

The Gift from Above
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
December 18, 2022

Text: Congregational Reading: Luke 2:1-20,
Before beginning sermon: Galatians 4:4-5

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Purpose: To help us understand that in the fullness of time, God sent His only Son into the world to redeem the world. We need to have a heart of willingness to hear and respond to the good news. We also need to be willing to go and tell others.

Did you hear that phrase, “*when the fullness of time...*” Maybe you have experienced personally what that word means. If you have ever been pregnant, then you understand more than anyone what that word means. There was a period of expectation, a period of worry, there was a period of rest and silence, but then one day – it happened. The water broke, the pain started, the frantic drive to the hospital. The fullness had come.

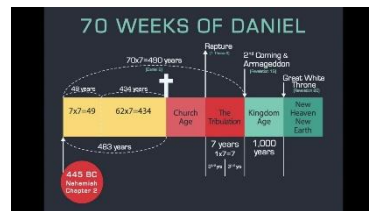
What amazes me in my hours of studying the scripture is that God planned the birth of Christ a long time ago. In Revelation 13:8 it says,



that Jesus is the “*Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*”

Do you see for there to be a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, there had to be a baby born? God could have sent Jesus fully grown. God did that with Adam. He formed him as a fully-grown man. But God chose the way of human flesh and human family. God put down in His Holy Word that Jesus would be born of the line and lineage of David. For Him to be from the line and lineage of the King David, it would mean that he was to be born as a child.

God also laid down in Scripture a precept found in Daniel chapter nine. The period for the children of Israel was to be 490 years (70 times 7). The period of 483 years (69 times 7) was determined by God to be the period of time until the Messiah would come. The last seven years, are described in the Book of the Revelation.



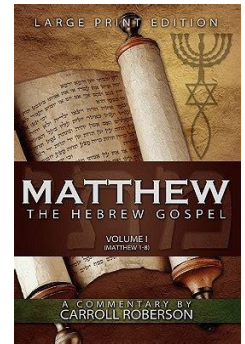
This time clock for the coming Messiah was to start when the decree was given in Nehemiah 2:1 for the rebuilding of the walls, streets, and temple. If you move forward in time from that decree, you would find that Jesus entered the streets of Jerusalem exactly 483 years, to the day, from the 1st day of the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of the reign of King Artaxerxes.

If you were living during the time Jesus was born, and you knew the scriptures as those wise men from the East, then you knew the time was quickly approaching. They were

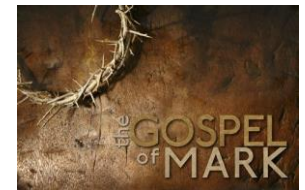
looking for a sign to lead them to the Messiah. They were looking for a sign ...

Each of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, was written with a different audience in mind. The word synoptic means to have an overview of the whole or to be seen from a particular view.

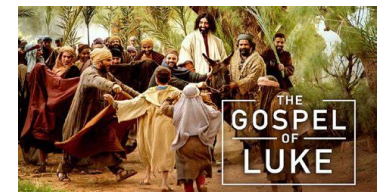
Matthew was written to the Jew of that day. It opens with the genealogy of Jesus. It traces Jesus’ lineage from Abraham to David, fourteen generations, from David until their 70 years of Babylonian captivity, fourteen generations, and from their captivity until the birth of Jesus, fourteen generations. If we turn over to Luke chapter three, we will also find another genealogy of Jesus. This family tree follows the line of Mary. The one in Matthew is the family tree of Joseph.

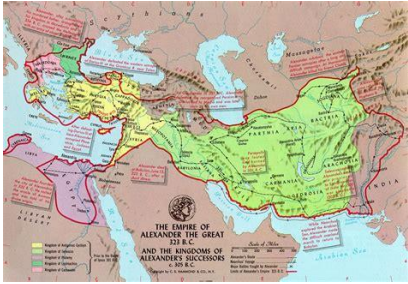


The book of Mark is written to the Roman mind. Every item is done quickly. The Book of Mark is a “Jesus on the go” book. Just the facts.



Luke was written to the Greek mind of that day – thorough and detailed. Since Luke was a physician, he would write a more thorough view of the life of Jesus.





God had prepared the world for His Son to be born. God had prepared the world by allowing Alexander the Great to come to power. Alexander gathered all of the providences, tribes, and areas under one ruler and

government. The east and the west were brought together. Separated tribes were united under a common leader. New lines of communication were opened, as were new channels of commercial trade. The Greek language became the language of the world. The city of Alexandria became the capital of the known world and the city still bears his name today. It was in this language, the Greek language we find our New Testament Bible written in.

The three great historical nations had to contribute to prepare the soil for the planting of Christianity. The Jews on the side of the religious element; the Greeks on the side of science and art; the Romans, as masters of the world, on the side of the political element.

Dr. Gregory in the book, *Key to the Gospels*, (page 211) said, “The Greeks are clearly distinguished from the other great historic races by certain marked characteristics. They were the representatives of reason and humanity in the ancient world. They looked upon themselves as having the mission of perfecting men.”

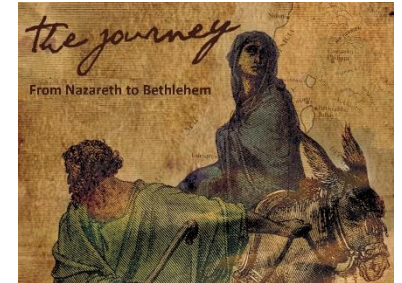
When we read the story of Christmas, we need to realize that this did not just happen one day. God had been preparing the soil of the world for Jesus’ arrival. Jesus came “*in the fullness of time.*” The world was literally pregnant, in expectation of this special birth. The language

of the people was prepared, the government of the world was prepared, and the calendar of God’s timetable was prepared. For a few moments this morning, lets us look at God’s preparation.

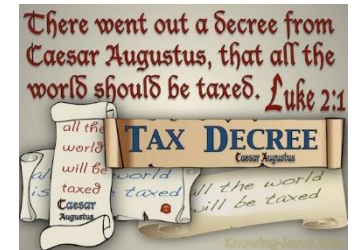
I. The Preparation (Vs. 1-5)

In Luke 2, verses one through five speak to the preparation necessary for Jesus’ birth.

Joseph and Mary were both required to travel back to their ancestor’s home place. It was decreed that everyone was to return to their ancestral home place, list their name, their family relationship, and pay the required tax. God had foretold in Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Even the advisors of Herod knew of the prophecy and told him that the King would be born in Bethlehem.



The decree was given by Caesar Augustus that the entire known world was to be taxed. This man was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. Actually, his name was Octavianus and he took the name Augustus. It had religious significance. That is what he was attempting to do, deify himself. (That is where we get the name for our eighth month of the year, August).



Caesar Augustus signed the tax bill to support the expansion of his empire. His decree, *in the fullness of time* caused two individuals; Joseph and Mary, to travel back home.

It is interesting to note that the most powerful person of that day, the ruler of the known world, the person that had all the wealth and power at his disposal is no longer remembered in history. We probably would not even know about him if it was not listed in the scripture. That little baby born in obscurity, born in a manger, born unnoticed by most people, is the one that the world remembers. The world has built churches in His name. The world has established kingdoms in His name. Individuals have given their lives for the cause He proclaimed. That little baby was Jesus – Immanuel – God with us.

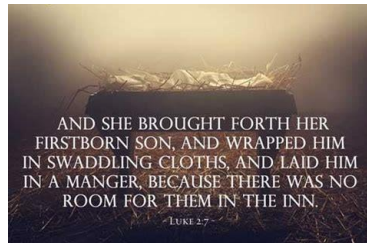
II. Arrival (Verses 6-7)

Luke 2, verses 6 and 7 speak to Jesus' arrival. Verse 7 says,

“She laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” There was no room available for the King. No room for a mother in labor. No room for a man and his espoused wife. No room.

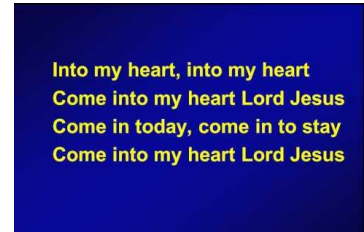
Have you ever heard it said, “There is a place for everything and everything in its place?” Well, do you think this is the place for God’s Son? Born in a small village, no room for them in the inn, and laying Jesus in a feed box for animals? How odd that the creator of the world would plan such an entrance for His Son.

It causes me to ask the question, “Have you made room for Christ in your life?” Are you so busy with the other issues of the day, that there is no room in your heart for Jesus? Does the latest project occupy your time and you have not time for Christ? Do your possessions possess you?



There is a children’s song that expresses this so well.
(Tune HOLCOMB)

Into my heart, into my heart
Come into my heart Lord Jesus,
Come in today, come in to stay
Come into my heart Lord Jesus.



III. The Proclamation (Verses 8-12)

Verses 8 to 12 speak to the proclamation of Jesus’ birth!

It is so fitting that there was an angel of the Lord to proclaim the birth announcement. I know you have received a birth announcement in the mail. It lists all the details of the child: their weight, length, time of birth, who the parents are and where they were born. Today those announcements are sent out on Facebook! We have the same details, (well almost all) about Jesus.

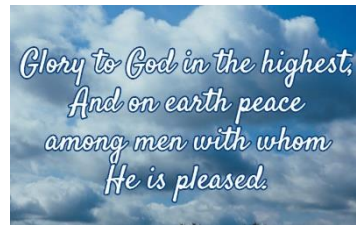
The angels tell who is born – the Savoir, who is Christ the Lord
It tells where – in the city of David, Bethlehem
It tells when – this day.



Now it is not recorded for us the exact day – but the shepherds knew the exact day. At one time, the birth was celebrated on January 6th, commonly known as Old Christmas. In the 4th Century, the official day was established as December 25th. It really is not important what day Jesus was born on. It is important that He was born!

Verse ten in the KJV says, “*And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*” And a whole host of angels joined them and said, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace goodwill towards men of goodwill.*”

What this announcement tells us is that Jesus’ birth is good news but not necessarily good news for everyone. It is good news and provides “*peace among men with whom He is pleased.*” (RSV) If you are pleased with Christ, then you will have peace. If you are not pleased with Christ, then you will live in a world that does not have peace. To me, the most beautiful word in Hebrew is “*Shalom,*” which means peace.



I have talked with people through the years that have lived many years running from the Lord. They knew they were in sin. They knew they were out of fellowship with God. But they continued to run away from Him. Once they stopped running and yielded their life to Jesus Christ by faith, then the peace of God, which passes all understanding, entered their hearts and minds. They no longer live their life out of fear. They have peace.

Romans 5:1 reminds us how we obtain this peace. “*Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ.*”



Do you see that? We have peace when we have Christ. The world around us wants peace. We see many people protesting many things. At the heart of many of these protests is a lack of peace in their hearts and lives. Each person is passionately calling for “Peace, Peace.” But there will be no peace apart from Christ.

An angel came to announce the birth of Christ. What was the first thing the angel said, “*Do not be afraid.*” The angel said that to Joseph, to Mary, to Zacharias, and if one were to stand before us today, he would say, “*Do not fear.*”

IV. The Accompaniment (Vs. 13-14)

This angel was not on a solo mission of announcement; verses 13 and 14 indicate he **was accompanied by a whole host of angels.** If you study angels in



scripture, you will find that not one angel in scripture is referred to as a female. All angels were men. You will also see that angels do not sing; they proclaim or they say.

Many years ago, there was a television program called, “Touched by an Angel.” The theology of the television program was a little muddled. The writers of the program are Jewish and you will never hear them say that Jesus is the Savior of the world. They only encourage you to “trust God.”

During the program an angel will reveal who they are by way of a transforming light over their head. It is as if they are transfigured just as Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration. Angels are not gods. But in our culture

some individuals have become so absorbed in angelology, that it has become a substitute for the worshipping the One and Only true God.

That night in Bethlehem, the shepherds didn't just see one angel; they saw a whole host of angels "SAYING" not singing,

*Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward
men of goodwill.*



I don't know how many a host is, but I am sure the sky was full that night! God did not come to the Kings of the earth to make this proclamation; He came to the poor of the day. King Herod attempted to kill Jesus once he found that the wise men had slipped away without returning back to report the news of Jesus' birth.

One commentator made the observation that the sheep that the shepherds were keeping were sheep that were probably used in the late fall or early spring. These lambs were being raised for use during the time of Passover. They were keeping the sacrifice ready, safe and fed for that upcoming season of the year. In the same manner, Jesus was born in a lowly stable, or cave, or shed, in preparation for His sacrifice at Calvary thirty-three years later.

V. The Inquiry (Verses 15-16)

In verses 15 and 16, we see the **shepherds came and inquired** as to where this baby could be. The King James Version of the bible says, "And it came to pass."



I like that phrase. Over a period of time everything passes. Joy passes, sadness passes, depression passes, even an announcement from angels to a group of shepherds' passes.

When the shepherds heard the proclaimed message, what did they do? Did they deny what they had heard? NO. Did they debate the theories of what had happened? NO. They accepted it and went and inquired to see if it was true – immediately. They probably were the first people to greet the baby after His birth. The account in Mathew tells us that the wise men arrived later with gifts for Jesus. Some people have said that Jesus was probably several months old, or maybe even two years old, when the wise men arrived.

Speaking of the wise men, how many were there? The scripture doesn't say. It only says that they brought Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Three gifts brought by several wise men. The more I have pondered the providence of God's care, the more amazed I am about this gift of the magi. This is a direct fulfillment of Isaiah 60:6 which says, "*The multitude of camels shall cover your land, The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba shall come; They shall bring gold and incense, And they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord.*"

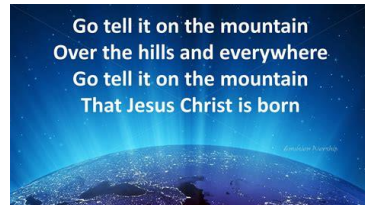


The **gold** is representative of the *Kingship* of Jesus. Very few common people had gold. Only the kings had gold. The **frankincense** is representative of *divinity*. Not only was he a King, but he was also divine. And the **Myrrh** is representative of his *future sacrifice* for the sins of the world.

Mary and Joseph may have sold these special gifts to finance their travel to Egypt and back to Nazareth later. We know they were not very wealthy. We learn more about their economic status in Luke 2:21-23, when they went to the temple and offered two small sparrows, or pigeons, as an offering of purification for Mary.

VI. The Testimony (Vs. 17-19)

Once the shepherds came to see the infant, verses 17 to 19 says they went everywhere, testifying what had happened to them. They were the first to tell the news of the baby Jesus. They weren't ashamed to tell. They were not afraid of what others might think of them. They weren't worried that their family would think they were crazy. They just told what had happened to them. They told everyone. And everyone was amazed at what was told them.

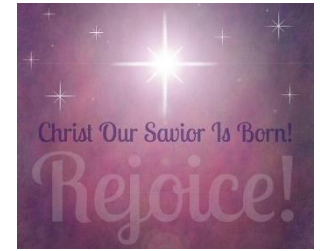


One of the most interesting phrases in this section is that Mary *kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*. She knew the child she was carrying in her womb was special. She knew his family tree was special. She did not go out and say, *"This baby will be the Messiah."* No she just kept it all in her heart and pondered it.

How much more would our spiritual life be if we took time to eliminate the clutter in our life and just pondered some things? Turn off the music in the background. Turn off the television. Just ponder the things of God. Mary pondered – we too need to take time and ponder.

VII. The Rejoicing (Verse 20)

As we close our time this morning, we can see in verse 20 that the **shepherds departed rejoicing**. Not only rejoicing, but they were glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen. This experience of the shepherds should be similar to our experience. Not that we hear angels, but that we have heard about Jesus.

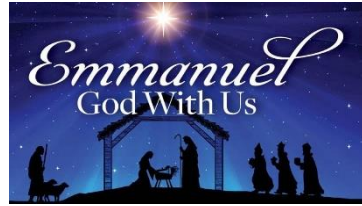


The Shepherds --

1. **Heard** – the proclamation of the good news.
2. **Believed** – they acted upon the word of the angels to see if it was true.
3. **Obedied** – they went and put it to the test and left their sheep and went to see the Lamb of God.
4. **Received** – they received just what they had been promised.
5. **Testified** – they left assured, and then they told others.
6. **Rejoicing** – they did not leave downcast, their hearts leapt with joy as they found out that Immanuel – God with us - had come.
7. **Praised** – they were unashamed of their word, they knew their experience was true and real, and they were not afraid to believe and praise his Holy Name.

How about you? Have you heard the news? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ that has come into the world? If so, have you obeyed what God is asking you to do? God wants you to trust Him with your heart. God wants you to surrender your life over to Him.

When you do, God will receive you just as he promised. He will cleanse your heart from all unrighteousness. He is who He says He is. Jesus is Emmanuel, which means, “God with us.” He came to die on a cross for your sins. You are challenged to trust him. Let him come into your heart.



If you do that, then you will be willing to praise God for his free gift of salvation.

Maybe you are here and say to yourself, “I have trusted Jesus, but I don’t have that desire to proclaim this good news.” If you have lost the “joy of your salvation” as David once did, he turned back to God, and asked him to “RESTORE UNTO ME THE JOY OF MY SALVATION.”

In the midst of Christmas, let us come back to Bethlehem and know that the child born there is our Saviour.

LET US PRAY