

Stories of Christmas

Jesus is Born

Luke 2:1-20

Opening

Gathering: What does Christmas mean to you?

Today's Focus: God loves us so much that He prepared us over thousands of years to receive His only Son in ways that He promised but were not understood. The arrival of our Savior is great news!

Key Verses: *And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger. Luke 2:7*

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10-11

When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Galatians 4:4-5

Opening Prayer

Lesson

What Year Was Jesus Born? (Luke 2:1-2)

In 525 AD, Pope John I asked Dionysius (a Scythian monk) to prepare a calendar
Saw Jesus' birthday in 753 AUC (*anno urbis conditae*)
Dionysius selected January 1, 754 AUC to be January 1, 1 AD (*anno domini*)

When does Luke say that Jesus was born?

Luke 2:1

Caius Octavius - Grandnephew of Julius Caesar, 19 when Julius Caesar was killed (44 BC)

Fought against Mark Antony for 14 yrs to take over, Won at Mark Antony's suicide

Converted government from a republic to an imperial form

Given title *Augustus* by senate in 27 BC (*undertaken under favorable auguries* or well-omened)

Expanded empire and brought time of peace called *Pax Romana*, ruled until 14 AD

What other timemark does Luke give to narrow the date?

Luke 2:2

What event best nails down the precise date of Jesus' birth?

Luke 2:1-2

Historical records show that a census was taken every 14 years, One was known in 6AD

Counting back leads to 8BC

What does Matthew add that helps narrow down the date?

Matthew 2:1 (Luke 1:5)

Herod disfavored by Augustus in 8-7BC, executed 2 sons in 7BC, health problems led to death in 4BC

Historians believe Palestine census would have been pushed to 6-4BC

Other details further narrow to late 5BC or early 4BC, some say 6BC

Year 2000 actually happened in 1994-1996

Stories of Christmas

Jesus is Born

Page 2

What Day Was Jesus Born?

First known mention of December 25 is by Hippolytus (165-235AD)

Confirmed as correct by Chrysostom (345-407AD) in 386AD

Saturnalia - 3 to 7-day winter festival in honor of Saturn, Roman god of agriculture

Celebrated at winter solstice (days grow longer)

Mithraism (sun-worship) celebrated 12/25 as the birthday of the sun

Roman Catholics began ~330 AD celebrating 12/25 as the birthday of the Son

When do we celebrate Jesus' birth?

Dec 25 - Protestant & Catholic, Jan 6 - Eastern Orthodox, Jan 19 - Armenian

Some feel winter date is wrong because sheep were typically penned up November - March

Luke 2:8

Others don't see conflict because:

Could have been a mild winter, shepherds would have been outside with sheep

Not for certain that sheep were brought under cover during winter

Sheep were brought in from wilderness during winter, around Bethlehem fits

Only 6 miles south of Jerusalem, Bethlehem shepherds raised sheep for sacrifices

Sheep were in fields at least 30 days before Passover (as early as February)

What is the importance of when Jesus was born?

Galatians 4:4

The Census (*Luke 2:1-3*)

Rome law: *Whoever has property in another city must deliver his tax declaration in that city.*

In Palestine, many had ownership in property of "patriarchal houses"

Romans surveyed & valued property, registered & verified owners, taxed accordingly

What resulted in Palestine from this part of the Roman census law?

Luke 2:3

O Little Town of Bethlehem (*Luke 2:4-5*)

Who specifically was affected by this need to travel to be registered?

Luke 2:4

What did Joseph being of the *line of David* have to do with going to Bethlehem?

1 Samuel 17:12

Ruth 1:22; 2:1; 4:13, 17

Who went with Joseph to be officially registered as property owner?

Luke 2:5

Why was it an important part of God's eternal plan that Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem?

Micah 5:2

Why does Micah refer to the town as Bethlehem Ephrathah?

Genesis 35:19 (Ruth 1:2; 4:11)

How was this town's blessing also its curse?

Matthew 2:16-18

Why was it important that Mary was only *pledged to be married* and not married to Joseph?

Matthew 1:18-25

Bethlehem means *house of bread*. How is this significant?

John 6:35

Bread represents a basic necessity of life. How is Jesus our *bread of life*?

John 6:32-33

Stories of Christmas

Jesus is Born

Page 3

No Room in the Inn (*Luke 2:6-7*)

After getting the pregnant mother of His Son to Bethlehem, what did God bring about?

Luke 2:6

What royal and special treatment did God's only Son receive upon birth?

Luke 2:7

Did this change after Jesus was revealed as the Messiah?

Matthew 8:20

Why was this important?

2 Corinthians 8:9

Philippians 2:5-8

Neither Hospital Nor Hospitable Conditions

Why was there no room in the inn?

Luke 2:3

Khan (caravansary) - Square, single-story building with open, unfurnished recesses

Traveler brought his own carpet, food, water; Paid little for shelter

Leewans (recesses) provided on first-come, first-served basis

Late-comers could stay with animals penned in back of khan, often in caves

Birthing procedures in Jesus time:

Joseph's role

Mary's role

Salt

Swaddling cloths

Intended to straighten body from fetal position and to keep arms & legs from flailing

How widely were swaddling cloths used?

Ezekiel 16:4-5

The First to Hear (*Luke 2:8*)

What important people did God select to first learn about the Messiah's birth?

Luke 2:8

Had God ever shown His grace to anyone like these before?

1 Samuel 16:11-12

What other group of people did God call to see the newborn Messiah?

Matthew 2:1-2

What point does God's selection make?

Revelation 5:9

The Glory of the Lord (*Luke 2:9*)

How was the shepherd's normally quiet and boring night interrupted?

Luke 2:9

How had God revealed His glory in the past?

Exodus 40:34-35

How long had it been since the glory of the Lord had been revealed?

Ezekiel 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-24

Besides being startled, why were the shepherds afraid of what they saw?

Exodus 33:20

Stories of Christmas

Jesus is Born

Page 4

The Message (Luke 2:10-14)

After calming the shepherds, who did the angel say he had a message for?

Luke 2:10

What was this great news?

Luke 2:11

What names did the angel give Jesus that defined who He was?

Titus 3:4-7

John 1:41, 45

John 20:28

How would the shepherds know they weren't just hallucinating from the sheep smells?

Luke 2:12

How were all of the other angels in heaven able to hold themselves back at this great time?

Luke 2:13-14

The Sign (Luke 2:15-16)

Did the shepherds stay with the sheep and try to figure out what they had seen?

Luke 2:15-16

Was it surprising that the shepherds were able to find the baby they were seeking?

Matthew 7:7-8

The First Evangelists (Luke 2:17-20)

After seeing Jesus, did the shepherds remember their sheep and go back to them?

Luke 2:17

How did Peter later explain why those who have received Jesus must spread the news?

Acts 4:20

How was this strange message from the shepherds received?

Luke 2:18-19

After running throughout Bethlehem, did the shepherds finally go check on their sheep?

Luke 2:20

The shepherds give us the following sequence on responding to God's gospel (*good news*):

Heard, Believed, Obeyed, Received, Testified, Rejoiced, Praised

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. In what ways have God placed me in the right places at the right times?
(Esther 4:14; Galatians 4:4-5)
2. Why is it important to me that Jesus fulfilled even details of God's promises?
(2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Corinthians 1:20)
3. When have I sensed the presence of God in my life?
(Deuteronomy 31:8; Psalm 16:11; Matthew 18:20; 28:20)
4. Do I marvel at the great things God has done around me? (Psalm 98; Luke 9:43; 13:17)
5. Do I spread the word about what I have seen and heard? (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 4:20)

Next Week - *Jesus is Presented at the Temple* (Luke 2:21-38)