

The Birth of Jesus

📖 Luke 2:1-20

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Last time we studied Luke 1:67-80. This is Zacharias' praise to God for the Messiah and the Messiah's forerunner, John. In early church history it was adopted as a hymn and became known as *The Benedictus*, the Latin word for "praise" or "blessing" at the beginning of verse 68. The introduction to his praise is verse 63 where he wrote on a tablet in wax, "his name is John." Verse 64 says that "at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began speaking in praise of God. The words he spoke in praise are probably verses 68-79. These words were prophetically given to him by the spirit of God. As verse 67 says, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and enabled to prophesy. Verses 68-75 are his prophetic praise to God for giving the Messiah. Verse 68, "Praise be the Lord God of Israel..." Note that He is uniquely the God of Israel. Israel is the nation that descends from Jacob who was renamed Israel. The reason He is the God of Israel is because He only made covenants with Israel. And why does Zacharias praise Him at this time? "For he has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people." Zacharias knew that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah. And because of that his visit and accomplishment of redemption for Israel was as good as accomplished. The redemption of Israel is their being set free from Gentile powers. Daniel had prophesied that Israel would be ruled by four Gentile kingdoms before being set free in the kingdom of God. In the 1st century they were being ruled by the fourth Gentile kingdom of Rome. He saw in Messiah's visitation being set free from Rome and restoration of the kingdom of God. In verse 69, he says God "has raised up a horn of salvation for us." Messiah is the horn of salvation. The horn signifies the power of the ox and when attributed to Messiah signifies His power to accomplish Israel's deliverance. The Messiah is from "the house of David, His servant." God made a covenant with David promising him an eternal house, an eternal throne, an eternal kingdom and an eternal descendant. The one in Mary's womb was the eternal descendant. In verse 70, God spoke this "by the mouth of all his holy prophets from old." This is well-known from OT prophecy. And what was well known is verse 71, that Messiah will provide "Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us." In verse 72, this would be a "show of mercy toward" the believing remnant, something generation after generation had longed for, God was now at work to do. This proved God remembered "His holy covenant," which verse 73 described and defined as an "oath which He swore to Abraham." God was remembering the Abrahamic Covenant promising Israel the land, the seed and the worldwide blessing. This was a covenant of mercy because God was not obligated to enter into this covenant. And it's this covenant that

ensures Israel's Messianic deliverance into the kingdom for all those who have enjoyed spiritual deliverance through the terms of the new covenant. When they enter into the kingdom, verse 74 says they will be granted the ability to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness all their days, which is the hope of all the prophets and all Israel. So verses 68-75 are Zacharias' praise related to God sending the Messiah to fulfill the Abrahamic, Davidic, Land and New Covenants. And it shows you how compulsive this man was with the OT Scriptures and how he emphasized the very things that we emphasize, namely, the covenants. Now in verse 76 he shifts his attention to John, the forerunner of the Messiah. And he says, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High." This is the first place John is explicitly referred to as a prophet. This was significant because there had not been a prophet in Israel since Malachi, over 400 years before. The prophet would always precede and introduce the king, so John's role would be to "go on before the Lord to prepare the way. That way when the Messiah came they would believe in Him. In verse 77 it says John would "give" them the "knowledge of salvation" and "the forgiveness of sin." Salvation and forgiveness are available only through faith in the Messiah, not through keeping the law or Pharisaic traditions. Salvation is only through faith. And why had God sent the Messiah to provide this salvation? Verse 78, "Because of the deep seated mercy of God." It's only based on His mercy and not anything in Israel, not anything in you, not anything in me. Therefore, in verse 79, He was sending the Messiah who is the "the morning star from heaven." And what Messiah was sent to do was "to visit" those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, these were the Gentiles. And He was sent to guide into the way of peace, this was His mission to the Jews, to bring them into the way of peace in the kingdom. And finally, in verse 80 he returns briefly to John. The verse summarizes John's childhood and development. It says he grew physically and spiritually and he lived a very unique life in the wilderness alone until the day of his public appearance when he came baptizing at the Jordan River.

Now we'll just add one more thing about John and this description of life in the wilderness in verse 80. Because of where John lived, which is known as the wilderness, and the Valley of Arabah, which is the region north of and around the Dead Sea, there has been speculation as to whether John was an Essene, which was a sect of Jews that lived at Qumran, a community near where John lived, located on the NW side of the Dead Sea. This is the community that produced or housed many of the Dead Sea Scrolls that were first discovered in the 1930's. They were an ascetic community that rejected the priesthood in Jerusalem. They believed they were the children of light and the rest were children of darkness. There would be a clash between light and darkness and then the teacher of righteousness, Messiah, would come and establish his kingdom. Some have speculated whether John was a part of this sect because John grew up in the same area, he had a similar ascetic life and he held to many of the same prophetic ideas. However, John was probably not a part of this group. John had a particular mission given to him by God, it was to go before the Lord to prepare the way. The Qumran sect did not follow John and they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. If John had been a part of that sect we would have expected there to have been at least some mention of their support of John in his ministry and a turning to the Messiah. It

seems better to see John's life in the wilderness as that of a loner, one who was growing up separate from all sects in order to be set apart and prepared to preach his unique message.

Having seen the birth of John and a summary of his early life and development, today we come to Luke 2:1-20, the birth of Jesus. It may not seem like the right time of year to celebrate the birth of Jesus, it's not December 25. But we have no way of knowing for sure that Jesus was born, as the Western church holds, on December 25. This date was chosen in the early church in connection with the winter solstice and the worship of Saturnalia. It is very likely that the Christians decided to celebrate Christ's birth on the winter solstice as a substitute for the pagan worship of Saturnalia. In any case, we don't know exactly what time of year or what day He was born. Having said that, I am not saying it could not have been in December or January, it could have been. There is no good evidence either way. We really don't know and so while we may celebrate Christ's birth on Dec 25, it may have happened on July 18.

All we can say definitively is that it was about six months after John's birth. And people have tried to date Christ's birth from John's birth, by trying to determine what time of year Zacharias' order was serving in the Temple. But that was chosen by lot every year and so every year differed. So it has never been discovered that way either. But we do know they were born six months apart from one another. And what is far more important is what is in the text, not speculations about what is not in the text. What is in the text is Luke's deliberate comparisons and contrasts of the two births. As far as comparisons, in both instances the angel Gabriel makes the announcement. In both instances a parent is surprised. In both instances a woman who is childless gets pregnant. In both instances it is a supernatural pregnancy. What these comparisons do is connect John and Jesus as having a unique place in the plan of God. As far as contrasts, in the announcement of John, it is the father, Zacharias, who receives the revelation, whereas in the announcement of Jesus, it is the mother, Mary. In the announcement of John, the revelation took place in the temple in Jerusalem, but in the announcement of Jesus, the revelation took place in Nazareth, a small city in the Galilee. In the announcement of John, Zacharias does not believe, but in the announcement of Jesus, Mary does believe. In the announcement of John, the revelation is that he will be great, but in the announcement of Jesus, He will be greater. In the announcement of John, the woman who conceives is not a virgin, but in the announcement of Jesus the woman who conceives is a virgin. What these contrasts do is distinguish John from Jesus and show that Jesus is greater than John.

We come now to Luke 2:1-20 and Luke's narration of Jesus' birth. Constable said, "Luke's brief account of Jesus' birth emphasizes three things. He described the political situation to explain why Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This set Jesus' birth in a context of world history and anticipated His cosmic significance. Second, Luke connected Bethlehem with David to show that Jesus qualified as the Messiah. Finally, he presented Jesus' humble beginnings and so introduced the themes of Jesus' identification with the poor and His rejection." In other words, the way in which Luke narrated the birth, was to accomplish his purposes with his gospel. Luke

wanted to show that Jesus came for the whole world in fulfillment of Israel's covenants, and in particular for those who are poor and downtrodden and broken in order to set them free from bondage to sin.

In 2:1-3 let's look at the historical setting of Jesus' birth. Luke narrates the setting of Jesus' birth as occurring within the larger Roman world. Therefore, his birth has universal significance. This is part of Luke's emphasis on Jesus' coming not only for Israel but for the Gentiles. **Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.** The words **in those days** refer to the days of John's birth. It was those days that Augustus issued this decree. **Augustus** was **Caesar** from 27BC to AD14, setting the births of John and Jesus within that time frame. Of course, the Romans were working with a different calendar based on the founding of Rome, but once the BC/AD system was developed several centuries later, the dates were coincided so that on our calendar system he ruled from 27BC to AD14. This Augustus was more commonly known as Octavian and he is known to have issued several decrees to take a census of the realms in which he ruled. But this **decree** was unique in that it was **a census be taken of all the inhabited earth**. In other words, this was a very large undertaking. The purpose of this **census** was to gain statistical data in order to levy taxes. Fruchtenbaum said, "This was not an income tax, but a property tax, which shows the reason for the sojourn to Bethlehem." The phrase **of all the inhabited earth** is *πασαν την οικουμενην*. It may seem to refer to the entire inhabited world; including North America, South America, Asia, Africa, etc...but the meaning is limited in context to the Roman Empire. Because the word translated **all** (*πασαν*), may be limited in a context, those who hold to limited atonement, the idea that Christ did not die for all men, but only for the elect, use this passage to support that idea. However, in the passages that say Christ died for all men, the context does not limit it to the elect only. Therefore, the limited use of "all" in Luke 2:1 does not support a limited use of "all" in other passages, but commits the error of illegitimate totality transfer, that is, the illegitimate transfer of the meaning of a word in one context into the meaning of a word in another context. Just because "all" can be used in a limited way in some contexts, does not mean that it can be used that way in all contexts (no pun intended). It must be argued from context since context determines usage. In any case, the point here is that the census was to be taken of the entire Roman Empire.

In verse 2 it says, **This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.** This is perhaps the most contested historical fact cited by Luke. From secular history we know that **Quirinius** served as governor of the Roman province of Syria at least twice; once in 3-2BC and again in AD6-7. However, we also know that Herod died in 4BC and that Jesus was born before Herod died. Therefore, the problem is that if **Quirinius** did not serve as **governor** until 3BC, how is it that Jesus was born at least a year before? However, it should be noted that just because we do not have record of **Quirinius** serving as governor before 3BC, it does not mean that he did not. The absence of a record does not equate to the absence of a historical event. **Quirinius** may very well have served as governor in 8BC and in the future some record may be discovered to that effect. Further, the word in verse 2 translated "first" may be translated as "prior to," as in John 15:18. If that's Luke's intention then it should be translated, "This was the census *before* **Quirinius** was governor of Syria." That could solve the problem by

moving the census before Herod's death in 4BC. Another possibility is that the term in verse 2 translated **governor** could be taken in a less technical sense as "an administrator." That would mean that Luke was telling us that this census took place when **Quirinius** was still in an administrative position before he became governor. If that's the case, the census could also have been taken before Herod's death in 4BC. Either solution is a valid way of handling the text so it really matters very little. Ultimately Jesus had to be born before Herod died and this is fixed to be in the early summer of 4BC. When the Magi came to Jerusalem looking for the King of the Jews, Herod was alarmed and sent out soldiers to kill every baby boy in the environs of Bethlehem that was two years old and under. But we don't know how long before Herod died that he sent the command to slaughter. My point is that there is not enough information to determine the year of Jesus' birth, much less the day. He could easily have been in 7, 6, 5 or 4BC. Fruchtenbaum concludes, "Insofar as the biblical record is concerned, there are no details given that make it possible to determine with any certainty the season of the year in which Yeshua was born, let alone the exact month and day."

Whenever the decree was issued, verse 3 says, **And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.** This reveals to us that everyone was traveling. The roads would have been busy and the inns would have been crowded. In verse 4 **Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.** It says that **Joseph went up from Galilee** because the area of **Judea** was of higher elevation than **Galilee**. The **city** that he went up from was **Nazareth**. As mentioned before, this was a small town at the time. The people that lived there were known as the Natsoreans and they believed that they were from the house of David and that the Messiah would come from among them. Joseph evidently lived among them at the time. However, in order to register he needed to go **to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David.** Joseph was a descendant of King **David** and had Davidic throne rights, but he *could not* exercise those rights because he was under the curse of Jeconiah. Jesus received his throne rights from Joseph, who was his legal father, but because He was born of a virgin, He was not under the curse and *could* exercise His throne rights.

Joseph was going up **to the city of David which is also called Bethlehem.** There are actually two cities of David and two Bethlehem's, so it is important to distinguish this **city of David** as the one that is also **called Bethlehem.** Every Jew familiar with the OT Scriptures would know that this **Bethlehem** was the one referred to in Micah 5:2 as "Bethlehem Ephrathah," the place where Messiah would be born. Since Joseph was of the tribe of Judah and the house of David, his land inheritance was in this area. In order to fulfill the requirements of the census, he would have to be present for an assessment of his property.

Therefore, in verse 5, Joseph went up **in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.** The distance of travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem is 90 miles. We don't know what mode of transportation they had, and whether they had a donkey or not as is commonly pictured. But the real question is

why did Joseph take **along Mary** when she was only **engaged to him, and was with child**? The word **engaged** is *μνηστευω* and means “woo and win, betroth.” In other words, it referred to having wooed a woman into betrothal. Betrothal was a stronger relationship than our engagement. When a Jewish woman was betrothed to a Jewish man a legal document was drawn up that was signed by both the fathers. The document stated that legally the man and woman were husband and wife. The only way the betrothal could be undone was by a legal divorce. There is evidence that in Judea the betrothal was so strong that the husband and wife could live together before the marriage, though in the Galilee this was not accepted. So there is a bit of ambiguity regarding whether Joseph and Mary might have lived together before their marriage. But what is not ambiguous is stated in Matt 1:25, “but he kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son...” So it’s possible they had been living together in Nazareth, and if she were already pregnant it might even seem appropriate, but it’s not certain. In any case, if they were living together before, it explains why they travelled together during the betrothal. However, there is also something else here to consider. They both knew from the angel Gabriel and from Elizabeth and the fact that she was undoubtedly showing, that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah. They also both knew from Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. When they heard the decree of Augustus Caesar that a census be taken of all the Roman Empire they must have interpreted this as God’s providential way of moving them to Bethlehem for the fulfillment of prophecy. If so, it is hard for me to imagine that Joseph would go to Bethlehem without her.

Now we see the purpose of Luke 2:1-7. What Luke is saying is that the prophecies of God are greater than the decrees of man, and that the prophecies of God use the decrees of man in order to find fulfillment. This is an elegant passage demonstrating that God and His word are above all kings and kingdoms and all senates and houses and all governments around the world. And that His purposes will be established, not apart from these human purposes, but in and through them, that He might receive all the glory.

And in verse 6 we see them being fulfilled, **While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.** Verse 6 says, **while they were there.** We don’t know how many days **they were there.** It is assumed by many that they arrived just days before the birth, but we don’t know that. It could have been a month or two or more. But **while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.** The nine months gestation was complete. And **she gave birth to her firstborn son.** It is significant that it says **her firstborn son** and not “their firstborn son.” The son belonged to her in the sense that she made a contribution of humanity to the son, whereas Joseph did not, but her contribution was overshadowed by the Most High God so that she did not transmit the sinful disposition to the son. The son is referred as **firstborn.** There are several meanings of **firstborn son** and it is difficult to determine which one Luke meant in this context, but I think it refers to Exod 13:2 and 12. That passage is at the Exodus and the Jewish mothers were to offer their firstborn son, the one that opened the womb, to the Lord, to be set apart for Him.

This would affirm the virgin birth and it would also set Him apart to the Lord, getting us prepared for 2:23-24 where they go to the Temple to present Him to the Lord.

Now what it says she did next has been discussed at great length. **And she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.** An **inn** in the Greek is καταλυματι and refers to “a lodging place.” These lodging places might be a guest room in a house or any place of lodging. It does not really refer to something like a hotel. The one referred to here sounds like a single guest room. It says **there was no room for them in the inn**, singular. There was only one inn in Bethlehem and with so many people traveling to Bethlehem to register, **there was no room for them.** The innkeeper is usually considered to be the villain in the story, banishing a poor pregnant woman from the inn. However, the real reason was probably more along the lines that she was pregnant, and if the time came for her to give birth, it would have greatly inconvenienced his other guests. Putting all these facts together, while I can’t say for sure how long they remained in Bethlehem until it came time for her to give birth, it seems they had not been there very long. In any case, they had to find another place. What they found is described elsewhere as a stable. Fruchtenbaum said, “This was not like a modern-day barn, but, as was common in the hill country of Judah, it was a cave used for sheltering animals.” These caves are low-lying in the hillsides. The countryside is littered with these caves. She took the child and wrapped Him in cloths. These are what people are talking about when they say “swaddling clothes.” What they were seems to be thin strips of cloth wrapped around Him, the significance of which we will talk about later. And she **laid Him in a manger.** The **manger** was most likely “a feeding trough.” The caves were used to shelter animals at night and so they usually had feeding troughs. These feeding troughs were carved out of rock. They have been found throughout the Land of Israel.

So verses 1-7 are written to narrate the setting of the birth as occurring during the reign of Augustus Caesar when he issued a decree to take a census of the entire Roman Empire and to show that God’s prophecies work over and in and through the decrees of all human kingdoms to bring about His purposes.

Now in verses 8-14 we see the first group to whom the birth was announced, some shepherds. **In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.** The reason the first announcement was made to a group of shepherds is not agreed upon. One view is that it is because the shepherds were of low class, low in society, and that the Messiah came to save the meek and lowly. It is true that rabbinic sources report that shepherds during Jesus’ day were often held in contempt and considered untrustworthy. They were consistently grouped with tax collectors and revenue farmers. As such this view came to see the shepherds as symbols of sinners. This view is possible, considering that Luke emphasizes that Jesus came for the despised and the lowly. Another view is that the shepherds in view here were Levitical shepherds who watched over the temple flocks destined for sacrifice in the Temple. If true, this might signify that the Lamb of God is the sacrifice who would take away the sin of the whole world. The Old Testament mentions “The Tower of the Flock” twice as a location shepherds who attended to the flocks destined for

sacrifice in the Temple would watch over their flock. Brown said, "In Mishnah Shekalim 7:4 we are told that animals found between Jerusalem and Migdal Eder (near Bethlehem) were used for Temple sacrifice, and this tradition has been invoked as support for the idea that the Lucan shepherd in the region near Bethlehem were especially sacred shepherds." Edersheim adds that "...in the Jewish mindset it was "a settled conviction" that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The people were equally convinced that "He was to be revealed from Migdal Eder, "the tower of the flock." This tower was located close to the road to Jerusalem, and a "passage in the Mishnah (Shek. 7.4) leads to the conclusion, that the flocks, which pastured there, were destined for Temple-sacrifices, and, accordingly, that the shepherds, who watched over them, were not ordinary shepherds." He goes on to speculate that these shepherds went back to the Temple and shared what they saw and heard so that the people in verse 18 who "heard it" and "wondered at these things" were the priests and worshippers in the Temple, helping us understand why people like Simeon and Anna were expecting His arrival at the Temple as described later in this chapter. It's not clear which of these views is best and why the angel of the Lord appeared to them. Did he appear to them to reveal that the Messiah came to save sinners, even lowly shepherds, the despised, etc...and thus the announcement was first made to them? Or did he appear to them so that they would return to the Temple with the good news that Messiah had been born? The latter seems more plausible to me in light of verse 10, "I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people." He came for all people, not just the meek and lowly and despised. But for prophets, priests, and kings as well. Ultimately He came for anyone and everyone, but the focus here is Israel.

In verse 9 we see what appeared to them on that otherwise uneventful night. **An angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.** The **angel of the Lord** is not identified, but it is an angel, not the pre-incarnate Christ, and he **stood before them**, and was therefore on the ground unlike most representations. And **the glory of the Lord shone around them.** The **glory of the Lord** is the Shechinah Glory. The Shechinah Glory is the term used to describe a visible manifestation of God, something that indicates His presence. In the OT the Shechinah Glory is seen as a "smoking oven" in Gen 15, as a consuming fire on Mt Sinai in Exod 24:17, as well as a cloud, and as the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night in Exod 40:38. Many think, and I agree, that the star that signaled to the Magi that the King of the Jews had been born in the land was the Shechinah Glory and not a literal star. Shechinah Glory is always associated with light and it is always associated with **the glory of the Lord**. The Lord sent an angel and Shechinah Glory shining around the shepherds to announce the birth of the Savior. It is therefore understandable that **they were terribly frightened.**

But in verse 10 **the angel** calmed their fears, saying, **"Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."** The angel obviously detected their fear and immediately allayed it saying, **Do not be afraid.** The reason for no fear is because the announcement is not one of ill will but of **good news, news** that will bring **great joy...for all the people...today...a Savior...Messiah...** Constable said, "Significant terms

characteristic of Luke's Gospel occur in the angel's announcement indicating its importance. These include "bring good news" (Gr. *euangelizomai*), "joy" (Gr. *chara*), "people" (Gr. *laos*), "today" (Gr. *semeron*), "Savior" (Gr. *soter*), "Lord" (Gr. *kyrios*), and "glory" (Gr. *doxa*). This angelic announcement then is a seed bed for important ideas that Luke traced through the rest of this book." The word **good news** is *ευαγγελιζομαι*, from which we get "evangelism." It is a proclamation of good news. This good news will bring **great joy**. This joy will be **for all the people**. **All the people** does not refer to Jews and Gentiles, but to Jews, as it has been in the narrative up to this point. The relationship of Jesus and salvation to Gentiles will only become apparent later as Israel rejects Jesus and the door is opened to include Gentiles.

The good news is that **today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord**. This **Savior** is not destined to come in the distant future, but he is here **today**, and nearby to the shepherds, **in the city of David**. And He is three things. He is **Savior, Christ** and **Lord**. First, as **Savior** He is the deliverer of His people from their enemies. These enemies are physical and spiritual. Israel expected God to save them from both their physical enemies, such as the Gentile nations, as well as spiritual enemies, such as sin. The one who was born that day in the city of David was that **Savior**. Second, as **Christ** he is Messiah. Christ is simply the Greek word for the Hebrew Messiah. Both words mean "the anointed one." Those anointed in the OT were usually kings and priests who were being commissioned into an office. In some sense they were messiah's, but they all looked forward to and pre-figured the Messiah, the Davidite who would deliver. Third, as **Lord** He is sovereign. Luke doesn't explain it here, but he will as his gospel unfolds. He wants us to see Jesus as the people of Israel would see Him, starting from His earthly origins as a baby born and laid in a manger who grew up as a Jew in the land of Israel but who also had heavenly origins, as the Lord God. For now it is enough for Luke to simply state that He is Lord, as his gospel progresses he will fill out the meaning.

In verse 12 the angel gives the shepherds one sign with two aspects. **This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger**. Now for something to be **a sign** it doesn't have to be supernatural, but it does have to be unusual. It can't just be something ordinary. So what does it mean the baby would be **wrapped in cloths**? Whatever it means it was something unusual. Some think that the cloths were narrow strips that were wrapped around the infant to restrict movement or to straighten the limbs. Others think that the baby wrapped in cloths was a sign because the Jews expected the Messiah to come as an adult. Still others think that the swaddling clothes represented the low and humble estate of the child who is the Messiah and Savior. I don't like any of these suggestions. Pentecost suggested that what was unusual was that the baby was swaddled with thin strips of cloth that resembled burial cloths. In addition to this the other unusual aspect was that He was lying in a feeding trough. Thus, the sign was that He would be found wrapped in strips of cloth that resembled burial cloths and lying in a feeding trough inside a cave. Pentecost said, "Instead of a palace, there was a manger. Instead of the purple garment of royalty, there were swaddling clothes." Fruchtenbaum followed Pentecost and said, "It was not unusual for a baby to be wrapped in baby clothes. Being strips of cloth, as Pentecost suggested, gave the appearance of burial cloth. The symbolism should not be missed. On the very

first day of His life, He was wrapped with the same type of cloth He would again be wrapped with on the last day of His life, showing the purpose of His birth.”

Now all this has been revealed by one angel that stood before the shepherds that night with the Shechinah Glory shining around them. But in verse 13 we read, **And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.** The Greek for **multitude of the heavenly host** is really “a multitude of the heavenly army.” The angels in heaven constitute God’s army. They are involved in fighting the angelic conflict with fallen angels as depicted in Dan 10. So what the shepherds saw was an angelic army. And what this angelic army was doing was **praising God.** This praise would reveal to the shepherds where this baby came from and His significance.

Verse 14, saying, **Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.** The first aspect of their praise is to glorify God. **Glory to God in the highest.** The expression in English would mean something like “the most glory, or height of glory,” but the Greek is different. The meaning is “Glory to God in the highest heaven.” They are identifying the location of God as the highest heaven and ascribing glory to Him. This contrasts with earth which they address in their praise next. **And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.** In other words, the group that will receive **peace on earth**, will be the men **with whom He is pleased.** **The men with whom He is pleased** are those who believe in this child that is born and lying wrapped in a manger. He is the Savior, Messiah, Lord. Where those who believe in Him will receive peace is said to be **on earth.** This is a reference to the **peace** that will be brought to earth in the kingdom. The kingdom is an earthly kingdom in the sense that it is located, it’s sphere is on earth. It is also called the kingdom of heaven because it is a kingdom that is sourced in heaven or comes from heaven. It is also called the kingdom of God because it is a kingdom that is established by God. Putting all the descriptions together we conclude that the kingdom is God’s rule of heaven on earth. As such the kingdom will be characterized by peace. There will be no war. But this will only be entered into by those with whom He is pleased, that is, those who believe in this child.

In verses 15-20 we see the shepherd’s response to this good news. They rushed to Bethlehem, they found the baby just as had been told them. They went out and told others about this Child and everyone who heard what they said marveled at these things. And so again there was a spreading of the good news to many, just like with John six months before, so that the testimony was going out more than 30 years before John and Jesus would appear on the scene again. So there was no excuse, the people of Israel should have known. It was told them by the shepherds. But Mary, she treasured all these things in her heart. We’ll talk more about this next week, but she pondered them in her heart. This word **pondered** is *συμβάλλω* and means “to give careful thought to.” It means she was thinking carefully about all that had transpired through her and how it was the culmination of the Messianic prophecies spoken by God through the mouth of all the prophets. And as for the shepherds, they went back to their flocks, praising and glorifying God for all they had heard and seen just as had been told them.

In summary, in verse 1 it was in the days of John's birth that Caesar Augustus decreed a census be taken of the entire Roman Empire. In verse 2 this census was either before Quirinius was governor of Syria or when he was at first an administrator of Syria. In verse 3, everyone in the Roman Empire was on his way to register for the census, in order to be there for the assessment of their property. In verse 4 Joseph went up from Galilee, the city of Nazareth to Judea, the city of David which is the one also called Bethlehem, because he was of the house of David. In verse 5 his purpose was to register along with Mary. The two went together even though they were only betrothed and she was pregnant because they recognized that God was using Caesar's decree to take them to Bethlehem for the birth of the Messiah. In verse 6, while they were there, it came time for her to give birth. She gave birth to her firstborn son and she wrapped Him in thin linen cloths that appeared like burial cloths and laid him in a feeding trough because there was no room in the inn. Out in the surrounding hill country, verse 8 says there were some shepherds, probably shepherds that kept watch over the flock destined for sacrifice at the temple, and in verse 9 an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them and Shechinah Glory light shone around them and they were understandably terribly afraid. But in verse 11 the angel allayed their fears and said, I bring good news that will bring great joy that is for all the people. That good news is verse 11, that today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. What they heard was that a Savior Messiah had been born and He is sovereign. In verse 12 the one sign would have two aspects; he would be wrapped in unusual cloths, what appeared like burial cloths, and he would be laid in an unusual place, a feeding trough. Then in verse 13 an entire army of angels appeared and praised God saying Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace among men with whom He is pleased, that is, those who believe in this child. And in verse 15 when the angels had gone the shepherds went straightaway to Bethlehem to see this sight and in verse 16 they saw and spread the news and in verse 18 many marveled at what they were told, but in verse 19 Mary treasured all these things, thinking about them, and in verse 20 the shepherds went back glorifying God.

What can we learn? Messiah has already come. Messiah had a human birth. Messiah is a Savior. Messiah was testified at His birth. Messiah was seen. Messiah was marveled at. God was praised. Yet, as we will see, this is only the first part of the story. The second part is Messiah was rejected. Messiah died. Messiah rose. Messiah ascended. Messiah is exalted in heaven at the right hand of the Father. Messiah sent the Spirit. And the third part is that Messiah is coming again! Messiah will establish His kingdom. Messiah will rule forevermore. Then there will be peace on earth.