

FOUR GREAT VISITS OF THE
CHRISTMAS STORY
Luke 1:39-2:38

INTRO: Welcome to another Christmas day. Since 1998 I have given 12 messages on Luke 1:26-2:38. I have called this extended section of Scripture on the account of Christ's birth the, "Four Great Visits of The Christmas Story." They are:

- I. THE VISIT TO MARY (Luke 1:26-38)
- II. THE VISIT TO ELIZABETH (Luke 1:39-56)
- III. THE VISIT TO BETHLEHEM (Luke 2:1-21)
- IV. THE VISIT TO JERUSALEM (Luke 2:22-38)

In this morning's message I will give the last message in the section I have called 'The Visit To Bethlehem.' The fourth visit is to Jerusalem. I had originally given Luke 2:1-20 as covering the third visit, but have found I was in error. It goes to verse 21. Some 32 days pass between verse 21 and 22. For this morning's message we want to focus in on this 21st verse. In verses 21-24, I find in these verses the fulfillment of four rites required in the Jewish ceremonial law. A rite, in light of the passage we are considering this morning is the performance of a divine or solemn service as established by religious laws or the customs of a certain group of people.

For example, we have marriage rites, or funeral rites. A rite is the process of performing weddings or funerals. These vary greatly from belief to belief and from culture to culture. However, the rites performed in our passage are those required by the law of Moses that were kept by the Jews. These are rites that are not required by God of the Church.

We are going to consider the first rite as given in verse 21. We give it because it is related to the Christmas story. For the benefit of those who listen to the defense of a six day creation by Ken Ham, let me tell you what a story is. It may be one of two things. It may be a narration of facts, or a narration of fiction. When we talk about the Christmas story, or Bible stories, we are talking

about a narration of facts, and here the narration of facts as related to the birth of Christ.

I. THE CIRCUMCISION (2:21a)

Now it is not readily apparent, but this verse does not focus on His circumcision, but on His naming. We will not focus on His circumcision either, but to mention a few things.

What we have first mentioned here is that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. This was a Jewish, or biblical ritual. A biblical rite in the Jewish faith was the formal, religious act required by God's law. Thirty two days before Jesus' parents took Him to Jerusalem, He was circumcised according to Jewish custom. And at this time He was named. So our text says, "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcision of the child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

Paul, writing in Galatians 5:3 says this, "...I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is debtor to keep the whole law. Then in Galatians 4:4-5 he says, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Jesus was born under the Jewish law and fulfilled the law, and thus qualified by His very life to be the Messiah. Circumcision was one of those rites required in Jewish, or OT law.

II. HIS NAMING (21b)

But the second thing I want us to notice here, though first in importance, is that this was also the day He was named. As a matter of fact, that He was named on this day is the purpose of this sentence. His circumcision is incidental. It only tells us exactly what day He was named. He was named eight days after His birth. This passage seems to indicate that at least male children were not named until the eighth day. From that I want to raise a question; just when was Jesus named? So I want us to notice something very interesting here in our verse. It says that He

was so named by the angel 'before' He was conceived in the womb.

Go with me to Luke 1:30-31 (read). Here, before Mary conceived, the angel told her to name Him Jesus. Then when her fiancée heard that she was with child and was greatly distraught the angel came and told him what had taken place. So let us go to Matthew 1 (read 18-21).

So, let me ask you a question. Joseph knew Mary's Son was to be called 'Jesus' before He was even born. Mary knew her Son was to be called Jesus before He was conceived. The angel knew He was to be called Jesus before he came from glory and informed either Mary or Joseph. So, when was it decided that He would have this name?

Now before I answer that question, I want to ask you another one. It is theological in nature. It is a question theologians have pondered for a long time. It is this: When did Jesus become the Son of God? Was it when He came as a Child, or was He the Son of God before that? Turn to Luke 1 just for a moment (read verse 35).

It says here that the One who was to be born to Mary would be called, 'the Son of God'. Now here is my question, did Jesus become the Son of God at birth, or was He the Son of God before that? Now you may be surprised that many theologians believe He was the Son of God from eternity. According to them, He was eternally the Son of God. I see numerous problems with that. I believe He became the Son of God at the incarnation, and He was called the Son of God after His birth. Before that He was not God's Son.

Now I want to show you what John Calvin says of the view I hold. He writes, "Heretics, who imagine that he became the Son of God after his human generation, seize on the particle *therefore* as meaning that he would be called the Son of God, *because* he was conceived in a remarkable manner by the power of the Holy Spirit. But this is a false conclusion: for, though he was manifested to be the Son of God in the flesh, it does not follow that he was not the Word begotten of the Father before the ages. On the

contrary, he who had been the Son of God in his eternal Godhead, appeared also as the Son of God in human flesh." Well, Augustus H. Strong, in his comprehensive systematic theology agrees with Calvin.

You may be surprised to know that our Catechism bears on this question. It says in chapter 2, question 4: "Is Jesus Christ the Son of God from all eternity?" And the answer goes like this, "Yes: He was with the Father before the world was; whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Jn. 17:5; Mic. 5:2)." And you might say, "Well, the Catechism agrees with Calvin." In my notes on the Catechism I write as a commentary under the answer like this: "This question can be misleading. It must be read right. It could be read, 'Was Jesus the Son of God from all eternity' or, 'Was Jesus, who is the Son of God, from all eternity?' The first question asks if He was always the Son of God, the other asks if Jesus, as a Person, was eternal. It is the latter which is meant as the references indicate. Jesus is eternal and existed from eternity but He became the Son of God when He came to earth in a physical form."

We understand that the Catechism was originally written in German. In German the question reads, "Ist Jesus Christus, der Sohn Gottes, auch von Ewigkeit?" What the Catechism is asking is whether Jesus Christ as a Person existed before He was born, and the answer of course is that He did. Jesus Christ is the second Person of the triune God, but as I understand the Word of God, at the incarnation and His birth, He became the Son of God.

So in Luke 1:36 the angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." Why was Jesus called the Son of God? Because He was fathered by the Holy Spirit, who is God. Why was He called the Son of man? Because Mary, a human being mothered Him. This is the incredible message of Christmas.

Now let me add here that it is my view that when conception takes place, a person with all his or her possessions such as the body, the soul and the spirit

with all their parts comes into existence. No part of any human being ever existed before conception. That means each person with all their possessions has a starting point in time. But, there happened in time one exception, only one; for what I have just stated was not true of Jesus Christ. You see, He, as the second Person of the Triune God had existed from eternity past. In John 8:56 Jesus, in conversing with the Jews said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." John then says, "Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?'" Then comes an incredible statement by Jesus. He said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." So incredible is that statement that the laws of grammar have to be broken to convey it. It should say, "Before Abraham was, I was." But He did not die somewhere in between that time and this time, so He says, "Before Abraham was, I AM." You see, before He was conceived He existed as the second Person of the Trinity. But at conception, He, as Almighty God entered a physical existence, and became the Son of God! No words can adequately describe the incarnation of Christ.

Let me mention something here as well, before we go on with our earlier question. Maybe it will help us to know what the name 'Jesus' means. Who knows what this name means? It means 'Jehovah saves' or 'Jehovah is salvation.' So, since it is Christmas, let me tell you a little story. There was a Jewish man, by name of Dr. Ben David Lew, who personally experienced the Jewish holocaust in Europe. I used to get his news letters, which would be over 30 years ago now. He has told how that a number of times he was required to dig his own grave. Each time the Lord delivered him. Then one day he found Jesus as his Messiah and Savior.

But there was one matter that troubled him. If Jesus was indeed the Messiah why was His name not in the Old Testament? So he diligently searched the Scriptures and one day as he was reading the book of Hebrews he came to chapter 4:8 where it talks about Joshua leading the people of Israel to the land of rest. The Greek word for Joshua there is *Iesous* the very same name that Mary was told to call her Son in

Luke 1, and that Joseph was told he was to name the Messiah in Matthew 1. He further discovered that "Jesus" is a translation of a later form of spelling for Joshua. Dr. Ben David Lew now knew that the name Jesus was all over in the OT too.

From then on he began leading other Jews to *Iesous*, which in Hebrew is *Ieshua*, and in English, *Joshua*; and the meaning is **Savior** or Jehovah saves. You see, it is for this reason that the Lord told Joseph to call Him *Iesous* or *Jesus*, because he will **save** His people from their sins."

So now let us go on with the question: Joseph knew Mary's Son was to be called Jesus before He was even born. Mary knew her Son was to be called Jesus before He was conceived. The angel knew He was to be called Jesus before he informed either Mary or Joseph. So, when was it decided that He would have this name? How did the angel know He was to be called Jesus? Did the angel decide that? When was it decided that the second Person of the Trinity was to be named 'Jesus' on the day of His circumcision?

I propose to you that it had been determined before the universe was created. I believe that the Triune God determined what He would be called, based on the work He would accomplish. You see, Jesus may have had a part in His own naming! And so, when the angel came to tell Mary what would happen, he could tell her not only what would happen, but what they were to name this Child. This had had been determined before creation. So, listen carefully as I read for you 1 Peter 1:20-21, "He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."

This text says Jesus Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world. The word translated 'foreordained' does not mean to be predestined. It is the word to 'foreknow'. Before God created the universe, the birth of Christ and His name and His death burial and resurrection were already established facts. God knew it would happen. Not only that, but Jesus had agreed to it. So Revelation 13:8

says He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

So I believe that before God created man, He knew what would happen if He created him. I have told you before how dangerous it is to make free moral agents. God knew, and He knew what would happen. But He also knew what He could and would do about that. But before He could proceed with His plan, the second Person of the Trinity had to be in agreement with this plan.

Now I want to show you what happened. The Bible tells us precisely what happened. You must turn to this passage in your own Bibles in the book of Philippians (read 2:5-7). You see, before the creation of the world Jesus was in the form of God. But He did not consider being in the glorious form of God something to be grasped and hung on to. He was willing to give that up. When? Well, if He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, then this must have been before the foundation of the world as well.

So, way back before the foundation of the world, before the creation of the universe, it was decided that the second Person of the Trinity would become man. It was foreknown what He would do, and His name was chosen on the basis of what He would do. He would save people, and His name would be, Savior, or Jehovah saves, or as we know it; He would be Jesus.

Yes, Joseph was told before Jesus was born what He was to be called. Mary knew before He was conceived what He was to be called. The angel knew before he spoke with Mary what He was to be called. But God knew before creation what He would be called. It was not the angel who decided what Mary's Son would be called.

So, before the creation of the universe, the second Person of the Trinity agreed to become the Son of God and the Son of man, and to give up His life as the Son of Man for sinful man. He would be the Savior, and would be called 'Jehovah is salvation' or 'Jesus'. And then, when the time was fulfilled, the angel of the Lord came and told Mary what would happen and he instructed her that she was to call His

name Jesus. Then, having found Mary's approval, through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was conceived in her womb! The angel then came to Joseph and told him what had taken place and he said, "You shall call His name Jesus." And then, eight days after He was born, the day He was circumcised He was named 'Jesus'.

And now I want to show you something else, though I have told you this many times. The angel told Joseph that he was to call Mary's Son Jesus and he told him why. Why? It was because, and I quote, "He will save His people from their sins!" That name fits, does it not? If He saves His people from their sins, He is a Savior, Jeshua, Jesus!

Now I want to show you a truth about why He was to have this name. It is a truth that we have almost lost today. You see, He was to be called Jesus, not because He would justify lost people and save them from hell fire. Yes, that is true too, and that must happen before He can truly do the saving He came to do. But the saving He came to do was not to justify lost sinners, but to sanctify saved sinners! It was to save HIS people FROM their sins. I wonder if you see it? The angel said to Joseph, "You shall call His name Jesus because He will save HIS people, FROM their sins." There is the doctrine of sanctification. There is the primary purpose we are justified and saved from hell. It is so we might be saved from our sins in life, sanctification!

Recently I have told you why God created man. Why was it? Yes, to glorify God. And before we can glorify God as He wants us to, we must be saved from hell, that is to be justified. But, we must be in the process of being sanctified, saved from our sins, before we can glorify Him in the way He desires.

Is it not fit that on Christmas day, when we commemorate the birth of Savior, we should spend some time on so great salvation? You see, the primal focus is on His saving people from their sins. This is a life-long process. It is a present tense process. When it says in the Bible, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have

everlasting life" the stress is on 'believing'. And it is present tense believing. It means to go on believing. And having eternal life is dependent, not on having believed once, but on going on believing.

You see, it was determined before creation that the second Person of the Trinity was to be named, and the reason was because He would save His people from their sins. And how does He do that? Through their continual belief in Him. The just, the saved, the Scripture declares, shall live, continually by faith. Faith is not a one time event, it is a life-style.

CONC: So, in conclusion, let me read our verse once more, "And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

That Jesus was circumcised is mentioned here incidentally. The major point of this verse is to tell us on which day He was named. It is the naming of Jesus that plays the prominent part of the information given us here by divine inspiration. But with regard to His circumcision, He was born under the law, that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. So Galatians 4:3-6 says, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"

With regard to His name, Joseph was told what he was to call Mary's Son before He was born. Mary was told to name Him Jesus before He was conceived. The angel was told to tell them what to call Him before he left heaven. And, I believe, the Triune God had determined this before creation!

And so, in the fullness of time the second Person of the Trinity experienced conception as a helpless baby. He had laid all His glorious, visible attributes aside and was born in a sheep barn, I think. And eight days later, like all Jewish boys, He was circumcised, and then He was named,

and His name was 'Jehovah is salvation' or as we know it, Jesus! Yes, He is the Savior, the One who saves His people 'from' their sins. May He ever do so for us!

So, here is my final paragraph. It was determined that the second Person of the Trinity was to become the Savior, or Jesus before the creation of the universe. The angel was sent to tell Mary this before she conceived. And she was told to call Him 'Jesus'. Then the angel told Joseph what had happened to Mary, and he was told to call Mary's Son 'Jesus'. Then eight days after He was born, He was circumcised and named, 'Jesus'. And then, just over 30 years later, He actually became the Savior, when He was crucified, was buried and then raised the third day according to the Scriptures!! Hallelujah, we have a Savior! We have Jesus!