

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) = Put marks on timeline on board

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

When does Luke say that Jesus was born? = Augustus was first Roman emperor
Luke 2:1 = During reign of Caesar Augustus (44BC-19AD)
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 = Quirinius (Cyrenius) was governor of Syria (6-4BC and 6-9AD)

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

Luke 2:1-2 = A census of the entire Roman world
Historical records show that a census was taken every 14 years, One was known in 6AD
Counting back leads to 8BC = Would have taken a few years to reach Palestine

What does Matthew add that helps narrow down the date?

Matthew 2:1 (Luke 1:5) = Herod was king of Jews (37BC-4BC)
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

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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) = 12/25 on old Roman calendar, 12/21 now

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 = Shepherds attended flocks at night

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 = *In the fullness of time, God sent His Son ...*

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 = *Everyone went to his own town to register, time to verify credentials*

O Little Town of Bethlehem (*Luke 2:4-5*) = Bethlehem means *house of bread*

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

Luke 2:4 = Joseph went from Nazareth to Bethlehem (72 miles, 3 days)

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

1 Samuel 17:12 = David, the greatest king of Israel, was from Bethlehem

Ruth 1:22; 2:1; 4:13, 17 = David's great grandparents, Boaz & Ruth, from Bethlehem

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

Luke 2:5 = Mary, Joseph's pregnant fiancée'

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

Micah 5:2 = Prophecy that Messiah would come from Bethlehem (David's town)

Why does Micah refer to the town as Bethlehem Ephrathah? = Ephrathah means *fruitful*

Genesis 35:19 (Ruth 1:2; 4:11) = Region called Ephrath during Jacob's time, Rachel buried there

How was this town's blessing also its curse? = *Rachel weeping for her children*

Matthew 2:16-18 = Herod ordered all Bethlehem area baby boys killed

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

Matthew 1:18-25 = Prophecy that Messiah would be born of a virgin, no union

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

John 6:35 = *I am the bread of life.*

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

John 6:32-33 = *the bread of God ... gives life to the world*

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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 = Mary went into labor

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

Luke 2:7 = Poor, cast out conditions, no room or bed, just a feeding trough

Did this change after Jesus was revealed as the Messiah?

Matthew 8:20 = No, *the Son of Man has no place to lay His head*

Why was this important?

2 Corinthians 8:9 = *For your sakes he became poor, so ... you might become rich*

Philippians 2:5-8 = *Made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ...*

Neither Hospital Nor Hospitable Conditions

Why was there no room in the inn?

Luke 2:3 = *Everyone went to his own town to register, City crowded*

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 = Jewish men didn't act as midwives

Mary's role = Jewish women were proud of delivering their own babies

Salt = Baby washed, then salt rubbed on body to prevent infection

Swaddling cloths = Strips of cloth wrapped tight around a baby like a mummy for first 6 months

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

How widely were swaddling cloths used?

Ezekiel 16:4-5 = Not having been wrapped was a sign of neglect & being unloved

The First to Hear (Luke 2:8)

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

Luke 2:8 = Uneducated, unclean, smelly shepherds living in field tents, night shift

Had God ever shown His grace to anyone like these before? = Unworthy to be presented by Jesse

1 Samuel 16:11-12 = He chose another Bethlehem shepherd, David, as great king

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

Matthew 2:1-2 = Wise men from the east, Intelligent & blessed, but not Jews

What point does God's selection make?

Revelation 5:9 = Jesus was sent to save all types of people

The Glory of the Lord (Luke 2:9)

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

Luke 2:9 = An angel appeared and *the glory of the Lord shone around them*

How had God revealed His glory in the past?

Exodus 40:34-35 = Filled the temple as a cloud, people couldn't enter

How long had it been since the glory of the Lord had been revealed? = Ezekiel in Babylonian exile

Ezekiel 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-24 = Ezekiel saw it leave the temple 500 years earlier

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

Exodus 33:20 = *No one may see me and live*

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The Message (Luke 2:10-14)

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

Luke 2:10 = *Good news of great joy that will be for all the people*

What was this great news? = For all the people, but also to you

Luke 2:11 = The promised Messiah has been born today in Bethlehem

What names did the angel give Jesus that defined who He was? = Write names on board

Titus 3:4-7 = *Savior* - Saved us to be justified by His grace for eternal life

John 1:41, 45 = *Christ* (Messiah) - The one God promised, *The Anointed One*

John 20:28 = *Lord* - God, ruler, king – Used instead of saying God's holy name, Yahweh

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

Luke 2:12 = The angel gave a sign - A baby wrapped in cloths lying in a manger

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

Luke 2:13-14 = They couldn't, they all joined in praising God

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 = No, they left the sheep & *hurried off and found* the angel's sign

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

Matthew 7:7-8 = *Seek and you will find*

The First Evangelists (Luke 2:17-20)

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

Luke 2:17 = No, *they spread the word*

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

Acts 4:20 = *We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard*

How was this strange message from the shepherds received?

Luke 2:18-19 = *All who heard it were amazed, Mary treasured & pondered them*

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

Luke 2:20 = Yes, they returned to their responsibility & praised God

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)