John 1:3— All things were created through him (Jesus), and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.

And guess what?—this same ^(god) who spoke the cosmos into creation is now ^{among} mankind.

All Jesus needed was a physical body, and guess what?

+ **Hebrews 10:5**—*That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God, "You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But you have given me a body to offer."* *EAST*

+ **Luke 2:7(b) NLT**— *She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth...*

Your translation may say swaddling clothes.

In the first century, strips of cloth were used to wrap babies to keep them warm and secure.

This was common practice for newborn babies.

The point here is that Jesus was treated like any other baby.

Jesus was not dressed in royal robes— but in the everyday clothes that other babies wore.

+ **Luke 2:7(c) NLT**— *... and laid him in a manger,*

It may have been common to wrap babies in swaddling clothes, but putting a newborn baby in a manger was not common.

A manger is a feeding trough for livestock.

Why not put Jesus in a crib?

+ **Luke 2:7(d) NLT**— *because there was no lodging available for them.*

Wherever Joseph and Mary stayed, it was not at Motel 6 and it certainly wasn't the Ritz Carlton.

Because Luke mentions a manger—this has led to the belief/tradition that Jesus was born in a stable.

However, the Bible doesn't say that.

Feeding troughs could be found anywhere animals were kept, not only in stables.

So, Jesus may have been born in a cave or in a field of some sort.

It may have been a public shelter or campground.

It's possible that there was no room anywhere because people were traveling to and from for the census.

All that to say, when Jesus was born, He was born in a smelly, filthy, cold shelter surrounded by noisy animals.

farm

+ **Luke 2:8 NLT**— *That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.*

~~The good news of Jesus' birth came first to a most unlikely group of characters—shepherds.~~

Shepherds were mainly uneducated and unskilled.

They had a reputation for being dishonest and unreliable.

Shepherds were near the bottom of the social economic ladder.

The irony is that two of the greatest people in Israel's history were both shepherds — Moses (Ex. 3:1) and David (1 Sam. 16:11–13).

Not only that, Scripture refers to God as the “Shepherd of Israel” (Ps. 80:1; cf. 23:1; Isa. 40:11).

Jesus described Himself as the “good shepherd” (John 10:11).

Regardless, no one expected shepherds—of all people—to get the divine memo.

So shepherds were doing what they always do—working.

Nothing out of the ordinary—until we get to verse nine.

+ Luke 2:9 NLT— Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified.

Most of the time, when angels show up, people hit the ground in fear, trembling, and trepidation—thinking they are about to die.

And this is precisely what the shepherds thought at this moment.

So, put yourself in the shepherd's place—

You're doing what you've always done, watching the sheep in the middle of the night, and BAM, all of a sudden, you see this blinding light with glowing men talking to you—

What do you do? Freak out!

+ Luke 2:10 NLT— but the angel reassured them. “Don't be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.

The shepherds did not need to fear, for the angel had come bearing good news.

People will fear God at the Second Coming when Jesus bears justice.

But the angel's message was not one of judgment but joy.

Luke 2:11 NLT— *The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!*

Verse eleven is the theme of this passage.

The angels give Jesus three specific titles.

Jesus is The Savior—Jesus is the one who rescues and delivers people from their sin.

Jesus is the Messiah/Christ—Jesus is the chosen and anointed One from God the Father to be our Savior.

Jesus is Lord—Jesus is the master and ruler of the cosmos.

The very name of Jesus Christ proclaims God's glory.

Jesus = God Saves

(Title) Christ = Anointed One

“Jesus⁺ Christ” = *God saves through His anointed One.*

The Lord Jesus— is Lord, Savior, Messiah, and so much more.

These three titles reveal the greatness of Jesus.

That statement is the heart of the gospel message — all people are sinners who need a Savior.

The shepherds couldn't grasp all this, but God chose them to hear the message first. Why?

God is no “respector of persons”—God does not show favoritism or partiality to someone's rank or title.

In other words, the free offer of the Gospel is available to everybody.

Jesus was born to save sinners.

— To you tonight

Pause—

slight detour

Most of the time in our church culture today, Jesus is presented and “marketed” as this mascot who will rescue people from a lousy marriage or miserable job.

Many people don’t go to church today to worship the Lord Jesus Christ—they go because they’ve been lied to thinking that Jesus will make them healthy, wealthy, and wise.

I did a little research on some of the largest churches in America—let me read you actual sermon titles:

- Because sermon titles say a lot about a preacher's theology & priorities.*
- More than Enough
 - The Greatness Code
 - The Power to Change
 - Peace of Mind
 - Lead Like it Matters
 - Devil You’ve Held me Long Enough
 - The Blessings of Letting Go
 - How Did I Get Here
 - Challenge the Shadow
 - Enough Already!
 - What’s it Gonna Be? *(Got me! Secret)*
 - Make Peace with Your Strength
 - This is Not your Final Chapter
 - Don’t Fight Your Future
 - Don’t Believe the Lies
 - Your Time for Release
 - Choose to Be Happy
 - Breaking control
 - (My favorite) Living Unoffended, etc., etc., etc.

It's my favorite because when we first hear the Gospel—it's offensive!

That's the whole point: God is holy, and we're not.

fr sin
If we could save ourselves, we would have done that by now

And if we think that Jesus is just a version of a cosmic Santa Claus, we are going to be so disappointed and angry at God.

All of those sermon titles may point to solutions that are legitimate problems in our lives— but those are only the visible symptoms of the root problem itself.

Key part # 2
 +

The root problem is sin.

We have all broken God's laws—and because of that, justice must be served.

Justice for sin is eternal punishment in a very real place, hell.

And The true gospel message within the Christmas story is that Jesus came into the world to rescue and deliver people from sin.

That's why Jesus' titles are so important—*The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord.*

+ **Luke 2:13 NLT**—Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

Pause -
 The picture here is that there are so many angels singing at this moment—that it is unequalled, unmatched and unrivaled in Scripture.

No where do you see this many angels in Scripture.

These are not just angels but warriors—armies of Heaven.

This is an army who fights on behalf of Heaven.

But look what these angels proclaim about Jesus—~~Jesus brings peace.~~

+ Luke 2:14 (a) NLT— “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

This is not world peace—this kind of peace is so much more important than that.

This kind of peace comes from believing that this Jesus (whose birth we are celebrating today) is Lord and Savior (Rom. 5:1; cf. Acts 10:36).

And when we believe that—God gives a supernatural peace, why?

Because our sins have been forgiven and we no longer carry the guilt and shame of those sins.

How is that possible? Because of Easter.

It's possible because of the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

It has nothing to do with your work—but everything to do with the works of Jesus.

It's only by God's grace.

Now please note that peace is not given to everyone...

+ Luke 2:14(b) NLT— ... and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

So the opposite is also true, correct?

The other side of this coin is that peace does not come to those with whom God is displeased.

How do you know if God is pleased or displeased?

Luke 2:15 NLT— When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

Two things to note.

First, the shepherds heard the Gospel message—Jesus came to save sinners.

Second, they believed it.

It's the same thing today—

Romans 10:9—If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Saved from what? Saved from your sins. Saved from your guilt of being a sinner.

Romans 10:10— One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

→ Your life becomes A living Testimony "rightly!"

Romans 10:11— For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame,

Jesus

So, the mode and means of salvation have always been the same—whether it was for shepherds 2,000 years ago or for us today.

All that to say this.

So God the Father is pleased when you believe in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And God the Father is displeased when you disbelieve.

Luke 2:16 NLT— They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.

Luke 2:17 NLT— After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.

Can you imagine that conversation?

“Hi, I know that you don’t know us, but wow, do we have a story for you!”

Luke 2:18 NLT— All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished,

Luke 2:19 NLT— but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.

Luke 2:20 NLT— The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Once they had heard and believed, the shepherds could not help but tell others about it.

Once again, it’s what true Believers do today—we share Jesus day by day.

PREACH:

- Current events — living in the End Times?
- Fear of the unknown—wars and rumors of wars. *2024 news / financial melt down*
- Doesn’t matter what happens to you—the question is whether or not we believe in what Jesus says and to remain faithful.
- Scripture says we are to watch and pray.
- Fear shouldn’t shut us down. It should wake us up!
- That’s what the local Church—does. Wakes sinners up.
- Calls those back who have walked away.
- And we make disciples of Jesus.
- Is God calling you? You’re invited to stay afterward, come again next week and join one of our many Bible studies.

How is life different in 2024?

How are you going to find life well?

PRAYER

Invite B.A.L

BENEDICTION

(May you) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pe. 3:18)

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