

Luke 2:

“8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 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. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” 15 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.” 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”

The Real Christmas!

We are truly blessed to be here celebrating the Advent and Christmas season of 2020. It is not only a blessing because it reminds us about Who is really in charge after a very difficult year, but because it stands against those who would have us avoid such celebrations, even though it is Jesus Who came to defeat death!

As Pastor Boothe reminded us, we, as Christians, are those who can truly appreciate the wonder of the God of the Universe coming as a little baby, demonstrating His ultimate power through ultimate weakness. Submitting Himself to parents and relatives and friends who cared for Him: Some of the very sinners for whom He came to die, fed Him, changed His wraps, taught Him to walk and talk and how to grow & mature in wisdom and knowledge before God and man. A story that only our loving God could conceive of & only our loving God could carry out giving us not only redemption but an example of how we are to humbly live our lives in service to others, not with a sense of fear, but a sense of victory!

- **We celebrate all of this each and every year to remind us & our children that this all took place in real history.**

In the same way that we remember the birthdays and anniversaries here a Church of the King during our fellowship meals: We do so because each of us was actually born on a certain day & real couples took real vows on their wedding day.

These are important reminders in our age where our children will be told that the Biblical accounts of Christmas are all just fairy tales, like Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, or yes, even Lord of the Rings.

Nice images and stories to make us feel better in a dark and depressing world.

- **But the Bible declares that we are His faithful witnesses, who are to know and proclaim to others that Jesus DID come as the light of the world and that His coming has changed everything!**
- **NOT just because we believe it, but because it is REAL!**

The actual texts that give us the Christmas story are relatively short: Given to us only by Matthew & Luke.

- Of course they are not the only places in the Bible where we learn about the details and meaning of the coming of Jesus, as Paul aptly demonstrated last week from Galatians.

From the promised deliverance by the seed of the woman in the opening chapters of Genesis to the closing call for Jesus to come quickly at the end of Revelation... The other coming of Jesus that we remember in this Advent season which Paul will address next week.

- The Bible IS the story of the coming of Jesus to save His people from their sins!

The accounts that are given by Matthew and Luke tell us the details that we need to know about the birth of Jesus, the incarnation of the Son Of God... It is Luke who tells us the details of the night Jesus was born, which Lord willing Jeff will flesh out for us in two weeks.

For this morning I have turned to the account of the Shepherds to help us ground the birth of Jesus in real history and to learn some practical lessons from them.

Luke 2:1 “And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.”

This is a good place to again consider the historical accuracy of the Bible...

Today the skeptics who want to discourage us from believing the Bible and undermine our precious faith, often bring up the question of when Jesus was born...

- They tell us that we don't even know what year Jesus was born nor even what time of year His birth took place!

Well, the Bible does not give us the exact year, or the exact time of year, so we have to accept that:

- Knowing that if it was critical it would have been given.

When we consider what Luke does tell us about Zacchaeus' service at the Temple and the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary we do come to a date in late December!

However, the skeptics go even further and say the Bible actually contradicts itself about the time Jesus was born.

They point out that other secular records show King Herod dying in 4BC which had to be after Jesus was born because King Herod is present at the time of His birth.

However, they tell us that Governor Quirinius took his famous census in AD 6 or 7 which is almost ten years later.

Of course, they assume there was only one census, even though Luke specifically references the FIRST census!

That would certainly imply more than one census so in the end we do not have a conflict in the Biblical account.

Of course they will go on to say, BUT there is no other record of such a census so how do we know it took place?!

- We should learn to trust God's account of what happened in history!

Earlier skeptics, using the SAME type of argument, said Pontius Pilate the governor whom the Gospel accounts tell us condemned Jesus, was NOT a real historic figure.

His existence was not accepted by secular historians until 1961, when a limestone inscription was found bearing his name and relating him to the reign of Tiberius who was Caesar from 14-37 AD.

OOPS, I guess we Christians were not so foolish after all for having confessed Pilate as a real governor of Judea for almost seventeen hundred years in the Nicene Creed!

- Since that time Pilate's palace & other evidences have been found providing more confirmation of the historical accuracy of the Gospels.

Whether any secular evidence about the earlier census will be discovered before the return of Jesus does not really matter when you consider how many proofs have already surfaced that confirm the faithfulness of the Scriptures.

Sadly, some Christians say these details are not important because the Bible presents the Gospel, the great 'spiritual truth' that is of primary importance...

True enough, but if the Bible is wrong about what historical details it does give us...

Then why should we believe that Jesus was born of a virgin or any of the other details of His life & work? Our children will ask such questions and we need to be ready to give them an answer for the faith within!

- And so, God uses this census to bring Joseph and Mary to the place where He promised long ago that the Messiah would be born.

Luke 2:3 "So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. 4 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, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 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."

Much has been made about Jesus being born in humble surroundings, or even relating Mary & Joseph to the plight of the homeless, which they were NOT.

But we do need to remember the reality of what is happening here...

The fact is that ANYPLACE on this earth would be pretty humbling for the Son of God, the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity to be born!

The Old Testament promised that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem and that He would come as the lamb of God...

So Joseph goes to Bethlehem and Mary delivers the baby Jesus and puts Him in a manger...

- A place where shepherds would often place a new born lamb.

Thus it should not surprise us that the first announcement of this important event came to....
SHEPHERDS!

8 "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid."

Yes, this is where I need to give my annual reminder that all those cute angels that appear this time of year are NOT accurate! Just who would be afraid of them?

10 "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. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Jesus did not grow up to become King or even ascend to be King...

- **He was born the King of Kings & Lord of Lords, worthy of our worship.**
- **In the various Christmas accounts, we see this great truth proclaimed by the angels, by the wise men with their gifts & worship and by Simeon in the Temple just so we don't miss that important point! And the Angels also give these humble shepherds a confirmation of these great truths with signs they could see and touch:**

12 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." Next we see that the birth of Jesus was certainly NOT a secret in heaven: 13 "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

If you have experienced the beauty of just twenty or thirty well trained choral voices signing in the round or even in a rotunda, then this picture should take your breath away...

- **Imagine what this heavenly HOST sounded like that night!**

AND as you are trying to take all of this in, remember that they were not performing for the world or even ALL of Jerusalem, but just for these faithful shepherds who were to be the first witnesses for Jesus!

And we know them to be faithful because they demonstrate it with their response: 15 "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." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. "

Remembering that what took place that night are events in real history, we must see that there are some very practical lessons we should also learn from the account of these faithful shepherds...

- **First and foremost it should remind us of the importance of our being faithful in our callings!**

Any shepherd who had decided that keeping the sheep was just too boring or that this particular night was too cold would have missed that heavenly chorus and the chance to see Jesus!

- **Jesus in His teaching tells of how the servant who was rewarded generously was the servant who was faithful in little things!**

There are many who wonder if God is real in their lives often looking for some experience or new adventure to get them excited.

- **The lesson of the shepherds is that more often than not God meets us where we are faithfully serving in our everyday lives!**

And this leads us to the second lesson where we must learn to listen carefully to what God has to say, even when it might seem a little strange:

The shepherds where to seek the Messiah as a baby in a manger.

- **And of course, we must not only hear what God says, but obey His commands as these Shepherds did that night by visiting Jesus!**

Some will object at this point and say that was fine for them, but my Christmas has been pretty dull:

Lots of shopping and other distractions of the season...

- **But no angels singing or special stars to help me along!**

Here we must remember what Jesus told the rich man who wanted Abraham or Lazarus to return to his brothers to warn them about the fires of hell, arguing that they would believe it if someone came back from the dead.

- Abraham told this man that they had Moses and the Prophets and if they did not believe them, then even if one did come back from the dead they still would not believe because they rejected what was clearly in God's Word!

We must remember that God did not send His angels to a group of men who had spent their lives apart from the faith, not caring about what God said, hoping to sort of wake them up.

It is faithful people who are faithful! If you have not been faithful, the answer is not to continue in sin until the angels appear to you some night...

- The answer is to begin being faithful...
- Faithful to what God has said in the Bible, His Word!

Going into the New Year we will again study the lives of Simeon and Anna, as well as wise men from the east, where we see great faith and faithfulness in their lives and we will be challenged to live such lives today. There will be simple lessons that each and every one of us can learn and we begin to see such simple lessons in the lives of the shepherds:

- Be faithful daily as you serve in your vocation or calling.
- Hear what God has to say in the Holy Scriptures.
- Do what God commands, even when it seems a little strange!

If we do this the result will be lives that reflect the response from these faithful shepherds:

Dr. Luke tells us that “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. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”

- These humble shepherds worshipped God, they gave Him all the glory and they went about telling others about the Good News!
- May it be so with all of us in this New Year!

Communion Meditation: Psalm 23:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

**He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.**

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”