



Christmas According to the Shepherds

Luke 2:8-20

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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CHRISTMAS ACCORDING TO THE SHEPHERDS

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*He is born, He is born
The Son of God has come to dwell
The King of kings and Lord of lords
Emmanuel
He is born, He is born¹*

We love Christmas songs. The fun songs like “Jingle Bells” and the nostalgic songs like “I’m Dreaming of A White Christmas.” We love the romantic songs like “All I Want for Christmas Is You!”

One Christmas song that tugs at the heart is “I’ll Be Home for Christmas.” It was written in 1943 imagining a soldier writing a letter to reassure his family that he would make it home from war, even though he knew he might not. “I’ll be home for Christmas ... You can plan on me ... Please have snow and mistletoe and presents by the tree ... I’ll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams.”

The best songs, of course, are about the true Christmas, the first Christmas. “Joy to the world, the Lord is come” ... “O come, let us adore Him” ... “Silent night, holy night.” And as we just sang, “The First Noel.” “Noel” is the French word for Christmas and the Latin word for birth. So the “first Noel” refers to the first Christmas, the first birth, the first announcement.

Luke 2 records the first Noel, the night the birth of Jesus Christ was announced to shepherds watching over their flocks. The first Noel was the moment the Messiah was introduced to the world as an angel declared, “I bring you good news of a great joy ... For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:10-11, NAS). The most unique and most significant birth in history was the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. **HE IS BORN!**

From the moment things went wrong in the Garden of Eden, God has been passionately pursuing us. And He came after us in the form of a person – Jesus ... His Son ... the Christ ... the promised one ... the appointed Savior of the world. ***God loved us so much that He came after us, He became one of us, He gave His life for us, so that He might save us.***

We read the Christmas story year after year, not because it’s traditional and not because it’s sentimental. We read it because it’s true. We believe Jesus is the Son of God, who was born through the miracle of virgin birth, who sacrificed His life on the cross, and who supernaturally rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. We believe Jesus is the Savior of the world. That’s what Christmas means to us, worshipping and celebrating Jesus Christ as our Savior.

HE CAME AFTER US

Luke 2 records the first Noel of how *God loved us so much that He came after us.*

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to his hometown to register. So Joseph also went from Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he was descendant of King David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and she was expecting a child. While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:1-7, NIV).

One hundred years after Jesus was born, Justin was born. Justin was a Gentile and educated by four different philosophers, yet none of their teaching satisfied him. While on a visit to the seacoast, he met an old man, a Syrian Christian. The old man explained the prophets and told him about Jesus, and Justin became a Christian. Justin wrote extensively defending the Christian faith and was later martyred for his faith. Justin lived only 40 miles from Bethlehem, so he went there to find the place where Jesus was born. Some people took him to a cave their grandparents said was the birthplace of Jesus. In 330 AD, it was over this site that the Roman emperor Constantine built The Church of the Nativity. An altar marks the spot where Jesus was supposedly born.² Historians point out that animals were often stabled inside a cave, which served as a basement upon which a house was built.³ Feeding troughs were cut into the stone walls of the cave, and such a feeding trough would have been a manger for Jesus. But the point is that the significance of the birth of Jesus was known and honored throughout the region.

The night Jesus was born some shepherds were out under the stars watching their sheep.⁴ It was a scene that had been repeated unchanged for thousands of years, until that night. Something happened that night that had never happened before. “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people’” (Luke 2:9-10, NIV).⁵

The Gospel is good news because, from the moment things went wrong in the Garden of Eden, God has been passionately pursuing us. The Bible says Jesus came “to seek and to save those who are lost” (Luke 19:10). Human history is a divine search and rescue. *God loved us so much that He came after us.*

HE BECAME ONE OF US

He loved us so much that He became one of us. “For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you, you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:11-12, NAS).

The Savior, “a baby.” The Savior, “has been born.” What does that mean? It means God became one of us. It means He stepped down from majesty to a manger. It means all the creative power of the universe was contained in a 7-pound baby. It means Mary held God in her arms. It

means, as Luke 2:11 says, God as “a baby wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger.” He became one of us.

To confirm His humanity, the New Testament includes the genealogies of Jesus. But what can we learn from a list of dead people? The answer is a lot. Matthew’s account of Jesus begins with this verse. “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). Matthew wrote to convince Jewish readers that Jesus was the promised Messiah. That’s why he began with the genealogy, including the names of David, the king of Israel, and Abraham, the father of Israel. Matthew 1 traces the genealogy of Jesus through his mother Mary, and Luke 3 traces His genealogy through His father Joseph. Both trace the genealogy of Jesus back to David, to Abraham, and even to Adam.⁶

The genealogies remind us that with each generation came the rebirth of hope. Every generation hoped the Messiah would come in their lifetime. As we scan the list of names, we see that hope passed down from generation to generation. Each generation knew they were one step closer to the day when the Messiah would come.

One Messianic scholar writes, “As the Son of David, it means Jesus is king. As the Son of Abraham, it means Jesus is a Jew. As the Son of Adam, it means Jesus is a man. As the Son of God, it means Jesus is God.”⁷

Again, the genealogies confirm the humanity of Jesus. ***God loved us so much that He became one of us.*** The Bible says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1, 14, NAS). The Bible says, “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9, NIV). The Bible says, “This is the great mystery of our faith, that Christ was revealed in a human body” (1 Timothy 3:16, NLT).

But does God in a manger mean God reduced? No, never reduced. Infancy, yes, but always deity. Jesus was both human and divine.

- Human enough to nurse at His mother’s breast and divine enough to create the universe.⁸
- Human enough to be hungry⁹ and divine enough to be called the “bread of life.”¹⁰
- Human enough to be tempted¹¹ and divine enough to resist temptation.¹²
- Human enough to weep over those who had died¹³ and divine enough to raise them from the dead.¹⁴
- Jesus was human enough to bleed and to die¹⁵ and yet divine enough to come back to life conquering sin and death and promising the same to all who believe in Him.¹⁶

God loved us so much that He became one of us.

HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US

But the shocking part of the Gospel is that *God loved us so much that He gave His life for us*. That's what the angel meant when he said, "Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior" (Luke 2:11). Jesus came to save us, and to do that, He had to die for us. "There has been born for you a Savior." Jesus loved us so much that He gave His life for us.

Two places you would least expect to find God are in a manger and on a cross. In the manger, He took on our humanity. On the cross, He took on our sinfulness. It was in this fleshly, human form that Jesus did His work.

And Peter was an eyewitness. He was an eyewitness of the cross and would never forget that moment and what it meant. Peter wrote, "(Jesus) personally carried our sins in his body on the cross ... By his wounds we are healed" (1 Peter 2:24, NLT). Paul would never forget the moment he understood the cross. He writes, "In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God's grace!" (Ephesians 1:7, NCV). John would never forget what Jesus said. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

When we deserved it the least, God loved us the most. When we deserved it the least, Jesus gave His life for us. That's how much He loved us.¹⁷ Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said of those He loved, "I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (Isaiah 49:16, NAS). Seven hundred years later, that prophecy was fulfilled on the cross. His love for us was literally nailed into His hands!

When the other disciples had seen the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes, Thomas was not there, and he couldn't believe it. Thomas said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were ... I will not believe it" (John 20:25, NIV). Then Jesus appeared to Thomas and offered His hand. "See My hands, Thomas."¹⁸ How's that for proof? Jesus holds out His hands to the world and says, "This is how much I love you!" God loved us so much that He gave His Son, and *Jesus loved us so much that He gave His life for us*.

I AM THE DOOR

Luke 1 tells the Christmas story from Mary's perspective. Matthew 1 tells the story from Joseph's perspective. And Luke 2 is the Christmas story according to the shepherds. We learn a lot from them about the birth of Jesus. But Jesus helps us even more by using several metaphors to describe Himself. He referred to Himself as "the light of the world" and as "the bread of life."¹⁹ He also referred to Himself as "the door."

Jesus said, "I am the door" (John 10:9, ESV). But the disciples did not understand what He meant.²⁰ So He explained, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved ... I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:9-11, ESV). Jesus is both the shepherd and the door because they are one in the same.

What was true then is true today. Sheep are helpless, are often lost, cannot sniff for food, and have no instinct to find their way home. Sheep need a shepherd. And the bond between a shepherd and his sheep is as close as a man and his dog. When the shepherd calls, the sheep hear his voice and follow him.

In the fields at night, the shepherd would build a sheep pen. Usually a wall of rock or brush with a small entrance. At night, the shepherd would lie down in that entrance and sleep. In that way, the shepherd and the door are one in the same.

Think about it. A door serves two purposes. Entrance and protection. If you knock on the door of my house, I must open the door and give you permission to enter. And at night, I lock my door to protect my family. So the shepherd, being the door to the sheep pen, gave both permission to enter and protection from danger.²¹

So when Jesus said, “I am the door,” He is giving us permission to enter into God’s presence, into God’s grace, into God’s family. “I am the door. If anyone enters by me (if anyone believes in me), he will be saved” (John 10:9, ESV). We see this throughout the New Testament. Romans 5:2 says, “Through him we have obtained access by faith” (ESV).²² Hebrews 10 says, “We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10:19, NAS).

Jesus made it clear when He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NAS). Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and the only way to God. And Peter declared it when he said, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name ... by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12, ESV).²³ Jesus is “the door.” It’s simple and uncomplicated. Jesus is the Son of God and the only way to God.

Some might complain and say, “Why should we accept that there’s only one way to God?” Because of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection proves Jesus is the Son of God and the only way to God. Again, Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NAS). Jesus said, “I am the door. If anyone enters by me (if anyone believes in me), he will be saved” (John 10:9, ESV).

THAT HE MIGHT SAVE US

God loved us so much that He came after us, He became one of us, He gave His life for us, so that He might save us. “For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior” (Luke 2:11). That statement was made to a few shepherds, but that statement is for us as well. “For today in the city of David there has been born ***for you a Savior.***” And that’s exactly what we needed. We needed saving.

God sent His Son to free us from bondage to sin and guilt. We don’t have to be enslaved by those things anymore.

God sent His Son to save us from the lie that this life is all there is, from the lie that happiness can be found in what the world has to offer. We don’t have to believe the lie anymore.

God sent His Son to spare us from death. He came to rescue us from an eternity without Him. We don't have to fear death anymore.

Grace means we are forgiven. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12, NAS). No matter what we've done, no matter how bad it was, God is willing to forgive us of everything we've ever done wrong. Jesus paid the price for our sin. All we have to do is believe in Him and accept the free gift of His grace.²⁴

And grace means we are His children. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God, and that is who we are!" (1 John 3:1, NIV). Never doubt God's love for you. He gave His Son for you. And the moment you put your faith in Jesus you become a child of God, and nothing can ever change that.

CONCLUSION

Luke 2 is the "first Noel" – the first Christmas, the first birth, the first announcement.

"Some shepherds were out in the fields keeping watch over their flock one night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that 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'" (Luke 2:8-12).

*God loved us so much that
He came after us
He became one of us
He gave His life for us
so that He might save us
and that's why we worship Him*

NOTES

¹ “Noel (He Is Born)” – Songwriters, Tommee Profitt/Domain Writer Public, © Capitol Cmg Genesis, Tommee Profitt Songs.

² Merrill C. Tenney, Editor, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963, 1964, 1967), page 112.

³ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978, 1993), page 145.

⁴ See Luke 2:8.

⁵ Angels played a prominent role in the Christmas story. An angel visited Mary and told her that God had chosen her to give birth to the Messiah. An angel told a skeptical Joseph that it was all God’s plan. An angel told Zacharias the priest that the long-awaited Messiah was coming. And an angel appeared to some shepherds and told them Jesus was born.

⁶ The genealogy in Luke 3 goes all the way back to Adam, confirming that Adam was a real man and not a mythical character, also confirming that Jesus was a real man. The genealogy of Jesus confirms that He was a descendant of Abraham, the father of Israel, and a descendant of David, the king of Israel, fulfilling two criteria for being the Messiah (see Matthew 1:1). The genealogy of Jesus includes the names of four women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Three of these women had scandalous backgrounds marked by incest, prostitution, and adultery. These are the grandmothers of Jesus. All four were foreigners, non-Jews. Reiterating that He is the Savior for all nations.

⁷ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “The Genealogy of Jesus,” Jews for Jesus publications, www.jfjonline.org/pub/issues.

⁸ See Colossians 1:16.

⁹ See Matthew 4:2.

¹⁰ See John 6:48.

¹¹ See Matthew 4:1-11.

¹² See Hebrews 4:15.

¹³ See John 11:35.

¹⁴ See John 11:17-44.

¹⁵ See Matthew 27:50.

¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 15:55.

¹⁷ See Romans 5:8.

¹⁸ See John 20:27.

¹⁹ See John 8:12 and John 6:48.

²⁰ “(When) Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them” (John 10:6, NIV).

²¹ As “the door,” Jesus protects us, secures us, and no one can snatch us from His hand. He said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11, ESV). He said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28, ESV).

²² See also Ephesians 2:18 and 3:12.

²³ Paul adds, “There is one God and one mediator between God ... Jesus Christ” (1 Timothy 2:5).

²⁴ See Romans 10:9 and Ephesians 2:8-9.