

Luke 2:1-20 "The Prince of Peace" 7/21/24

Celebrating Christmas in July has a big advantage - It allows us to skip the over commercialization of Christmas - Every Fall we are bombarded with Christmas gift commercials - And we might even get caught up in the commercial frenzy ourselves

It certainly is fun to give gifts to our families and friends - It is festive to get together and celebrate - Even with this Christmas in July service, we plan to celebrate with a luncheon - But not only are there no Christmas commercials, I didn't buy or wrap a single gift

As God's people, we should know that the gifts and decorations are not the most important part - The true meaning of Christmas is the fact that God sent Jesus to be our Savior - Even in July, we should rejoice that The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us

The historical context is interesting - Luke was writing about a little-known event in that day, the birth of Jesus - And was relating it to events of the world that everyone would know about: the emperor and the governor

Today, when we look back, we can discover which event was really important - Now the mention of Caesar Augustus brings to mind who was emperor at the time Jesus was born - And no one has even heard of Quirinius except for those of us who study God's Word

So often the things we encounter in this world seem so important - Our day-to-day struggles - Our jobs, our finances, our homes, our families - Even our country, our political leaders, and who's running for president - Yet from the perspective of eternity, what really is important? - It is the arrival of a Savior - And our response to Him

Our reading from Luke shares what happened on that first Christmas in chapter 2 of his Gospel - But first, let us back up to the previous chapter where we had heard of the birth of John the Baptist and a few other details

In the first chapter in Luke, we may read of an angel visiting a young virgin named Mary, who lived in Nazareth in Galilee - And she was told that God had selected her to be Jesus' mother

Mary did not show a hint of hesitation about being chosen to be mother of our Lord - The Holy Spirit overshadowed her - And she became pregnant with the Son of God without a human male being involved

This created several problems - Because Mary's society was very harsh in their treatment of unmarried women who became pregnant - And Joseph, the man she was engaged to, knew for certain that he had not fathered her baby

Mary's harsh treatment at the hands of the town gossips was undoubtedly a reality - But Joseph leaving her was not in God's plans, so another angel was dispatched to explain exactly what was going on to him¹

Another problem was the fulfillment of prophecy - Hundreds of years earlier, God said, through the prophet Micah, that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem in Judea - But Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth in Galilee

However, you probably already know that what seems like a problem for humankind is never a problem for God - Luke 2:1 "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered"²

The Roman emperor only thought that he was in charge - God is always in control - And so, God used the Roman emperor to make Mary and Joseph walk the 71 difficult miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem

Luke 2:6-7 "And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn"

¹ see Matthew 1:18-25

² Scripture quoted is from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,

This was the humblest location possible - Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Now hath heavenly glory wedded earthly poverty; and, henceforth, let no man dare to despise the poor and needy, since the son of the Highest is born in a stable, and cradled in a manger."³

Jesus may have been born a helpless infant, like all of us were - But please do not picture our Lord only as a cute Baby in a nativity scene - Know the Lord Jesus as your Savior

His earthly life was one long course of sacrifice for others - A ministry of teaching us how to love one another - And then He died to save us from our sins

Jesus may have been born at night, but He is the enemy of darkness - Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."⁴ - Bring the light of Jesus into your life and He will chase the dark times away

Jesus was born in a stable, and placed in a manger - His humble birth guaranteed that all would have access to the Savior - Had our Lord been born in a royal palace, only a privileged few would have met him

But born to poor parents - In an even poorer setting - Opened the door to all of humankind - Even the shepherds who were the poorest of the poor, in that day were able to come and worship the Newborn King

I've been your pastor for enough years, that you probably know that Mary and the Shepherds are my favorite characters in the Christmas narrative

Have you ever wondered why God chose those Shepherds for the exciting news that Jesus had been born? - I like to think that these shepherds, in the quiet solitude of their evenings spent outdoors, had the opportunity to be close to God

³ Spurgeon's Commentary on The Bible an Exposition, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, © public domain

⁴ John 8:12

Can you imagine how different the life of a shepherd in Biblical times is from the hectic pace of life in this 21st century? - Psalm 46:10 commands us to, "Be still, and know that I am God"

The shepherds had plenty of still, quiet time - But here in this modern world, we can eliminate quiet altogether if we want - You probably know someone whose TV is always on - Many of us never drive anywhere without the car stereo on

And the way some people use their earbuds amazes me - They will put great effort in going to a park to walk the dog, or exercise - Then instead of enjoying the peaceful tranquility of the natural world - They keep music or a podcast blasting in their ears

Perhaps we would not tolerate going without bathing for months at a time like the Shepherds - Or sleeping outdoors watching over animals - Or trying to defend a sheep from a lion or a bear with a stick and a few stones

But like the shepherds, we would all benefit from more time to be still - To pray and listen to God - And to focus on the beauty and blessing of the natural world that God has created

The shepherds, on that peaceful hillside, had enough quiet time to hear God's still small voice - Quiet time may be much scarcer here in this 21st century - But it is just as important today, if we are going to hear when God speaks to us in a gentle whisper

Jesus began and concluded his earthly life in the company of those who were marginalized by society - At His birth, with the visit of the shepherds - And on the Cross, with only a few women followers and John remaining

God loves those who are not popular, those on the outskirts of society, those who struggle in our world - And we, God's people, should always remember to show love to those who are less fortunate

Finally, look what the shepherds did after they saw and worshipped the Christ Child - Writing about Shepherds reaction to seeing the baby Jesus:

Luke 2:17-20 records, “And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

The Christmas narrative demands a response from us too - God has come down from heaven and walked among us - Teaching us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldliness, and to live self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives in this present age

Allow Jesus to set you free from all the things of this world that can drag you down - Because “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”⁵

All it takes is a simple prayer - Admit to God that you need a Savior, because there is nothing you can do to go back and change anything you’ve done wrong in the past - Believe that Jesus died and rose again to save you from those sins

Then just call upon Jesus to come into your life and save you from those sins, resting on the assurance of God’s Word that, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”⁶

It is so important that you accept God’s free gift of salvation for yourself - Romans 10:9 assures us, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”

Salvation through Jesus Christ is God’s gift to you - “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”⁷ - Now that’s a Fantastic Christmas Gift!

⁵ from John 8:36

⁶ Romans 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32

⁷ Romans 6:23