

The Christmas Miracles

Luke 2:1-20

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The first Christmas was the miracle of all miracles. John 3:16 says, “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.”

I want to take the Christmas story in Luke 2:1-20 and share with you some of the miracles in that story.

The first miracle is in verses 1-7; the miracle of the Incarnation. “And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem...”—which means “house of bread”—“... because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 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.”

You would say that in these first seven verses, you have the birth of the Son of God or the Incarnation. Christmas is about God becoming flesh. When we speak of the Incarnation, we speak of the fact that God left heaven, came to earth, was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life for 33 years, died a substitutionary death on the Cross, was buried and three days later rose from the dead. Forty days later, He ascended back into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. There He ever “lives to make intercession” for us.

That’s Christmas. Christmas is when God came down to mankind.

Luke gives us this historical setting of the event. And in Galatians 4:4, Paul said, “When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” That means that the birth of Jesus Christ happened at the perfect time. The world had become one with Rome, there was the universal Greek language, the Roman roads connected the whole world at that time, men were crying for peace and God sent His Son at that perfect time.

The Bible prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. In Micah 5:2, it says, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” So what we read in Luke is a fulfillment of that prophecy.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, though his parents were of the tribe of Judah, the kingly tribe of David. They were living in the north in Nazareth. And Nazareth was about 80 miles north of

Bethlehem. The prophet had spoken and said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

God sits on the throne and because He is sovereign, He took the heart of Caesar Augustus in Rome and turned it whatever direction He wanted it to go. So Caesar sent out a decree that all the Roman world needed to be taxed. You had to enroll in a census for the purpose of taxation. Caesar thought he was in charge of ruling the world, but he was nothing more than a puppet in the hands of a sovereign God, who actually turned Caesar's heart and controlled these events.

When I read this Luke narrative I'm joyful, because I know that God sits on the throne, and God is in control. We might look at the world right now and think it is so dark, so wicked and so evil; society has gone so far from God. But we know that God has His perfect way in His perfect time. His perfect plan cannot be thwarted or hindered; God's purposes will be fulfilled.

The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, so Mary and Joseph had to go from Nazareth all the way to Bethlehem, an 80-mile trip. Mary was in the last stages of pregnancy and took this trip on a donkey. If you want to induce labor, put your wife, in the last days of her pregnancy, on a donkey and take an 80-mile trip. That'll do it.

So the first seven verses tell of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, the miracle of the Incarnation. Verse 7 says, "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger..."—which is an animal feeding trough—"...because there was no room for them in the inn." Jesus was born in a humble setting.

Jesus is God incarnate. John 1:14 says, "And the Word..."—which is a reference to Christ—"...became flesh and dwelt among us..."—or "pitched His tent among us"—"...and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul said, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh." Hebrews 4:15 says, "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." So we have a sympathetic and compassionate High Priest in the person of Jesus Christ.

And Jesus was incarnate for three, simple reasons. First, He was to reveal God to us. He said to Philip, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father." He came to reveal the Father. Second, Jesus also came to redeem mankind, "to seek and to save that which was lost." And third, He will come one day to reign. That is in the future. He will come to reign on the throne of David forever and ever, "and of His kingdom there will be no end."

The second miracle that first Christmas is in verses 8-14, the miracle of the angelic visitation. "Now there were in the same country..."—near Bethlehem—"...shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 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. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'"

So we now move from the Incarnation to the visitation of the angels.

Shepherds were on the lowest rung of the social ladder at that time. They were not even allowed to testify in a court of law. They were despised and rejected. Many orthodox Jews said, "If you find a shepherd fallen into a ditch, don't bother to pull him out." So it is a picture of how God came to the lowly, the outcast and the rejected.

The picture here is sometimes called "the first Christmas service." The congregants were the shepherds. "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night." Some theorize that these were special shepherds; that they watched over the sheep that were used for the temple sacrifices. There was a special group of sheep used for the temple sacrifices. And these shepherds, that the angel appeared to, were in charge of these special sheep. If that is so, these shepherds would be the first to see in Bethlehem that day "the Lamb of God" who would be slain for the sins of the world.

Now in verse 9, we move from the congregation to the preacher, "an angel of the Lord." This could possibly be the angel Gabriel, but it doesn't say. Angels are majestic, intelligent beings created by God. There are not only all these angelic beings surrounding the birth of Christ, but they surrounded Christ His whole life. Verse 9 says, "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid."

Then the first Christmas sermon ever preached was preached by the angel, verses 10-12. He said, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." Notice it is to everyone. "For there is born to you..."—that is, "to humanity"—"...this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

Then notice the song the angels sang, in verses 13-14: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'" So the whole sky was filled with innumerable angels who were singing.

When we have church on Christmas, we sing. Christianity is a singing religion, because the Lord put His joy in our hearts.

And who came? Verse 11 says, "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Jesus is the Messiah, the Mashiach. He is the Lord. And how did He come? He was born. That's His humanity, His earthly birth. Where was He born? In "the city of David." Why was He born there? Because God made a promise to King David that from his seed or lineage, Messiah would sit upon the throne of David forever and ever, and from "His kingdom there will be no end." So He had a

covenant made with David that he would have the Messiah in his lineage.

This covenant was made when David sat down and said, “Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?” So Jesus came through the lineage of David.

And what was the purpose for which Jesus was born? To be the “Savior,” verse 11. I always liked these words of the angel. “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior.” So the chief reason Jesus came at Christmas was to save us from our sins. His very name, Jesus, or Jehovah Yeshua, Joshua, means “God is salvation.” He came to save.

And who did He come to save? Verse 10 says “all people.” It wasn’t just the Jewish people or Gentile people. “For God so loved the world,” so it was to “all people.”

And what did He do? What did He bring? He took away our fears, verse 10, and He brought us “great joy.” And we experience His abundant peace, verse 14.

That was the miracle of the angelic visitation.

Then the third miracle is in verses 13-17. It’s the miracle of the shepherds’ proclamation. The shepherds were the first evangelists going out from this first Christmas service. “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.’”

The shepherds’ response was in faith. They heard the message, the Good News, and their response was that they ran quickly to Bethlehem to see. They said, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known...”—they spread the news abroad—“...the saying which was told them concerning this Child.”

Now after the Incarnation, the visitation and the proclamation, we conclude in verses 18-20 with the response to the Christmas miracles. “And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”

I want to give you three concrete ways to celebrate Christmas. There are three key words in our text that illustrate the response to the Christmas miracles. The first is “marveled” or “wondered,” in verse 18; the second is “pondered,” in verse 19; and the third is “praising,” in verse 20. That’s how we should celebrate Christmas.

“And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” I believe the way to celebrate Christmas is to wonder at the birth of Christ itself. Wonder at the angels’ visitation. Wonder at the enunciation to Mary: “Rejoice, highly favored one.” She would

be the mother of the Messiah. Wonder at the birth of John the Baptist and at the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Wonder at all the things that happened and how the angel came to Joseph in a dream saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." Then wonder at the angel warning Joseph of Herod's anger and wrath, which sent Mary and Joseph and Jesus to Egypt.

Just think about the story of that first Christmas. Just to read the story would be sufficient. It was the greatest event in human history. Never before and never since had God become a man. You talk about wonder and majesty! In the womb of the Virgin Mary were knit together for all eternity deity and humanity.

Right now Jesus is in heaven as the exalted God-man. The reason Jesus is both God and man is so He could lay his hand on God, because He is divine, and He could lay His other hand on man, because He is man, and bridge the gap between the two and reconcile them, bringing them back together. No prophet, no priest, no guru, no "ascended master," no religious leader, no politician could ever do that.

You talk about making peace through the blood of the Cross! Jesus bridged the gap between God and man. The word "priest" means "bridge builder." There was a huge gap between us and God because of our sinfulness, but Jesus bridged that gap. And by faith in Jesus Christ, we can cross over that bridge, we can come to know God and we can have a personal relationship with Him.

So you don't celebrate Christmas unless you just wonder at the glory and marvel at the amazing thought that God would come from heaven and become a man.

The second way we should celebrate Christmas is in verse 19. "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." "Kept all these things" is almost the idea of keeping a baby book or a record of all the things that took place. Mary is keeping everything she can think about. She's writing down about the angel that came to Joseph, about the shepherds, about the wise men and she ponders all these things.

The word "ponder" means "to lay down sequentially and intellectually." So it goes a little deeper than to wonder. It's one thing to wonder; it's another thing to ponder. Ponder means to think of its significance, of its meaning.

Do you know what Christmas means? Do you know its significance? It means that our sins can be forgiven, that we can have eternal life, that there is a future and a hope. There is "a new heaven and a new earth," a new world coming. When we look at this dark world we live in right now, we know the future is bright because of the Christmas story.

Jesus Christ is coming back. That same Christ who was born in Bethlehem will return. Just as sure as the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled, the prophecies about the Second Coming will be fulfilled. That will be His Second Advent. And it won't be as a baby in a manger with just humble shepherds; it will be the heavens rendering lightning from the east to the west,

“every eye shall see Him” and He will come in power and majesty, in splendor and glory. He will set up His kingdom on earth, “and He shall reign forever and ever!”

It’s all because of Christmas. So ponder its meaning and significance; that Jesus came to suffer and die for the sins of the world.

The third way to celebrate Christmas is to praise, verse 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 spirit of Christmas is worship. You go all the way back to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and you will see that he worshipped. Elizabeth worshipped. Mary worshipped. Anna worshipped. Simeon worshipped. The angels worshipped. The shepherds worshipped. The wise men worshipped with gold, frankincense and myrrh.

What should we do? We should wonder at the glory of His birth. We should ponder its meaning and significance. We should worship; we should sing praises to the King of kings, who came to redeem us back to God.