

The Incarnation **Luke 2:1-38**

Intro: Page ____ **Luke 2:1-21**. I cannot read these words and not think back to celebrating Christmas on my mom's side of the family. Every Christmas, after we would stuff ourselves on a huge meal prepared by my grandmother, all the children would gather in the living room where the Christmas tree *and gifts* were located. And before the first gift was opened someone, usually my grandfather, who served as a pastor for about 50 years, would read this passage. It was a tradition that continues to resonate in our family because it was designed to remind us that there was something so much weightier and significant than opening a few gifts from one another. What makes Christmas Christmas is the greatest gift that we have received from God.

This text, the Christmas story, is as familiar as any in the NT. On the one hand, that is a beautiful thing because we should be familiar with Joseph and Mary, the Shepherds and angels, Jesus and the response of heaven to his coming. On the other hand, familiarity often breeds contempt. We move from possessing a sense of wonder to a casual response that borders on practical disregarding of these truths. The challenge for us is not simply to be familiar with the story, but to allow this story to renovate, or perhaps reconstruct, the story of our lives. The challenge is not to assume familiarity but to ask God to take us into the depths of who he is. The birth of Christ teaches us that...

The Point: The Son of God invaded human history, so that our lives might be invaded by his peace.

Remember, Luke 1:5-2:38 provide a theological overview of God's work of salvation. These early passages really provide the foundation and set the table for all that will follow in Luke. Three encouragements will help us see how the reality of Christmas should transform our lives. #1

I. Consider the humility of Christ in his Incarnation.

Verses 1-7 focus on the very tangible realities of Jesus' birth. They tell us of the "stuff of earth." They cover this particular moment in history when Caesar Augustus decreed a census, and Mary & Joseph traveled to be registered in Bethlehem because Joseph was a descendant of David. It was there Mary gave birth to her child, which was foretold by the angels as we saw in Luke chapter 1. Verses 8-20 go on to speak of the reception of heaven and earth to his coming of this baby boy.

As we reflect on Luke's account, we have to be struck by how the whole passage smacks of humility...

- Jesus, the Messiah who was foretold by the prophets, was born in a place reserved for animals... because there was no room in the inn.
- And then, we have the glorious announcement of the angels, not to those who sit in the King's palace, but to common, ordinary shepherds. Choosing the weak things, the common people... as common people they are representative of all people. But those details are minor compared to the grand reality of the Incarnation...

When we talk about the incarnation, we are referring to the act when the Son of God took on human nature.

- The One who is eternal was born in time and space. The One who is perfectly righteous would our dusty streets among those who are filled with sin. The One who reigns above all would, in the words of John Bunyan, "stoop down, past the fallen angels, to redeem us."
- To get a better grasp on the magnitude of the Incarnation, John Owen says we should, "Consider the infinite distance between God's essence, nature or being, and that of his creatures." Simply put, it cannot be done. [There is no way we can begin to grasp that infinite distance.]
- In reflecting on the incarnation, Octavius Winslow talked about how there is always some relative proportion when we are talking about two finite things. A grain of sand bears some proportion to Mt. Everest. A drop of water bears some proportion to the Atlantic Ocean. My 97' Honda Accord with no A/C bears some proportion to the 2.6 Million dollar 16 cylinder Bugatti Veyron Supersport! But there is no way to compare the Creator of all things, the one who is infinite in his being and unlimited in all of his attributes with the finite and the created. This only begins to help us consider the humility of Christ when he became man.
- And by the way, here's a little theology for you. Jesus did not cease to be God when he became man. "He became what he was not (a man), but he did not cease to be what he always was (God)." To put it another way: there was a time when Jesus was not. There was never a time when the Son of God was not.

- Jesus was fully divine, God from all eternity, Paul explains it in Philippians 2 by telling us that though being God, he did not make full use of his rights: “[Jesus Christ] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)
- God became man! What could be more lowly and unassuming?
- Jesus came to serve. He humbled himself. The one who sits on a forever throne taught us that the path to greatness is found in serving all. He taught us that if you want to be first, you will be last.
- In his humility, we find every reason, as his followers to exercise humility. We read Phil 2:6-8 together, but what does vv. 3-5 say: “**Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 2:3-5)**”
- Would people consider you as someone who is understated in your demeanor, in your “accomplishments”? or would people view you as someone who thinks a little more highly of yourself than you ought. Are you that guy who “has all the answers” who thinks your right whether that comes to a philosophical view or a practical task? Are you easily puffed up with pride, quick to raise up all of your many accomplishments (even if only in your heart)? *OR* are you someone who understands that your accomplishments, your knowledge, your skills are simply the result of God’s grace to you?
- We are in constant need of a dose of Christ-centered humility.
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We should be astounded that God became man, but what does the Incarnation say about how God relates to us?

- The Incarnation shows us how God has pursued us. He has taken the initiative in our salvation. When you weren’t looking for God, God came looking for you.
- Most people carry the notion that we obtain salvation by our pursuit of God. There are two false beliefs at work here: 1) That we can earn our salvation through our own pursuit and effort. “I’ll do enough nice things, good works in order to arrest God’s attention in the hopes that he might bestow salvation on me.” Simply put, we could never be good enough. The distance between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of men is infinite. But added to that, the second false belief in play here is 2) that we have made the first move toward God. We are not saved because we have pursued God. We are saved because God, in his mysterious and electing love, has pursued us by his Spirit in the Person of his Son. Salvation does not belong to man. Salvation belongs to God.

II. See the glory of Christ in his Incarnation.

The Glory of Christ...

- The glory of God attended his coming... “The glory of the Lord shone around them...” The majestic presence of God, the bright, radiant glory of God was made visible to the shepherds against the dark night sky.
- Why would the glory of God attend his coming? Answer. Because the glory of God dwells in his person.
- *Jesus is full of glory.* The worth of God is seen in the person of Jesus. . . .
- **“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)**
- **“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...” (Hebrews 1:3).** . . .
- **“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.” (John 1:18)**
- So how do we respond to the glory of Christ? Like the angels. Like the shepherds, and like Simeon and Anna. **Verses 22-38.**

The glory of Christ should move us to praise!

- Same sermon every week. 52 times a year, the same truths stated in different ways and with different emphases. Jesus is all we got. His praise is all we got.... He’s God. We’re not. He’s holy. We’re not. He’s running this show. We’re not. He’s worthy of praise. We’re not.
- “Glory to God in the highest.” May all praise be ascribed to God in the highest, seems to mean the highest plac

- This knowledge of God and his salvation through Christ should animate us and fill us with praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name (Heb 13:15) and the fruit of lives given to him in worship (Rom 12:1-2).

Praise is built on promises...

- The fulfillment of all God's covenant promises come together in Christ.
- The Sovereignty & providence of God in orchestrating the events of Jesus' birth as the fulfillment of prophecy. God is a God of the details. Question: how does a couple from Nazareth end up in Bethlehem? "The accidental events of history have become acts of destiny." (Bock, 203)
- All of the types in the OT from the sacrificial system to people pointing to Messiah are fulfilled in Christ. All of the shadows find their substance in Christ. Genesis will teach us that in our Equipping Class.
- Even in this passage, just as we saw twice in Chapter one with Mary & Zechariah, you have the pattern of promise-fulfillment-praise. A promise is made to Simeon that he would see the Messiah in v.26. That promise finds fulfillment in v.28. The consequent result is praise vv.29-32. This is explicit in the last phrase of v. 29, "according to your word." God always acts according to his word. He always follows through on every one of his perfect words and perfect promises. Praise should be built on promises, and praise should move us to proclamation.

The Glory of Christ should move us to proclamation

- **Once again, this is "Worship Driven Mission."**
- We see this with the announcement of the angels. **Verse 10.** Good News... The gospel is news. And news is meant to be announced, not twisted, not modified to fit our own preferences and intended outcomes, simply announced. This news is too good and too important not to share. Jesus, Savior, Christ, the Lord...
- **Verse 11.** Jesus. Savior. Christ. Lord. The only time these words (Savior. Christ. The Lord) appear consecutively in the Bible.
 - Jesus – A common name, uncommonly embodied in a baby. It means "Yahweh saves" or "The Lord is salvation."
 - Savior – deliverer, rescuer,
 - Christ – think Kingly, Davidic Messiah..
 - Lord – the title given for God himself.
- The good news is for all people. Look again at what Simeon says again in v 30-32: "[Jesus is] *salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.*"
- A light for the Gentiles. A Gentile is simply a non-Jew.
- You know what I love about this? There is not one person on the globe to whom this message of salvation is not directed, and there is not one person who does not need to hear this message. So what does that mean for us? We go!!
- This is what the shepherds did when they experienced the birth of Christ. Some have called the shepherds "the first evangelists." What about you?
- Have you seen the glory of God in Christ? If so, then like the shepherds, there must be something burning within you to speak of what you have experienced.
- The good news is inherently full of "great joy." You don't know joy until you know Christ... So the beautiful thing is that we go full of the joy of Christ so that others might know the joy of Christ.
- Consider the humility of Christ. See the glory of Christ, and finally, #3

III. Embrace the peace of Christ in his Incarnation.

- Look back at 2:14. The angelic announcement says, "Glory to God in the highest (we covered that), *and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*"
- His coming results in praise to God and peace for men.
- Peace describes the harmonious relationship that God desires to have all people. This is our deepest need: "peace with God."
- This theme of peace runs deeper than 2:14. It is implicit in the major theme of salvation (29-30)...
- It is also present in the hopes and longings of Simeon and Anna. Luke tells us that Simeon was waiting, like other devout and righteous Jews, for the "consolation of Israel" and "redemption of Jerusalem"

But... this peace is only experienced by "those with whom he is pleased!"

- At the same time, God's peace is for everyone, AND God's peace is not for everyone.
- The gospel is universal in its invitation but not universally received.
- To put it another way, the gospel is worthy of all acceptance but not all deem it worthy of acceptance.

- Simeon knew this. Luke knew this. Jesus knew this. Paul knew this. We know this.
- Simeon puts it like this in his words to Mary in **verse 34**. “Behold, this child is appointed (this is his mission. This is how it is going to turn out. How Simeon? Well this child is appointed) for the fall and rising of many in Israel.” These are piercing words.

How is this going to happen?

- Opposition... We will see in Luke: great reception *and* great rejection.
- Ironically, while Jesus came to unite and reconcile God and man, he necessarily brings division.
- “In me you might have peace.” (John 16:33) & “I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” (Mt. 10:34)
- Luke also tips us off through the words of Simeon that this opposition will be fierce, even to the point of a sword piercing through her own soul. How would Mary’s soul be pierced? Simeon is pointing us to the coming scene of Calvary, when Jesus, Mary’s baby boy, would one day be crucified on a Roman cross. Mothers, can you imagine seeing your son brutally and unjustly murdered before your eyes?
- Yes, there will be a sword that will pierce Mary’s soul and it is the same sword that reveals the hearts of many...

Many will oppose Christ, but God will be pleased with many and his peace will rest on them.

- So how do we get in that group of people? Some of you are thinking, “I’m not sure if GOD is pleased with me.” Or possibly, “How do I know if God is pleased with me?”
- Well, what pleases God? **“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)**

What is your response to the birth of Christ? Is it one of faith? We see three dominant responses. Marveling, meditating, and faith.

- Who could not marvel at the claims found here.
- Some of you, like Mary, will leave pondering these things, meditating on them...
- Others will walk away like the shepherds, believing which moves to praise and proclamation.

Conclusion:

- Not everyone responds like the angels and shepherd and Simeon & Anna. This is the difference between Judaism & Christianity... The Jews are waiting, waiting, waiting. Christians are shouting, “He’s here!”
- I met a grad student about a year ago at the Equal Exchange by North Station. . . Basically, said that she had lost hope in the Messiah, because if he was going to show up, God was not very punctual..
- It’s funny how everyone wants to sit in the seat of God, quite a dangerous seat of opposition to take... if that’s your perspective, I want to say humbly, and lovingly, and courageously, “Be ready for the fall.”
- Your eternal destiny rises or falls on your response to the picture of this two month old in the temple who was the perfect, crucified and resurrected Christ.
- **Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**
- He came once. He is coming again...Are you ready? Will you rise or fall at his coming?
- Pray.
- It is my prayer that in light of the Incarnation of Christ, you could say with the angels “Glory to God in the Highest...” (maybe push to Micah)