

02/09/25 - Luke 2:1-20 - "From Heaven to Humility"

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 1 to 20. That's Luke, chapter 2, verses 1 to 20.

And verse 1 reads, In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all of the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and all went to be registered, each to his own town.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth to Judea to the Sea of David, which is called Bethlehem. And because he was one of the house and the lineage of David to be registered with Mary, his patrol was with child.

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 clothes and laying him in a manger, because there was no space for them in the end or no place for them in the end.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

[1 : 30] And they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away, brought them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

[2 : 30] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in their heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they have heard and seen, as it has been told them.

This is God's word. Thanks be to God. Well, I've got to say it, church. Merry Christmas. We have arrived.

Right? It's Christmas every day for, if you're me. I'm singing Christmas carols all year round. I didn't hear an amen on that.

Are you guys okay? Maybe I'm the only one who needs to go back to the confession. All right. You know, many assume that the Bible is merely, merely a historical record that's meant to provide irrefutable certainty for our faith.

Think about that for a second. Many assume that the Bible is merely a historical record in order to provide irrefutable certainty for our faith.

[3 : 57] But there's a problem, because faith and absolute proof cannot coexist. You can't have faith, you can't call it faith, if it's based on irrefutable proof.

If something is undeniably proven, faith is no longer necessary. I know, I'm getting psychological. But faith is believing, according to Scripture, of what has been promised, regardless of what is seen.

It's faith. It means trusting in God's promise, despite uncertainty in facts, uncertainty in feelings, and uncertainty in circumstances.

Faith begins where certainty ends. And God calls us to trust, not just tally up the facts. Now, this begs a question, because, okay, Luke's intention, it's even on the graphic, so that you may have certainty.

If Luke's intention and purpose of writing to Theophilus, who was established in chapter 1, is that he would know for certain the things that he had been taught concerning the things of the gospel, what does Luke desire for us to know for certain today?

[5 : 27] And how does that work in line with faith? What does Luke write that still holds this element of unknown that requires our response of faith?

Well, today we celebrate Christmas in February. It's a miracle on my calendar. It will go down in history.

This is the unfolding of Christ's birth and the foundation of our faith. And Luke reinforces this message through history, through angelic proclamation, and also the discovery of the shepherds in a manger.

And what's the message? The message of the gospel says, God alone has the real power to usher in real peace by way of His real birth.

And so the uncertain aspect that we are confronted with today is not whether all these things happened.

[6 : 40] It is certain that they happened. But will we believe in history? Will we believe the angels? Will we believe the shepherds?

And not only that, but we believe in the effect that it still holds for us today in Steel Valley Church. The sermon title today is, From Heaven to Humility.

Let me make sure that's up there. There it is. From Heaven to Humility. Got the clicker. And I'm going to break this up into three sections.

Here in a Baptist church, that's protocol. And so we've got three sections. You can also thank Martin Luther, no, Charles Spurgeon for doing the three points sort of thing. He kind of ushered in that.

But I'd like to break this up. And I want us to see if the message of the gospel says that God alone has the real power in the first section. We want to see that He ushers in real peace.

[7 : 45] And we see that He makes that all known by way of His real birth. Real history. But will we believe?

From Heaven to Humility. Let's break this up. And I want to pray before we do this. Let's all join together in prayer. Lord, we come to You today knowing that there's a lot of legitimate reasons that we might have to doubt.

A lot of things that are uncertain in life, a lot of challenges, a lot of hardships that make us kind of just question Your goodness at times or Your holiness.

and just don't know how many of these things can make sense. But we know that Your thoughts are not our thoughts. Your ways are not our ways.

And You have chosen to reveal Yourself today to us through Your Word. And so we pray that You do this by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Soften our hearts.

[8 : 53] Open our ears. So that we may receive its instruction today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So the first section today is a message from history.

Let's look at history here. Verse 1 says, In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

There's sort of like this sense of power here that all the world. You can't escape it. You can't escape it. Right? You should sense that power in this.

Then verse 2, it says, This was the first registration from Quirinius, who was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered. And so we receive some historical insight here.

Because this Caesar, this Caesar that's given a title, Augustus, this Caesar was known by Octavian from his high school friends.

[10 : 03] He rose up to be quite a powerful figure. And you sense that. All the world should be registered. He led with an iron fist. Now, I don't know what they teach in public school, high school history classes anymore.

I try not to think about that too much, about anything that's being taught in public schools, for that matter. Amen. But we might remember this name, Augustus, being the one who ushered in 200 peace, 200 years of peace, stability and prosperity to the Roman world through the Pax Romano. That's a Latin phrase for Roman peace. That was this Augustus. It was this Augustus who was the great, powerful, political warrior who defeated Antony and Cleopatra during the Battle of Actium in September 2nd, 31 BC.

This Augustus was the first Caesar to ever have a Senate vote to change his title to Augustus. Augustus, which refers to, namely, a god.

Augustus means holy. Augustus means revered. And you see, this Augustus, this Caesar Augustus, had real power according to history.

[11:37] And we're probably wondering, okay, Brent, this has got to have a point. And there is a point. Because we've got to ask what Luke is doing here, historically speaking.

What's he doing? Is he just helping us pass the English or the history class? Well, the text in our translation, the English Standard Version, makes it appear as if Luke was a little bit confused here. Because we know that Quirinius was not in power here during the birth of Christ. And it sort of reads, this was the first registration when Quirinius was governor in Syria.

It's almost like connecting the two. But in our translation, it wrongly connects the two as if they're chronologically overlapping.

And so many have been led to speculation. Well, the authority of God's Word is at stake. If Luke is wrong, this could be really dangerous, you know, of how we hold the authority of the Word.

[12:45] And now, I'm not dumb enough to think that I can convince us all in our limited time today to end a century of debates right now.

But I will pose a question for you. Because we believe very profoundly in the authority of God's Word here at Steel Valley. is that since 6 AD, when Quirinius was in his leadership, it was a quite wide known time in all history.

It's like kind of referring to the 9-11 terror attack. All you have to do is say a 9-11 terror attack, and all of a sudden, your minds go to a significant point in history.

This 6 AD was a very pivotal point in the Roman Empire. This was a Jewish revolt against Quirinius. And maybe Luke is simply making a historical mark, a historical marker of the birth of Christ, of when it happened. Right?

[13:52] It's a significant moment for the church, for God's plan of redemption, right? But if it happens in an insignificant time period in secular history, how are you all going to know when Christ was born?

And so what I believe is Luke is consistently, just as he does in Luke 3, verse 1, he uses political figures as historical markers so that you know about the whereabouts in time that this took place. And I think it is a translation issue. I looked in the Greek, and I think it is a translation issue and not an inspiration issue. If you want to learn Greek, go for it. It's fun. You see, the most important matter that we need to settle here today is that Jesus Christ was historically born.

That is what we need to settle here today. Thank you. Amen. All right?

We can talk over coffee in our house churches about the date and everything like that. But this is probably occurring during the most unnoteworthy period in secular history, Jesus Christ coming down and being born of Mary.

[15:11] And I think that will line up with the emphasis of Luke here. And I don't want us to allow less than 10 years to destroy our robust trust in the authority of God's Word.

Like that. So with that settled, let's move on. Joseph, in verse 4, Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house of the lineage of David to be registered with Mary as betrothed, who was with child.

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 him, them at the inn.

So as you can imagine here, contractions grew on the way to register for Caesar Augustus, a mister who's thrown in his power to get all the world to register once again, right?

To pay their taxes. And I would picture this 13, 14-year-old Mary at this time, probably in tears as they're on their way to Bethlehem.

[16:40] I mean, this is not what she would... You have these images of having children, don't you? Like all these grandiose dreams. Like it's just gonna be pain-free.

That cord's not gonna be wrapped around their neck. Everything's gonna be fine, right? You could probably imagine getting to Bethlehem, having these contractions, and her being utterly destroyed. That even a barn, an inn, a barn with little... You know, where the horses are stationed in barns in these little quarters, there wasn't even room in the barns for them.

They found this little public courtyard for travelers that is used to tether animals. They found this little shelter outside. How insignificant.

And if it is an insignificant moment in secular history, how insignificant is this? Insignificant secular history, an insignificant location.

[17 : 49] We should see a contrast here between Caesar Augustus, a self-proclaimed God, wielding his great power for all the world to pay their taxes.

Yet he unknowingly was serving God's greater plan by sending Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem here. Fulfilling prophecy from Micah 5, 2.

Where Micah said long ago, 700 years before this, but you, O Bethlehem, from you shall come forth for me, one who is to be ruler in Israel.

Augustus' power was vast. It got people paying their taxes, yet God's power was greater. Augustus ruled the empire, but God ruled history.

history. Let's put that in present tense. God rules history. It's a very important message for our politically polarized culture today.

[19 : 01] God rules history. God rules history. The king of kings wasn't born in some palace, but in a lowly hut wrapped in rags, placed in a feeding trough.

No child that night seemed to even have any lower prospects than that situation. Even a bathtub would have been an upgrade.

Yet this is where Christianity began. In humility, in obscurity, at a time when the world barely even noticed, Christianity began.

The world looks for power in thrones. It looks for power in armies. God's true power was displayed in a fragile newborn.

Fulfilling the prophecy and proving that God alone reigns. I love how Kent Hughes, this is Carmen's best friend now, I love Kent Hughes, he's one of my favorite authors.

[20 : 23] He says, the baby Mary carried was not a Caesar, meaning a man who would become a god, like Caesar became a god, but far greater of a wonder, the true God who became a man at this time.

I love how that was phrased. You see, the message of the gospel says, God alone has the real power. man's power builds empires, God's power redeems souls.

This is the message from history. Let's see the message from heaven unfold here in verse 8. and in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night and an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were filled with great fear.

Another instance of cardiac arrest. Here they are. You want to talk about irony? the greatest message ever to be revealed to mankind came not to the doorstep of Augustus, the most powerful political warrior of this time, but it came to the depths of deep darkness in the middle of a field to lowly shepherds.

Shepherds were just a step up from lepers in this day to them and they rightly fear at God's presence.

[22 : 04] Healthy fear, reverent fear. In verse 10 and the angel said to them fear not for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord and this will be a sign for you.

You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Great news. Great joy. Available for all people. In verse 13 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 among those with whom he is pleased.

Can you imagine this dark field? You're probably looking we ate the wrong crop today brothers. whoo!

There weren't 50 angels there weren't 150 there weren't even 1,500 angels a multitude it's a number that can't be counted that appeared in this field.

[23 : 32] Heaven was empty of angels they were here. The night sky was full declaring glory to God and peace on earth.

Now there is an important theological reason why God did not send this message to Augustus. Right? And it's important for us to hear.

The gospel is only it's for all people but it's only good news to those who realize their need. it's for all people yes available for all people but not all people will receive it.

If you're here today thinking that man you're good you know you watch Joel Osteen on one of his channels and he said you're good so you're good right? And that being a Christian only just further enhances it's kind of like living life 2.0 just further enhances your already good life that you've inherited.

Well it's the worst thing that I could ever do this morning for anyone here today or on the live stream is to just stand there and give you a high five and say yeah man you're good. The worst thing I can do the best thing I can do is hand you a Bible and probably a remote to turn Joel Osteen off.

[24 : 58] The gospel is only good news to those who know they need it. Paul tells us about this in 1st Corinthians chapter 1 verse 26 to 29 he says not many of you were wise not many were influential not many were of noble birth but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise so that no one may boast before him apart from faith in Jesus Christ we're not good we're not good at all we're in danger apart from Jesus Christ the gospel is received by humble needy hands peace on earth to whom God is pleased and to whom is God most pleased according to faith those with faith not in their own goodness but in

Jesus Christ goodness alone peace on earth is a consequence of faith amen what a reason for a church to pray like absolute nuts for our unbelieving friends and family members not prayers trying to twist God's arm as if we could change an unchangeable mind and will but praying for those unbelievers that we love the most would be humbled would be wrecked spiritually in their rebellion against God and realize that Jesus Christ is the only hope for salvation praise God see the message of the gospel says God alone has the real power to usher in real peace this is the message from heaven and so in this last hundred meter dash here we have in verse 15 a message from a manger when the angels went away from them back into heaven the shepherds said to one another let us go over to

Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us it's like logically we need to figure this out that was pretty cool let's go check this thing out verse 16 and they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger and when they saw it they made known the saying that had been told to them concerning this child imagine their shock a grand angelic pronouncement that led them to an animal shelter dung and all smells you could imagine walking up to that manger wondering if they found the right child are you sure this one and God said yes this one in this significant moment in secular history in this insignificant manger and location to these insignificant shepherds was God unfolding the most significant moment of divine history here this is where

God's kingdom we see being upside down where the last become first where the weak are made strong and now as the shepherds arrived and they're like okay we got this right this is definitely the right place there's no other place that this would be here we are now they didn't pop in like we do to cranex and say oh what a lovely manger scene what a cute child right this makes me feel good right not cranex carmen cranex i rebuke you cranex let's pray they didn't just pop into this lovely manger scene they didn't just stand there and be like oh what a cute little child they gotta be absolutely flabbergasted at the sight what was intended to be communicated within this manger is that god truly became a man through this birth the one who made the stars in the night sky that night is the same one who learned to walk on a dusty road and this is an essential gospel christian doctrine this is what separates christianity from many other faiths that god truly became man it was not an illusion they did not eat the wrong crops that night right he was not appearing as a man but fully flesh and blood this baby was he experienced weakness learned to walk learned to read learned to write all for the mission of god redeeming us himself this baby born in poverty born in humility rejection was the lamb of god destined for the cross that was his mission as paul writes for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of god you see the lamb is born here really born and born to die this is good news of great joy for all people this is the message from the manger and so there's some responses here in verse 18 all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them obviously they're talking that got the town talking we also see

Mary who silently treasured up all these things pondering them all in her heart could you imagine the confirmation that Mary received this time that lines up with what the angel Gabriel recently in our text had informed her church isn't it difficult to imagine god working out our salvation to

intervene on our behalf unworthy and as wretched as we are in a fallen rebellious state from birth because of Adam's sin the first Adam's sin but still Jesus Christ was born into the world to be born into your heart sin this divine birth was real real and salvation is exclusively through faith in Jesus [33 : 30] Christ alone exclusively he is the one who is qualified in his humanity and divinity to be slaughtered on our behalf and to pay the ransom that we owe because of our sin and the shepherd's returns says in verse 20 glorifying and praising God it was a worship service then I think we can sing loud you sure heard them singing praising God for all that they had heard and seen as it had been told to them in church what we may not see today we are hearing we are hearing Luke today according to the inspiration of the scriptures and if through the inspiration of scriptures you are hearing God today through his word it's time to believe and to sing with the shepherds the message of the gospel says God alone has the real power to usher in real peace by way of his real birth it's real eternal peace isn't found in politics eternal peace isn't found in prosperity not found in power but eternal peace is found in a person

Jesus Christ this is certain this is the purpose of Luke's writing but the question is will we believe history will we believe the angels and will we believe the shepherds let's pray