

Good News Of Great Joy For All People

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 21st, 2008 • Merry Christmas • Pastor Chris Lankford

DO NOT BE AFRAID; FOR BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY WHICH WILL BE FOR ALL THE PEOPLE; FOR TODAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID THERE HAS BEEN BORN FOR YOU A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD. THIS WILL BE A SIGN FOR YOU: YOU WILL FIND A BABY WRAPPED IN CLOTHS AND LYING IN A MANGER.

~LUKE 2:10-12 (NASB)

1) The Promises Are For All People

- A) The miraculous virgin birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:18-25, 24-25; Luke 1:26-35) in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, cf. Matthew 2:1, John 7:42) was the fulfillment of many promises which God had made through history to the Jews (Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3, 17:1-8).

- B) The "Good News" of Jesus Christ (Gospel) was not limited to the Jewish people alone, but was also (as promised, cf. Isaiah 9:2-7) "for all people" (Luke 2:10, cf. Galatians 3:28).

2) The Promise Of Christmas

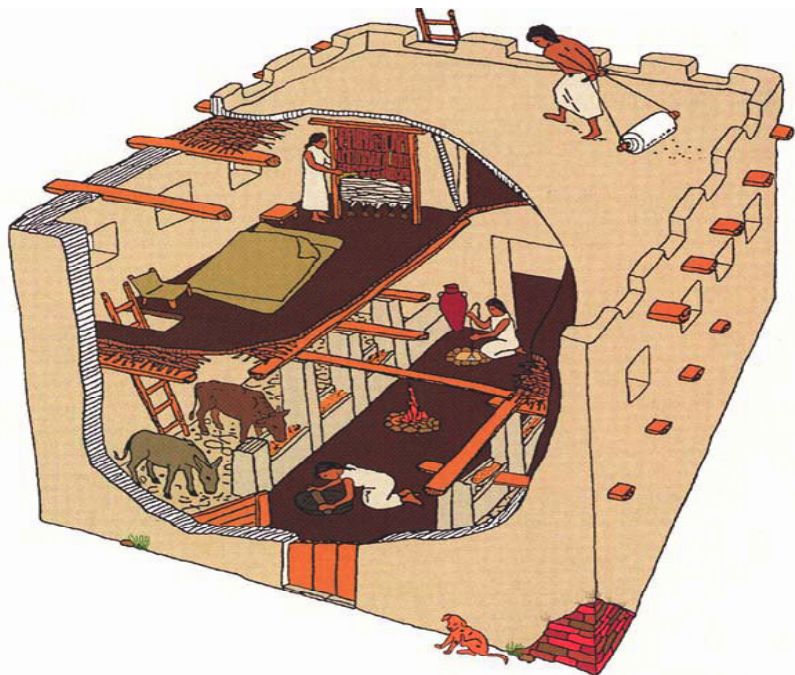
- A) The marvelous story of Jesus Christ's miraculous birth is magnificently recorded in Luke 2:1-20. Jesus Christ truly is 'God with Us' (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23).

- B) Caesar Augustus* is portrayed by Luke as an unwitting agent of God (Luke 2:1). His decree makes it possible for Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem, the town of the royal-line of David (1st Samuel 17:12).

- C) The purpose of a census was to make an assessment for taxes, and for Roman citizens, to assure registration for military service. Church history tells us that it was Jewish custom to travel back to your hometown for a census (2:3).

* One of the most significant historical issues in all of the Bible is located here in Luke 2:1-7. The association of a census taken during the governorship in Syria of Quirinius is widely debated. Historically speaking, there is no evidence of such a census ever being conducted during the time of Caesar Augustus, and the only census historically recorded during Quirinius' reign was in A.D. 6 and is well documented because it caused widespread revolt. Further, the Roman census of Jesus' time would not require Joseph to go to Bethlehem, as Roman census' never required this kind of "hometown travel." In fact, historical records show that Quirinius was not a governor in Syria during the time when Jesus was born. The answers to these objections are lengthy, and not appropriate for a simple footnote. I would direct you to Darrell L. Bock's "Excursus #2" (pages 903-909) from *Luke 1:1-9:50, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, for a more thorough discussion. I have made several copies of this selected section available in the lobby this morning, please take a copy for further study. Suffice it to say though, for our purposes here, that a census during the reign of Augustus, and a Jewish-styled census (which would require Joseph to travel to Bethlehem), along with the impending birth of Jesus (making Mary's travel more necessary), and a lower governmental role for Quirinius which could have placed him in a position to have administrated more than just the census of A.D. 6, are all historically plausible explanations for Luke's recording of the facts in Luke 2. As Bock notes, "it is clear that the relegation of Luke 2:2 to the category of historical error is premature and erroneous." I would conclude this note with a final thought... When sharing the message of the Good News with others, these types of objections can be presented with great intellectual force and persuasiveness. Do not be deterred by these compelling presentations. Check out the facts and historical data for yourself, and I believe you will be satisfied with the content of the Scriptures. The Word of God is truly sufficient for all we need (Hebrews 4:12-13)!

- D) Joseph returns with Mary to Bethlehem because he is of the line of King David (2:4). During this time in Bethlehem, Mary delivers her firstborn son, Jesus (2:6).
- E) The reference to an “inn” in Luke 2:7 was most probably the main guest room in the family home of Joseph (cf., Luke 22:11)†. The manger was most probably a feeding trough attached to the lowest area of the home.



† The passage tells us that Joseph and Mary were there because there was no room at the *κατάλυμα* (*katalumati*, public shelter). *Κατάλυμα* suggests that a formal inn is not in view here. The LXX (Septuagint) refers to the public shelters where many people might father for the night under one roof, cf. Exodus 4:24. Luke 22:11 uses the term of a guest room in a house, while 10:34 uses *πανδοχείον* (*pandocheion*) to describe a formal inn. The Christmas associations of an inn and an innkeeper, however, do not reflect the language of Luke’s text. Rather, *κατάλυμα* seems to refer to either some type of reception room or guest room in a private home or some type of public shelter. Since that location was full, the stable was utilized. It is also notable that Bethlehem was a very small village without a great number of overnight travelers because of its proximity to Jerusalem. A public inn would not be practical in this setting. A public shelter still might be possible, although highly improbable. Rather, the private family home with its attached stable is the most historically and archaeologically accurate picture of the first Christmas. Summarized from many sources, at least partially from Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, pages 207-208.

- F) The birth of Jesus was unadorned and simple. Jesus came into the world in the most humble of circumstances, driven by the decree of a distant ruler, and born to two teenagers who were probably very scared at being away from home.

3) A Kingly Pronouncement

- A) Despite this simplicity, there was a birth announcement from Heaven as Jesus was born (Luke 2:8-14)! However, it was to shepherds, a rather lowly and simple (albeit faithful, cf. 2:20) group of laborers in Jesus' time.‡
- B) The angels send the shepherds to find baby Jesus (wrapped in "cloths") lying in a manger (2:12). This would have been a strange sight, and thus, an easier discovery for the shepherds.
- C) The whole birth narrative is highlighted with the angels proclamation in Luke 2:14 of "Glory to God in the highest..." The scene on the Bethlehem hillside is consistent with the view from Heaven, an explosion has split the skies!
- D) News of Jesus' birth traveled fast (2:17-18), but the fullness of what is happening is not understood at this time, even by Jesus' own mother, Mary (2:19). Like all new birth, the treasure of Jesus will not be fully understood until maturity.

‡ Some people attempt to represent the shepherds as being the despised and downtrodden class of people in Jesus' time, finding significance that the proclamation of Jesus' coming came first to a class of people which were widely considered sinful. Most of this tradition comes from too late a source (5th Century) to be of real validity. Rather, shepherds are generally viewed in a positive light in Scripture (note that Abraham, Moses and David were all shepherds), and the metaphor of Shepherd is used of Jesus Christ (the Chief Shepherd, cf. 1st Peter 5:4), and of leaders in the New Testament church (Acts 20:28, John 21:16). It is most likely, then, that the shepherds were another picture of a larger scene, one of quiet humility, serene ambivalence, and utmost simplicity. Jesus came without much fanfare, in a remote location, to a bunch of people who the world would call "nobody's." This was His beginning, and this foreshadowed the objects of His ministry.

4) The Inauguration Of The King

- A) As with any Kingdom, there must be an inauguration. The King must assume his throne. This was a significant problem, though, for the Kingdom of God. All of the subjects of God's Kingdom were slaves to another Kingdom (John 8:34).

- B) In order for the King (Jesus Christ) to assume the throne (inauguration as King), He first had to pay a ransom for His subjects, a payment to secure their transfer from one kingdom to God's Kingdom (Colossians 1:13, Mark 10:45).

- C) Mankind was originally designed to be in God's Kingdom (Adam & Eve, etc.). Mankind was removed from God's Kingdom because of sin (Romans 3:23). So, the ransom which had to be paid was not to Satan (Ephesians 2:2), but to God Himself (cf. Leviticus 4:32; Hebrews 10:3-4).

- D) Jesus Christ paid this ransom (1st Timothy 2:3-6), even when we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). We know that God accepted the payment, because Jesus was resurrected from the dead and restored to life (1st Corinthians 15:20-22).

- E) The birth of Christ began the promise, but the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ inaugurated the King (Philippians 2:7-11) and seals that the promise is available for us (1st Timothy 1:12-15).

- F) Receiving the gift of God (Jesus) is accepted by trust/faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) in Christ through the humble confession of sin (1st John 1:9), and complete trust in God for forgiveness (Colossians 1:13-14) and eternal life (Romans 6:22-23).

Engaging Advent

The word "Advent" comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means "the approach" or "the arrival." The Latin verb is *advenio*: "I arrive. I come. I am coming."

For centuries, followers of Jesus Christ have observed this season with a passionate anticipation of Christmas morning, marking the joy of the birth of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

Despite its significance, our culture has largely captured this season and disguised it with Lord's-a-Leaping, Sleigh Bells Ringing, and a Jolly Old Elf.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of these special traditions... Unless we miss Jesus Christ in the midst of all the tinsel and trappings.

If we miss Jesus Christ, then we have missed Christmas, and we have missed the message of "Peace on Earth, and goodwill toward men..."

Will this year be any different?

Simply, you are invited to engage Advent, perhaps for the first time in your life.

Through this season, which encompasses the three Sundays which lead up to Christmas (and the Christmas Eve Service), there will be special Advent Scripture readings which you (and your family) are invited to read during the week. There will also be some readings from Christian writers who have contemplated Advent over the centuries.

Will you schedule a time each day to anticipate His coming? Will you engage Advent? Join with the shepherds, walk with kings from the East, sit with Herod as he hears of the Christ child, exult with Mary & Joseph, gaze on the star of Bethlehem all over again, as though this is the first time...

Advent Reading #4 ~ St. John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom was an important early church father (347-407) and whose preaching and liturgies for the early church earned him the surname "chrysostomos," which means "golden mouthed." His words were (and still are) considered some of the "gold" of the early church. John Chrysostom preferred a literal interpretation of Scripture during an era where allegorical interpretation was king. Thus, his writings are down to earth and beneficial for every generation.

The Mystery

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Luke 2:13-14

I BEHOLD A NEW and wondrous mystery. My ears resound to the shepherds' song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The angels sing. The archangels blend their voice in harmony. The cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The seraphim exalt his glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised up.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolding within itself on every side, the Sun of Justice. And ask not how; for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For he willed, he had the power, he descended, he redeemed; all things move in obedience to God. This day he who is, is born; and he who is, becomes what he was not. For when he was God, he became, man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is his. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became he man,

nor through increase he God from man; but being the Word he became flesh, his nature remaining unchanged.

The Father begot in the Spirit, and the Virgin brought forth without defilement. The Father begot without the limitations of flesh; so neither did the Virgin endure corruption in her childbearing, since she brought forth miraculously. Hence, since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does his coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this birth I have learned to venerate in silence, and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech. For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of his works.

It is indeed the way of nature that a woman in wedlock brings forth new life; when an unwed virgin, after she has born a child, is still a virgin, the nature here is surpassed. Of that which happens in accord with nature we may inquire; what transcends it we honor in silence; not as something to be avoided, passed over, but as that which we venerate in silence, as something sublime, beyond all telling.

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a mother who has brought forth new life; I see a child come to this light by birth. The manner of his conception I cannot comprehend. Nature here is overcome, the boundaries of the established order set aside, where God so wills. For not according to nature has this thing come to pass. Nature here has rested, while the will of God labored. O, ineffable grace! The only begotten One, who is before all ages, who cannot be touched or be perceived, who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, which is visible and

liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us he may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that we mortals cannot see. For since we believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears, we doubt that which they do not see, and so he has deigned to show himself in bodily presence, that he may remove all doubt.

And he was born from a virgin, who knew not his purpose; neither had she labored with him to bring it to pass, nor contributed to that which he had done, but was the simple instrument of his hidden power. That alone she knew which she had learned by her question to Gabriel: "How shall this be done, because I know not a man?" Then said he: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee."

And in what manner was the Almighty with her, who came forth from her? He was as the craftsman, who coming on some suitable material, fashions to himself a beautiful vessel; so Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for himself a living temple, and as he had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and, putting him on, this day came forth; unashamed of the lowliness of our nature. For it was to him no lowering to put on what he himself had made. Let that handiwork be forever glorified, which became the cloak of its own creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made before the clay had come into his hand, so neither could this corruptible body be glorified, until it had first become the garment of its maker.

What shall I say! And how shall I describe this birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of Days has become an infant. He who sits upon the sublime and heavenly throne now lies

in a manger. And he who cannot be touched, who is without complexity, incorporeal, now lies subject to human hands. He who has broken the bonds of sinners is now bound by an infant's bands. But he has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and abject humiliation the measure of his goodness. For this he assumed by body, that I may become capable of his word; taking my flesh, he gives me his spirit; and so he bestowing and I receiving, he prepares for me the treasure of life. He takes my flesh to sanctify me; he gives me his Spirit, that he may save me.

Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the nativity. For this day the ancient slavery ended, the power of death is broken. For this day paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused and spread on every side – a heavenly way of life has been implanted on the earth, angels communicate with me without fear, and we now hold speech with angels.

Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He has come on earth, while being fully in heaven; and while complete in heaven, he is without diminution on earth. Though he was God, he became man, not denying himself to be God. Though being the unchanging Word, he became flesh and that he might dwell amongst us.

What shall I say? What shall I utter? "Behold an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." Mary is present, who is both virgin and mother. Joseph is present, who is called father. His is called husband, she is called wife. The names indeed are lawful, but there is no other bond. We speak here of words, not of "realities."

To Him, then, who out of confusion has wrought a clear path; to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, we offer all praise, now and forever. Amen.

From 'Watch For The Light' Reading for Advent and Christmas, pages 270-282.

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