

“THE COSMIC IMPACT OF CHRISTMAS”

Luke 2:1-20

Dr. John Crocker
Crossroads Church, Albert Lea, MN.
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I think most of you know who Alfred Hitchcock was. He made some of the scariest suspense-thriller movies ever, like *Psycho* in 1960.

On his passport his occupation was listed as “*Producer.*” A French immigration inspector asked, “*Producer? What do you produce?*” Hitchcock answered, “*Goose bumps.*” (He actually used the British expression ‘*gooseflesh.*’)

- I firmly believe that Christmas is thrilling, and it should give us goose bumps.

If your observance of Christmas has never stirred your soul with awe and wonder, I think you may have missed the point of it.

A churchman, Bishop William Quayle said it best, ‘*When wonder is dead, the soul becomes a dry bone.*’

- In both the natural world and the supernatural realm the birth of Jesus Christ had an amazing impact.

God gave us Christmas as the best, most thrilling thing that has ever happened to mankind.

The Scripture text for our study is the most familiar narrative of the birth of Christ, Luke 2:1-20.

From Luke 2:1-20 we learn what God did to show us how important Christmas is.

I. GOD USED AN EMPEROR AS HIS SERVANT. Luke 2:1-7

¹*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.*

²*(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)*

The governor of Syria was Publius Sulpicius Quirinius.

Luke includes this little snippet of information because at that time the Roman province of Syria included Palestine in its jurisdiction. So the orders came from Syria.

Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, was the most powerful person in the world. Caesar actually ruled the whole known world.

But Caesar didn’t know that God was using him.

God didn’t appear to him and say, “*Caesar! It’s time for you to count all the people in the Empire. Now hop to it!*”

Many years before Caesar, King Solomon wrote, ‘*The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.*’ (Proverbs 21:1)

That’s how the Lord God used Caesar Augustus.

³*And everyone went to his own town to register.*

⁴*So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.*

⁵*He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.*

The decree for a census came from Caesar, but God was behind it.

Hundreds of thousands of people thought they were following Caesar’s decree, but they had no idea that Caesar was doing the Lord’s bidding.

- Joseph’s ancestral home was in Bethlehem, so he had to go to Bethlehem for the census.

Bethlehem was about 80 miles south of Nazareth. It was an insignificant Judean town. Its sole claim to fame was the fact that King David had been born at Bethlehem about 1,000 years earlier.

- But why did Mary go with Joseph?

Maybe Mary knew that the prophet Micah had spoken of the Son of the Most High being born in Bethlehem.

The angel Gabriel had told her that’s who the child in her womb was (Luke 1:32), so she had to get to Bethlehem soon.

‘*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*’ (Micah 5:2)

- Let’s not forget that Mary’s relatives and others in Nazareth had not received an angelic visitor telling them about Mary’s miraculous conception through the Holy Spirit.

Can you imagine Mary trying to explain her pregnancy to the upright and uptight people in her circle of family and friends?

That would be the most ludicrous and preposterous pregnancy story any of them had ever heard.

It would be like a student today telling his teacher that he had not done his homework because he had been kidnapped by aliens and taken to their mother ship orbiting the earth.

Mary had to go to Bethlehem because that's where Jesus had to be born. And she was probably also better off going with Joseph than staying home—alone and shunned in Nazareth.

- So they arrived safely in Bethlehem.

⁶ *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,*

⁷ *and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Eastern inns at that time were not like anything you might imagine—nothing as good as your worst hotel experience.

The Bethlehem inn was probably just a group of stalls around a common courtyard.

Travelers had to bring or buy their own food. The innkeeper provided the fire for cooking and fodder for the traveler's donkeys.

- ◆ Joseph and Mary were probably not the only people who couldn't get a place in the inn.

They found shelter in a place where the animals were kept, probably a cave in the hillside.

- ◆ Nothing about the place was suitable for the birth of royalty.

The greatest miracle ever—the incarnation of God—happened in such ordinary and crude surroundings.

Listen to this little poem, called *Opening Night* by E. Ruth Glover. It seems to capture the setting, even though she takes some liberties with doves and cows and a donkey.

Restless doves were stirring in the rafters
In dulcet tones remarking on the sight;
Dumb cows stood ringside at the little tableau
Their liquid eyes were watchful in the night.
A weary donkey nuzzled in the manger,
And heaven's searchlight hovered over all,
As on the stage of time Christ made his entrance—
A swaddled infant in a borrowed stall.
To no applause the cloudy curtains parted,
And heavenly choirs introduced the scene;
Life's greatest drama opened to its fanfare—
Unheard, unknown, unadvertized, unseen.

God came all the way down to reach and to save people for whom just living each day is a full-time job.

The simplicity of Jesus' birth was God's way of showing that Jesus came to be the Savior for the whole world.

- When Mary's time came, the only available place for the little family was one usually occupied by animals. Couldn't the God who moved the whole Empire at least have reserved one room at the inn for Mary and Joseph? Sure he could have! But that wasn't God's plan.

- The Bible gives us hardly any details about Jesus' birth.

We don't know if baby Jesus weighed in at six pounds or ten pounds, whether he was 18 inches long or 20 inches; whether he had a mop of dark hair or if he was bald as a bowling ball. We don't even know if Jesus was cute. All we know is it was a boy, and evidently he was healthy.

- What we know for sure is that God was in complete control.

The most powerful man on earth, Caesar Augustus, was God's instrument in bringing the virgin from Nazareth to Bethlehem at just the right time for the birth of the Savior according to prophecy.

The birth of Christ the Savior was so important that God moved the world to make it happen.

II. GOD SENT ANGELS AS HIS MESSENGERS. Luke 2:8-15

God gave some angels a grand assignment.

⁸ *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.*

⁹ *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

Shepherds always have an important role in church Christmas pageants. But in that day were just a bunch of rustic nobodies.

They were basically religious outcasts. They didn't have the right to enter the temple precincts because they were ceremonially unclean.

They were just ordinary men whose work kept them from satisfying the religious requirements of the Jewish Law.

They would probably have been voted the least likely ever to be visited by a messenger from God.

- Perhaps you think of yourself as being like those shepherds—the least likely to receive God’s favor. Like them, you’re not religious.

Perhaps this is one of the few times you come to church. It’s just not your thing. Your lifestyle is very different from that of the prissy religious people you know.

Well, it’s obvious from this account, that Jesus Christ the Savior didn’t make his entrance among religious people. If God had wanted him to come that way, he would have arranged for Jesus to be born into the family of the chief priest in Jerusalem.

God purposely chose to present Jesus first of all to the least religious people in the area—the shepherds.

The truth is that Jesus didn’t have much good to say about religious folk. When you read of Jesus rebuking people, it was usually the proud religious people. He had kind words for those whom the religious people rejected.

¹⁰ *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*

¹¹ *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*

¹² *This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

¹³ *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

¹⁴ *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

¹⁵ *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

This was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to these shepherds.

They had one of the most boring jobs on the planet. How exciting can it be watching sheep all day and night?

We know that all heaven was tuned in and watching this event. God gave the shepherds goose bumps!

- Jesus came to bring peace between a holy God and a world full of people under a divine curse because of sin’s defilement.

There is no greater distance than the separation between the holiness of God and the defilement of sin.

And that’s why Jesus Christ was born. God came in person to make peace—to reconcile God and mankind.

To accomplish this, Jesus had to deal with this enormous problem of sin.

He had to suffer the penalty for all our sin and win the victory over the evil one who was responsible for sin.

So the birth of Jesus Christ is infinitely more than a sweet story about a special little baby boy.

And Shepherds were the first of all the millions of ordinary people through the centuries who have heard and received the good news of Jesus Christ, the Savior.

- This was an electrifying event in heaven. The angels were spellbound.

The Apostle Peter explained that the outworking of God’s plan announced by the prophets and fulfilled in Christ held the angels spellbound. He said, *'Even angels long to look into these things.'* (1 Pet. 1:12)

I don’t know the emotional capacity of angels, but it’s clear to me that when God sent them as his messengers to announce Christ’s birth, they were pumped!

III. GOD CAME TO US AS A BABY. Luke 2:11-12, 15-20

When God added human nature to his divine nature and came to earth he came into the world in the ordinary way.

¹¹ *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*

¹² *This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

¹⁵ *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

¹⁶ *So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.*

¹⁷ *When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,*

¹⁸ *and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.*

Shepherds were considered unreliable witnesses. They weren’t even allowed to give evidence in court!

How interesting that shepherds would spread the word first!

These were the first evangelists in the New Testament. And they were effective.

Did you notice the enthusiastic reaction of the people? They were amazed. That’s not a benign emotion.

The shepherds’ report was compelling.

¹⁹ *But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

Try to imagine Joseph meeting these shepherds as they arrived on the scene.

They asked, *'Please, sir. May we see the baby, Christ the Savior? Some angels told us he was born. We just had to come.'*

I think Joseph probably had tears in his eyes as he said to Mary, *'Mary, this is amazing! Angels just told these shepherds about our baby. They left their sheep and came right away!'*

Mary's little baby was without a doubt the Son of God.

◆ And what about Mary? Few mothers would be pleased to have a group of dirty, smelly shepherds gawking at her baby.

But Mary and Joseph must have been thrilled. Only a soul of granite would not to be stirred its the core.

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (v.19)

²⁰*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

When they returned to their flocks, they didn't stop praising God.

The shepherds didn't go to see just a baby. They saw the One the angels had announced—the Savior, Christ the Lord.

• That baby in the manger would become the Savior on the cross.

Jesus Christ's birth was ordinary and unpretentious.

Only a few people knew that something extraordinary and unprecedented had happened behind a Bethlehem inn.

• God moved the most powerful man on earth to arrange for the arrival of Jesus the Savior at the place prophesied—Bethlehem. People throughout the world had to change their schedules to go and register for the census at their ancestral home town.

None of them knew that God was behind it all. God moved the whole world.

• I wonder what God has been doing in your life without you even realizing it to bring you to the point where you are ready to welcome Jesus Christ into your life.

But here you are. Do you think God may have had anything to do with it?

• Christ's entrance 2000 years ago had a cosmic impact. Will you allow Christ to make a difference in your life this Christmas?