

7. Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand what Zacharias said about the ministry of Christ. We also saw that we want to help our children learn what Zacharias said about his own son. In this topic, we are going to see some of the key things that we want to help our children understand about the birth of Jesus.

In Luke 2:1-7, we read, “And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” God had promised in the Old Testament that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. This shows how God worked through the Roman government to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for the birth of Christ.

Here, we see that the Roman emperor had one purpose, but God had another. The Roman emperor ordered all of the people in the Roman Empire to be registered. This was done to register young men for military service. Later, it was also used to make certain that the people paid their taxes to the Roman government. Here, we see that Caesar had one purpose and God had another. Micah 5:2 says, ““But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth *are* from of old, from everlasting.”” The purpose of God was for Mary and Joseph to fulfill the promise that He had given through Micah about the place where the Messiah would be born. This reminds us that God can use even the most corrupt government to fulfill His purpose.

The Lord had shown Joseph in a dream that the Holy Spirit was the One who had come upon Mary and that was why she was pregnant. Matthew 1:24-25 says, “Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.” Here, we see that Joseph took Mary as his wife, but they waited until after the birth of Jesus to have sexual relationships. Joseph and Mary were both descendants of David. As a result, Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to register. Mary and Joseph lived in the town of Nazareth so that meant that they had to travel about seventy miles, which included traveling through the mountains in order to reach Bethlehem.

The time for the birth of Jesus was close; this was probably a difficult trip for them, especially for Mary. They arrived in Bethlehem so that Joseph could register. Bethlehem was a small town and the inn was full. The rooms were probably filled by the Romans who were taking the census. On one of the days that Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem, Mary went into labor. They had no relatives in the area, so Mary and Joseph had taken shelter in a place where animals were fed, possibly a cave or a stable. As a result, when Jesus was born he was wrapped in swaddling cloths

and laid in a manger where the animals were fed. Swaddling cloths were strips of cloth that were used to tightly wrap a baby when it was first born.

Luke 2:8-14 says, “Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!’” Here, we see that God chose to announce the birth of Jesus to the world in a very unique way.

Bethlehem was less than five miles from Jerusalem. Throughout the year, many sheep and lambs were offered as sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. The hills around Bethlehem grew much grass and so many of the sheep that were offered in the temple throughout the year were fed on those hills and the shepherds would be with their sheep out in the fields both day and night. The evening Christ was born, an angel suddenly stood in front of a group of shepherds on the hillside. The glory of the Lord surrounded this angel; as a result, the shepherds were filled with fear. The angel immediately told the shepherds not to be afraid because he brought good news. This good news was a message for all people that would bring great joy to the lives of the people.

Many of the Jews were looking for the Messiah (Christ the Lord) that would come from the family of David to fulfill the promises given in the Old Testament. The angel told the shepherds that the Christ had just been born that very day in the city of Bethlehem. The angel also gave a sign to the shepherds so they would know how to recognize this baby. The angel said that they would find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger. Since the angel said the baby would be lying in a manger, the shepherds immediately knew that they would find the baby in a place where the cattle were fed.

Suddenly, the angel that delivered this message to the shepherds was joined by a large group of angels. These angels were expressing their praise to God. The Old Testament prophets had written about the coming of salvation through Christ and the angels had wanted to know how God was going to provide that salvation. 1 Peter 1:12 says, “To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.” Now the angels had their answer and they were filled with praise to God. The shepherds must have listened with amazement as they expressed their praise to God for revealing how He would provide this salvation. The angels spoke together saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” The angels had desired to know how God would provide salvation from the time Adam sinned and now they had their answer.

After expressing their praise to God, the angels disappeared. Luke 2:15-20 says, “So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us

now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.’ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”

At that moment, the shepherds had a much greater interest than protecting their sheep. All they could think about was this heavenly message. They immediately decided to go to Bethlehem and find the baby that would be the Christ. The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem as quickly as they could walk that night. As shepherds, they knew where there were mangers in Bethlehem to feed the animals. As a result, they quickly found Mary and Joseph. Even more exciting was the fact that they found the Baby lying in the manger just as the angel had said.

Those shepherds were never the same again. Everywhere they went they told others what the angel had told them concerning this Child. When we truly meet Jesus, we cannot keep silent. Peter and John said in Acts 4:18-20, “And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” The shepherds had the same response as Peter and John when they met Jesus. People were filled with amazement as they heard the message of the shepherds. We see this same wonder and amazement by others at least 15 times in the book of Luke. We see that the shepherds returned to their sheep with glory and praise in their hearts to God for the things that they had seen and the things that God had taught them through the angels.

Meanwhile, we see that Mary continued to think about all these things that had happened and pondered them in her heart. The word translated “pondered” means *to confer together or to bring thoughts together in one’s mind or heart*. Mary realized that she was now raising the Son of God. Mary had seen the Lord work in many different ways in her life. First, the angel had appeared to her and told her about the plan that God had for her life. Then, that message had been confirmed through the words Elizabeth had spoken to her. The Lord had also revealed to Joseph through a dream how the Lord was working. Now everything had been confirmed again by the shepherds. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to compare the things that the Lord has done so that the Lord can help them grow in their understanding of Jesus. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how God introduced Jesus to the world.