

The Nativity Part 1

Dr. Luke's Record of Christ's Birth

Text: Luke 2:1-7

Introduction:

1. The word 'nativity' simply means 'birth'. It is most often used when speaking of Christ's birth since His birth was the most significant in all of human history.
2. Matthew and Luke are the two Gospels that provide records of the nativity. Each contribute important details but Luke's account provides the most details. Luke records not only the details of the birth of Christ but also the events leading up to it such as the angel's visit to Mary.
3. In this message and the next, we will consider Luke's account of the nativity with the help of the following outline:
 - The Historical Context of Christ's Birth (Vs. 1-5)
 - The Humility of Christ's Birth (Vs. 6-7)
 - The Heralding of Christ's Birth (Vs. 8-20)
4. As we study this account let us be in awe and wonder of the truth that "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). J.C. Ryle wrote, "Every birth of a living child is a marvellous event. It brings into being a soul that will never die. But never since the world began was a birth so marvellous as the birth of Christ."

I. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CHRIST'S BIRTH (VS. 1-5)

Luke demonstrates his skill and accuracy as a historian of the times in which Christ was born. Sir William Ramsay, the famous sceptic turned believer and New Testament historian, came to the conclusion that not only was Luke a great historian, but that Luke was "among the historians of the first rank." In these verses we see the hand of God moving in history to accomplish His purposes.

A. The Providence of God was Active (Vs. 1-3)

Luke draws our attention to two important historical rulers at the time (the supreme ruler of Rome and the provincial governor of Syria) and to the world-wide decree of Caesar.

1. The Decree of Caesar Augustus (Vs. 1, 3)
 - a. The Emperor –The person making this decree was the Roman Emperor from 31 B.C. to 14 A.D. His entire name was Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus. He was the grandnephew of Julius Caesar. Interestingly, on our calendars, the month of July is named after Julius Caesar and August after Caesar Augustus. His title "Augustus" was bestowed upon him by the Roman Senate. History indicates that he rejected the title "king" as it

wasn't high enough for him. The name Augustus was coined for him meaning "exalted one". He desired to be viewed as a god by the people.

- b. The Edict – The decree of Caesar was for a census to be taken of the whole Roman Empire for the purpose of taxation. The word "taxed" means to register or enter in a list (Vincent). So, it was a census for the purpose of taxation. A.T. Robertson says, "It was a census, not a taxing, though taxing generally followed and was based on the census. This word (taxed, taxing) is very old and common. It means to write or copy off for public records, to register." The same word is translated "written" in Hebrews 12:23. The famed Bible scholar Frederic Louis Godet of France stated that "the term *apographe* (taxed) denotes among the Romans the inscription on an official register of the name, age, profession, and fortune of each head of a family, and of the number of his children, with a view to the assessment of a tax."
- c. Note: God would use this decree to move Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for the birth of Christ. God set the world in motion with thousands upon thousands of lives affected in order to fulfill His plan. The Providence of God is a great comfort to us as believers. Remember that history is really "His Story". President James A. Garfield called history "the unrolled scroll of prophecy." Caesar may have been ruling but God was in charge. He may have been sitting on the earthly throne of the world but God was seated above on the heavenly throne of the universe. David Sorenson notes, "This decree had actually been issued some years earlier, but trouble in the empire had delayed its implementation. God brought about a providential peace enabling events to coincide such that every detail of prophecy concerning Christ's coming be fulfilled in detail. Indeed, it was the fulness of time."

2. The Governorship of Cyrenius (Vs. 2)

- a. John Phillips writes, "Cyrenius was a man of humble birth, a soldier of fortune who rose to a position of great power. His Cilician victories won him a Roman triumph. His death was marked by a state funeral." Cyrenius was governor of the Roman province of Syria which included Palestine.
- b. The sceptics have attempted to attack Luke's credentials, claiming that Cyrenius was governor some ten or so years after Christ was born. However, archaeology has revealed that Cyrenius had at least two terms in ruling Syria, and one of those was during Christ's birth. (Butler) Further, "Justin Martyr, who lived in the second century, distinctly asserts three times that Christ was born under Cyrenius" (J.C. Ryle).

B. The Prophecy of God's Word was Accomplished (Vs. 4)

1. The purpose for which God so moved in the heart of Caesar was to ensure Christ was born in Bethlehem according to the ancient prophecy of Micah 5:2 written more than 500 years earlier. The decree meant that Joseph and Mary had to move from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a journey of around 75 miles or 120 kms. This would have been a long and difficult journey in those days, especially consider that Mary was “great with child”.
2. Micah 5:2 “But thou, **Bethlehem** Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; **whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.**”
3. Galatians 4:4-5 “But when **the fulness of the time was come**, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.
4. Micah’s prophecy not only highlights the place of Messiah’s birth but also His Person. This would be no ordinary child. He was destined to be ruler in Israel. This is yet to be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom. This child would not come into existence in Bethlehem. His eternal pre-existence is noted in the words “from everlasting”. The everlasting, eternal Son would take on human flesh and become a man. This child would be both God and Man – God and Man united in one Person, never again to be separated.
5. It is fitting that Christ should be born in Bethlehem as it means “house of bread” and Christ was the Bread of Life for the world. John 6:35 “And Jesus said unto them, **I am the bread of life**: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

C. The Purity of God’s Son was Affirmed (Vs. 5)

- a. Notice that Mary is referred to as Joseph’s “espoused wife”, meaning she was his betrothed but that the marriage had not yet been consummated.
- b. This highlights afresh the truth of the virgin birth. The integrity of Christ’s miraculous conception in the womb of Mary is carefully guarded by the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Joseph did not enter into the one flesh union with Mary until after Christ was born, removing all potential suspicion that Christ was really conceived with Joseph.
- c. Isaiah 7:14 “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, **a virgin shall conceive**, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”
- d. Luke 1:34-35 “Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, **The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy**

thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

- e. **Without the virgin birth, we have no Saviour!** If Christ had a human father, he inherited the sin nature that has been passed down from Adam (Rom. 5:12). Because Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the virgin’s womb, He didn’t have the slightest trace of the sin nature. He was 100% pure and holy. He is referred to in Acts 4 as “thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:27, 30).
- f. This was no ordinary baby! Consider Messiah’s words spoken prophetically through Psalm 22 concerning His babyhood. Psalm 22:9-10 “But thou *art* he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope *when I was* upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother's belly.”

II. THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST’S BIRTH (VS. 6-7)

We stand in awe and wonder at the humility and condescension of Christ at His birth. Everything about Christ’s birth was humble.

A. A Humble Covering – “swaddling clothes”.

- 1. There was no royal garment provided the King of kings. He was born into a poor home and wrapped in the common strips of cloth that were used by Hebrew mothers of the time. Evidently Mary had prepared her overnight bag!
- 2. Christ came from heaven’s glory where He was robed in inexpressible majesty, light and glory to be wrapped in simple pieces of cloth. If Christ had been born into the Greatest Palace on earth, surrounded by every honour, it would still have been an act of humility but to born to a lowly carpenter’s wife demonstrates a humility which is too wondrous to fully explain in words.
- 3. Php. 2:8 “And being found in fashion as a man, **he humbled himself**, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”
- 4. 2 Cor. 8:9 “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

B. A Humble Crib – “laid him in a manger”.

- 1. Christ’s bed was a humble feed trough. There was no royal crib to cradle the King of kings.
- 2. What a picture! The Creator lying in the creature’s crib. In reality this baby was the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is referred to as Mary’s “firstborn son”. For Mary this was her first son but the title ‘firstborn’ would be used of Christ in relation to His rank and supremacy in a number of areas. As Morgan said, “The simple meaning (here) is that Jesus was her eldest child, the firstborn Son.

But there is a larger meaning. Firstborn does not mean only first in time; it means also **first in place, first in order, first in importance.**” Jesus Christ is the firstborn, the highest in rank, position and importance as follows:

- a. The Firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). He is the first in rank and the highest in position amongst the redeemed.
 - b. The Firstborn of every creature (Col. 1:15). Christ is the first in rank and the highest in position over all of creation. And no surprise as He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe!
 - c. The Firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18). Christ’s resurrection has no parallel. It stands above all other resurrections in rank and position.
 - d. The Firstborn of the church (Heb. 12:23). The church is called “the church of the firstborn”. He is the originator, Sustainer and head of the church. He is the highest in rank and position!
3. As we gaze at the babe lying in a manger, let us remind ourselves of Who He is.
- Heb. 1:1-3 “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;”
- e. Col. 1:15-19 “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: (16) For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: (17) And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence. (19) For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell;”

C. A Humble Place – “because there was no room for them in the inn”.

1. The fact Jesus was laid in a ‘manger’ and it is noted that this was because there was no room in the inn, highlights that Christ was born in a lowly stable. It may have belonged to the owner of the inn where they sought refuge for the night.
2. The word translated ‘manger’ not only can mean a trough or box in a stable or barn which is designed to hold food (such as hay) for animals to eat; but it also can mean the entire surroundings of a

stable. For example, the only other place the word is found is in Luke 13:15 and it is translated 'stall' – "his ox or his ass from the stall". The stable was not part of a barn as in our culture but was either a cave (there were many limestone caves in the Bethlehem area) or a public stable provided by a town for travellers in which to shelter their animals. Within the limestone cave stables in Bethlehem, a niche was often carved out of the limestone for a manger in which to put fodder for the animals.

3. No room for Jesus? The town was too full to make room for the most significant birth in all of history. How symbolic of the world and its response to Christ even today! What about YOU?
 - a. Unsaved friend: Is there room in your heart for Christ this Christmas? He is more important than anything in the whole world and yet less important things have first place. To make room for Christ in your heart you must realize that Christ will take the throne in your heart. Self and sin cannot reign on the throne of your heart alongside Jesus Christ. That is why you must repent and humbly invite Christ to come into your life as Lord and Saviour.
 - b. Believer: Is there room in your life for Christ? You may have made room for him in your heart but now that you are saved, how much room do you have in your life for the King of kings? Sadly, Christians so often allow the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches to occupy their hearts and lives to the point where there is little to no room left for Christ. Perhaps this Christmas you could give Him first place (pre-eminence) in your life afresh? Do you have room in your daily life for Christ (e.g., daily devotions)? Do you have time in your week for Christ (e.g., church attendance, Christian service)? Do have room in your Sundays for Jesus? Do you have room for Jesus in your home life? Do you have room for Jesus in your marriage? Will Jesus have any room in your life this Christmas or will it be the world's version of Christmas.
4. No room for Jesus' parents – "no room for **them** in the inn". Again, how symbolic of a world that largely does not have room for those who are genuine followers of the Christ child.

Conclusion: Will you receive Christ as your Saviour this Christmas? Will you give Christ His rightful place as Lord in your life? Will you take the opportunity of this season to thank and praise God for sending His Son to be our Saviour?