

Did you know there's a conference dedicated to boring stuff? It's called, appropriately, the "Boring Conference." The conference's website claims it's a "*one-day celebration of the mundane, the ordinary, the obvious, and the overlooked.*" James Ward, creator of the blog "*I Like Boring Things,*" launched the idea in 2010 in response to the sudden and rather tragic cancellation of the "Interesting Conference."

Speakers have addressed the following topics: sneezing... toast... the sounds made by vending machines... the Shipping Forecast... barcodes... yellow lines... inkjet printers of 1999... ice-cream-van chimes... and similarities between 198 of the world's national anthems. ... Previous highlights include a talk about Dyson electric hand dryers.

Sounds pretty boring... right? ... Actually the conference has been a sell-out hit because it has a serious aim: *to take "subjects often considered trivial and pointless, but when examined more closely reveal themselves to be deeply fascinating."* As James Ward explained;

The basic idea is that the theme needs to be boring, but the content shouldn't be. There has to be something in the topic that a speaker with a real enthusiasm for it can bring out and make interesting. In fact most things, if you look at them in enough detail, can become fascinating. There's almost always something there.

... [P A U S E] ...

But let me now ask you: What if we took **THE** most wondrous subject... the one (of which) there can be no close second... and hearing it over and over for many years... is it possible that we could ever lose our sense of awe about it...? ... [P A U S E] ...

There is **NO THOUGHT** (or concept) *available to the human mind* that is more marvelous... more attractive... or more compelling... than the truth that... the Almighty... Sovereign... Creator of the heavens and earth... came to earth in the form of a helpless baby and grew up among us.

It was clearly a leap down — as if the Son of God rose from His splendor... stood poised at the rim of the universe with the irradiating light streaming out from Him... and then dove headlong... speeding through billions of stars at warp speed (faster than the Millennium Falcon... or the Starship Enterprise... through galaxy after galaxy... then finally through the Milky Way (earth's galaxy)... and past our solar system... where he plunged into Mary's womb and at the right time... He then emerged into a huddle of animals.... with the stench of manure... and acrid smell of animal urine that soaked the straw.

Nothing could be **lower**... could it? ... If we imagine that Jesus was born in a freshly swept... clean and sterile environment without nasty flies buzzing around – we miss the whole point.

The beautiful Christmas cards that we send out every year... and the children's plays where our kids dress up *in their bathrobes* to play the characters of this story – unfortunately – give us the wrong image. It is more wonderful than that! ... [P A U S E] ...

Many of us allow the wonder of this event to re-capture us *briefly* – every Christmas time. ... But **the wonder** is so quickly snatched away... because of all the holiday preparations that MUST HAVE our primary attention.

I am so pleased to be studying our passage today – removed (by a few months) from the hustle and bustle that usually accompanies the time we give ourselves... to be in awe of the most wonderous thoughts any human being can ponder.

Would you please join me right now... in asking God to strike us with an appropriate sense of awe and wonder... as we now study Luke... chapter two... verses 1-20.

- PRAY -

Luke 2:1-20

These verses give us a picture of what REALLY happened at Jesus' birth. The 1st thing that I would like to point out... is that these 20 verses are shorter than the space Luke gave to the birth of John the Baptist. ... Jesus is THE MESSIAH – and John is merely His announcer. “*Here He is... Ladies and Gentlemen... Your long-awaited Messiah – JESUS!!!!*” ... But even this helps *set the tone* of what Luke stresses – (which is) the humble circumstance of Jesus' birth.

Luke 2:1

Luke is the only Gospel writer who related the events he recorded... to world history. His account was addressed to a predominantly Greek audience that would have been interested in and familiar with the political situation of those times. ... (You see)... Luke wants NOTHING TO DO with what has emerged in modern thought that questions: “*Was Jesus an actual Person in history...? ... Did He actually live and walk among us (here) on earth...?*” ... Luke ties Jesus' birth to objective history! ... (Isn't it wonderful that the truth of the Bible can be verified...?)

The opening words of this famous section of Scripture... provide the setting for this (the greatest of all stories)... by informing us that Caesar Augustus (Octavian) was ruler of “the entire Roman world”—“all the inhabited earth”. The ancient historians tell us that Caesar Augustus was the great-nephew of Julius Caesar and was a born fighter who clawed his way to power by defeating Antony and Cleopatra and then... through the considerable genius and force of his person... gave the empire a solidness that was to endure for centuries.

It was said of him that he came to a Rome made of brick and left it a city of marble. ... He transformed not just Rome but the entire known world with his roads and his armies.

He was the first Caesar to be called “Augustus” when the Roman Senate voted to give him that title. Augustus means “holy” or “revered,” and up to that time the title was reserved exclusively for the gods. ... When the senate submitted to him certain titles like king, emperor, and dictator, he was not satisfied. Instead he chose the title *Augustus*. It had a religious significance, and it was an attempt to deify himself. (He wanted to be worshipped.) An inscription found at Halicarnassus (a Greek city) even called him “savior of the whole world.”

Notice what Luke is doing. ... Luke does not only establish a time reference to these true events... (More than that)... he is setting up a **contrast**. ... Caesar Augustus tried to make himself God... but nobody today reverences **him** or pays taxes to **him**.

But that little baby in Mary’s womb — many of us worship Him today and call Him our Savior. ... God used the authority of a man who thought he

was a god to bring upon the scene - the Son of God! ... The Lord had the last laugh.

We get a pretty good glimpse here of: “Who determines history? — Don’t ever think that is the Caesars... the kings... and the presidents?” ... In faith we believe that God is not only the Ruler of all things... but even the Ruler of human history... and that many unwittingly serve Him. ... (Think about it!) The Lord can work through our ungodly government authorities (and world leaders – duly elected or otherwise) to bring about His will. ... He often works through unethical authorities (including: ungodly husbands... parents... government leaders... employers... teachers, etc.) ... The Lord used those in authority to put Mary in the position and place where she would be used of God to fulfill the prophecy of Micah 5:2 and give birth to the Messiah in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2 (ESV)

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and that is where Mary is heading. Augustus Caesar was ruling... but **God** was in charge... for He used Caesar’s edict to move Mary and Joseph eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill His Word.

Luke 2:2-6

One word from a pagan emperor in Rome, and, throughout his vast domains... people began to move. This decree by Caesar meant that each person had to go to their native town to register for the census. A lot of traveling was taking place on the highways. There were probably lots of

donkey delays and wagon jams on the roads. Joseph was living in Nazareth, but needed to travel to Bethlehem of Judea to register with the Roman census because both Mary and Joseph were of the family tree of King David.

The journey must have been very trying for her, but she rejoiced in doing the will of God, and she was no doubt glad to get away from the wagging tongues in Nazareth.

There is a lot of discussion in the commentaries (among the scholars) about why Mary accompanied Joseph on such a difficulty journey. She (probably) didn't have to go – because of the Roman decree. (Only males had to report to their city of family origin.) ... But it could have been a number of reason - all combined.

It is possible that Joseph used the emperor's order as a means of removing Mary from possible gossip and emotional stress in her own village. ... Reason #2... The couple knew she would have the Baby during the time Joseph was gone... and they most likely did not want to be separated at that event. ... Also #3... both of them knew that the Child was the Messiah. They also would have known that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2 – the prophecy that we just read).

Luke 2:7

Bethlehem was packed. There were people everywhere reporting for the census. ... Because of the large influx of people... there was no room for them in the inn.

What actually was an "inn?" In the New Testament there are two Greek words that were translated "inn." ... One word is the word ***pandocheion***

which was like a hotel. ... It had someone who was like a manager and had apartments and provisions. ... This is where the Good Samaritan put the man that had been beaten on the road (we will see in Luke 10:35).

Another word for “inn” was the word *kataluma* {*kat-al'-oo-mah*} which is used here. ... It was an enclosure with walls and a roof into which someone who was traveling might put their livestock for the night or rest for the journey. ... It was like a hitching post that was provided by the city or town.

Sometimes these did have sleeping areas where the travelers could rest... but they could not obtain food. Travelers had to provide their own food and bedding. These places did have water... but there was no host on the site.

Looking at these words... we see then that it is contrary to most of the pictures on our Christmas cards... and children's plays. The inn (*kataluma*) - spoken of in this passage - was not a place like our motels or hotels which provided for the various needs of guests. ... (I am pretty sure) that there was no heartless innkeeper who stood at the door telling Joseph and Mary there was no room in his hotel. There is no drama about the inn... None of that comes from Scripture.

However(!)... There **IS** a lot of trueful drama regarding – “*no room for them in the inn.*”

The problem of “no room” is symbolic of the problem that man has faced since Jesus was born. Most of mankind, throughout history, has had “no room” for the Lord Jesus Christ. People have no room for Christ because they are full of themselves, full of their own will, full of their own cares, and full of their own sinfulness. They feel they have no time or no need for the Lord.

Let me ask, “Have you crowded the Lord out of your life? ... Do you spend regular time with Him? ... (Daily)... do you intentionally seek to re-orient your life toward Him... seeking His individualized tasks for you to accomplish that particular day...? Do you really have a close relationship with Him? Are you accessible to the Lord? ... This is His plea and challenge to us all through the Bible.

He could have entered — as He will when He comes to earth the second time — in power and great glory. ... Instead... He came in the weakest way possible (as a baby.) ... George Macdonald put it this way:

*They all were looking for a King
To slay their foes and lift them high:
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing
That made a woman cry.*

That is the way the Saviour came into the world. He did not lay aside His deity; He temporarily laid aside His ***glory***. There should have been more than just a few shepherds and angels to welcome Him — all of creation should have been there. ... Instead of collecting taxes... that fellow (Caesar) should have been in Bethlehem to worship Him. ... Jesus Christ could have forced him to do that very thing... but He did not. ... He laid aside (not His deity) ... but His prerogatives of deity. He came a little baby thing.

The manger where Jesus was laid was actually a feeding trough for animals. This word can also include the entire surroundings of the stable. This was a filthy... smelly place with flies... and... well... we have already described it. ... It (SURE) was ***not*** sanitary at all... but Joseph did not have much of a choice. ... He had to find something quickly. This is where the

King of Kings... the Son of God entered this world. His lowly birth was a perfect symbol of the humility that would characterize His life... and also what He would face in years to come.

No child born into the world that day seemed to have lower prospects. The Son of God was born into the world not as a prince but as a pauper. We must never forget that this is where Christianity began... and where it always begins — with a sense of need... a graced sense of one's insufficiency. ... Christ (Himself setting the example)... comes to the needy. He is born only in those who are "poor in spirit." The Incarnation provides a marvelous paradigm for Christ's work in our lives. (More on that in just a minute.) ... Everything pointed to obscurity... poverty... and even rejection. ... Luke showed the King of kings born into poor and humble circumstances — born as a human... born to serve.

The infant was wrapped firm and tight. It looked like a little mummy. Arms, hands, and feet could not be seen. A band was also wrapped under the baby's chin and across its forehead. The wrappings protected the baby but also gave it a sense of security. The confinement is similar to what it faced in the womb of its mother.

(But here is something – perhaps – you and I never considered before.) ... Even in His birth... we are reminded of Christ's death. These same types of wrappings were used to wrap the body of those who had died. When we think of mummies... our minds usually think about the Egyptian mummies. But the 1st century Jews wrapped their dead in the same manner. Beloved, Jesus was born to die for our sins so that we could have eternal life.

Luke 2:8

The appearance of the angel and of the radiant **glory of the Lord ... terrified** them. The Greek for “terrified” (lit., “they feared a great fear”) stresses the intensity of this fear.

(Now let’s all realize something about shepherds. You may already know this... but we all need to see this very clearly.) ... Shepherds were despised by the “good,” respectable people of that day. According to the *Mishnah*, shepherds were under a ban. They were regarded as thieves. The only people lower than shepherds at that particular time in Jewish history were lepers. These are who God chose to be involved in the birth of Jesus! Wow! Can this get any MORE humiliating...?

God comes only to those who sense their need. He does not come to the self-sufficient. The gospel is for those who know they need Jesus!

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (ESV)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

As soon as the Savior had entered the world, an angel was dispatched to announce His arrival, though not to kings or dignitaries, as with the birth of an earthly prince. Instead, the angel found shepherds, who customarily camped in the open fields in order to protect their flocks from predators and thieves. According to rabbinic literature from the fifth century AD, shepherds were a despised class, not unlike vagrants and homeless people today.

They were despised because they were unable to attend services and to keep the ceremonial laws of washing and cleansing. Their flocks just kept them too busy. This is why shepherds would seldom be found praising and worshiping God. They were looked upon as anything but worshipers. Their reputation was lowly at best, and religious people snubbed and ignored them.

There is an old saying that “*war is too important to be left to the generals.*” God seems to suggest: *peace is too important to be left to the diplomats.* The professionals have messed it up again and again. In giving this message to the shepherds... God bypassed the professional peacemakers. He gave the message and its interpretation to amateurs. We need amateur peacemakers. ... Do we have any “amateurs” among us today...?

Luke 2:9-14

This is the third of four appearances of angels. ... Angels are mentioned **fifteen** times in the first two chapters... demonstrating the supernatural nature of this event.

The terror of the shepherds is the normal human response to the transcendent realm of God throughout Scripture. At times it is awe (like Zechariah and Mary in 1:12, 29, or the three disciples at the transfiguration in 9:34). ... While Luke’s description includes both here... **terror** is definitely more predominant at the incredible glory of God displayed around them.

The angel calms them down: “*Do not be afraid*”... and then tells them the incredible message: “*I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all*

the people.” ... Fear is to be replaced with great joy... and that joy will be universal on all Israel.

What was the Good News? Not that God had sent a soldier or a judge or a reformer... but that He had sent a **Savior** to meet man’s greatest need. It was a message of peace to a world that had known much war. The famous “Pax Romana” (Roman Peace) had been in effect since 27 B.C. but the absence of war doesn’t guarantee the presence of peace.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, “While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns more than even for outward peace.”... Rome and Augustus had bludgeoned every foe into submission. There was “peace,” but it was a **dark** peace—a Hitler’s peace—and no man or woman or boy or girl could say a word against it without fearfully looking over their shoulder.

(Now) the Jewish word *shalom* (peace) means much more than a truce in the battles of life. It means well-being, health, prosperity, security, soundness, and completeness. (But get this)... “Shaloam” has to do more with **character** than **circumstances**. ... Jesus’ birth is to bring peace (*shalom*, well-being, blessedness, fullness.) ... This is the message from the angels to the shepherds and through them to us: Christ’s coming means shaloam.

We live in a wicked world. We live in a Satan–dominated world... and there is no peace. ... If you are one of those who has come to Christ and taken Him as Savior... you can know this peace of God. Romans 5:1 states: *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

The peace does not come when the arms race ends. Peace will not come with arms limitations treaties. Peace does not come when a general glow of good will wells up and we all feel magnanimous about our neighbors. (It won't be all of us standing on a hillside holding our bottles of Coke up and singing *“I'd like to teach the world to sing of perfect harmony...”*) The angels give us the precondition for peace—that we give glory to God in the highest. That has nothing to do with whether or not we win the arms race... or persuade the world to sing about peace.

Luke 1:15-16

(I always wondered were all the rushing at Christmas time got started! It started with the shepherds making haste to see the Messiah.) One commentator called this *“the first Christmas rush,”* but it was certainly different from the Christmas rushes we see today!

These shepherds are good examples for us to imitate today. They received by faith the message God sent them and then responded with immediate obedience.

They believed the message and went to confirm it for themselves. This was much like the action of Mary after she had heard the message of Elizabeth. Such an attitude contrasts sharply with that of the religious leaders in Jerusalem - who knew where the Baby was to be born but did not take the time or the effort to confirm it for themselves - (as Matt. 2:5 records for us).

First of all... these shepherds did not waste any time in responding to God's message.

(LISTEN!) What we believe affects how we behave. Doctrine affects our demeanor and deeds. ...The shepherds believed the Divine revelation given to them about Jesus Christ... and they *showed their belief* in their actions. ... They demonstrated their faith by going to Bethlehem to see Christ. They did not say, "Let's go see ***IF*** this is true." No, they said, "Let's go see this thing that ***HAS HAPPENED.***" ... Like these shepherds... we too... need to respond *swiftly* in our obedience to God's Word. ... When God speaks... are you more like these shepherds... or the religious leaders in Jerusalem...? ... Don't KEEP the wonder! Share the wonder!

Luke 2:17-20

The Greek term translated "treasured" (*Mary treasured up all these things...*) means "to preserve," "to guard," or "to keep watch." The accompanying verb, rendered "pondering," literally means "to bring together," much like someone arranging the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. For Mary, the last nine months had included an angelic visit, a difficult announcement, the near collapse of her betrothal, and less-than-ideal circumstances for childbirth. She must have recalled Joseph's anguish and his unflinching obedience to the will of God. She probably marveled at the timing of the census, the birth of God's Son in a stable, and the worship of shepherds. Her memories formed a complex and curious puzzle that dared to be solved. For years to come, Mary would arrange and then rearrange everything she had experienced in order to make sense of it all.

I will close today by quoting Chuck Swindoll... as he closes his commentary on these verses we have been looking at:

I find it interesting that God did not deliver the good news of the Messiah's birth to priests or prophets or kings. Rather than issue an official proclamation from the steps of the temple or the throne of a king, the Lord sent His angels to a group of nameless shepherds. He chose the least influential individuals—humanly speaking—to become the first witnesses to a message “which will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10).

While the shepherds undoubtedly recognized their own lack of status and influence, they nonetheless responded immediately. I find in their example two worthy exhortations for us today.

First, *respond immediately to opportunities*.

As soon as the angels disappeared and the skies closed the men said, “Let us go” (2:15), and they went “in a hurry” to find the Savior (2:16).

Don't wait for special occasions to talk about the Lord. Speak up whenever the opportunity arises. You don't have to be obnoxious by forcing a conversation, but remain continually transparent about your relationship with Christ. Watch for open doors. Don't hesitate; speak freely.

Second, *share your experience*.

God didn't call the shepherds to teach or preach. They had neither the training nor the skills. Instead, the Lord charged them with the responsibility to share what they had seen and heard, to describe their experience. In response, the shepherds “made known the statement which had been told them about this Child” (2:17).

Biblical and theological training is good. I highly recommend it for everyone, regardless of their calling or vocation. But you don't need formal training to tell others about Jesus Christ, any more than you need medical training to tell a friend about a good doctor. If you are a believer, you have a “before-and-after” story of your experience with Jesus Christ. Before you placed your faith in Christ, your life looked one way. After trusting in Him, your life changed. Your “testimony” is simply a description of the before-and-after change you experienced. If a group of shepherds could do it, so can you. Respond immediately to opportunities and share your experience.