

The Birth of Christ

Holidays can become busy with shopping, planning, travel, parties, dinners, movies, traffic, family and visitors, along with general chaos of dark days, winter weather and increased sickness. (Did I miss anything?) – Preparations...

A friend from school, named Brian Kellogg, wrote,

“My children want a cat for Christmas; Normally I cook a turkey, but, hey, whatever makes them happy!”

Another friend, Brian Grimes, wrote, Two tips for Christmas:

1st Forget the past; *forget the things you can't change.*

2nd. Forget the present. *I didn't buy you one.*

Today we shall look at the simple, main and plain, restful Christmas story:

Tyrannical rulers forcing people to travel, Angelic visitations, Giving birth in a sheep stall, shepherd visitors, and incredible inconveniences.

I. The Setting: Luke 2:1-20

¹Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. ²This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³Everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

- **The Census decreed by Caesar to organize their taxation :1-3**

The setting surrounding the birth of Jesus could be described as chaotic. Luke's gospel emphasizes Caesar's decree. Imagine everyone having to return to the place of their origin. Both Joseph and Mary were of the lineage of David requiring them to return to Bethlehem (the city of David) for the census.

Matthew's Gospel focused on the inner conflict of the engaged couple expecting a baby. Joseph, a righteous man was told by an angel that Mary was still a virgin and the conception was from God; the Child would be the Messiah.

The prophet Micah wrote,

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.

His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.” (Micah 5:2)

Speaks of the city in which Messiah would arrive;

and then about Messiah as the eternally ageless, Ruler of Israel.

II. The Arrival

The time had come for Messiah to arrive. (the Advent)
 God was on the move and the time of waiting had come to an end.

In this story we will see ¹Joseph cooperating, ²Angels celebrating, ³Shepherds obeying, and ⁴Mary pondering.

Joseph was cooperating

- **Engaged and Pregnant and being cared for by Joseph. :4-5**

⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David ⁵in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

Inconvenience – 90 mile trip through rough terrain

- **The baby arrives :6-7**

⁶While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.

⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (:6-7)

The Inn – People in the town would have taken in guests who arrived for the census. No doubt the town was crowded with visitors.

When Joseph and Mary arrived they had no place to stay.

“no room” – Sign: no vacancy.

Imagine what it’s like after a long trip to have your reservations lost.

- No bed
- No shower
- No place to recover
- No place to give birth

On a cold February day a snail started climbing an apple tree. As he inched slowly upward, a worm stuck its head from a crevice in the bark to offer some advice, *“You’re wasting your energy. There isn’t a single apple up there.”*

“There will be when I get there,” he said.

When the door to lodging closed all they could do was trust, and keep knocking.

The word for Inn was *katalyma*, a word picturing *rest*,

Lit. “to unyoke” or “to put down.”

It was probably a large walled, open-air courtyard that offered a little more protection than sleeping on the street [unlike a motel 6 or large bed and breakfast]. No human lodging was available.

The stable was a cave carved out of limestone for use as a stall. It probably belonged to shepherds. It offered privacy for Jesus’ birth.

III. The Angels :8-14

In this section we see celebrating angels and the obedient shepherds.

⁸In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

The Shepherds were watching sheep

In Old Testament times shepherds were regarded with respect and honor. By 500 AD shepherds are rock bottom in social status – like Gypsies with more smell.

At this time in history shepherds were ranked socially low in the ‘food-chain.’

They were the classic ‘working poor’.

1. Angelic Announcement :9-12

⁹And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

The birth announcement:

Date of birth, place of birth and identity of the baby.

Christ the Lord essentially means the same as “Messiah God”

The sign:

Laying a newborn in a manger was unheard of in that day.

It stressed irony of the King of kings;

Instead of being born in a palace or a home, Jesus was born in poverty.

He was homeless, and laid in a manger to rest.

2. Angelic Host Appearance 13-14

¹³And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Imagine the shekinah glory-light of God’s presence that brightened up the night sky like the brightness of the day.

Then add to that the appearance of the angelic host.

Angels beyond number bringing more glorious light.

Multitude of the heavenly host...

Lit. Plethora – from *Plethos* – suggests a lot of angels - God’s army [**host**]

The awesome power of heaven gathered to lead the celebration of Christ’s birth, in submission to the infant King of the world.

The original announcement was of **good news**.

I bring you **good news** of **great joy** which will be for **all the people...**

The Angelic Proclamation:

Glory to God in the highest
Peace on earth among men
God is pleased!

3. Shepherds’ Obedience :15-20

Not only was Jesus born in extremely humble circumstances, but His first visitors were humble shepherds. They may have been the most receptive people around.

¹⁵When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”

First, the shepherds were sent to see the baby Jesus first-hand.

Second, they were sent to encourage Joseph and Mary with the shepherds’ story.

Third, they told others.

God uses real people to bring His message to others

III. Finding Jesus

- Finding the family :16-17

¹⁶So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.

They didn't waste any time, they hurried!

They went straight to the place where the Child was.

They didn't wait till morning.

There was no delay for these men on a mission.

- Telling the story :17-18

¹⁷When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

- Ending thoughts :19-20

¹⁹But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

²⁰The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Mary was thoughtful, delightful, meditative – “treasured,” “pondered”

She held the newborn Jesus and was filled with wonder.

- She had a lot to process!

The shepherds were bubbling over with excitement.

I sense that they were spreading the good news to anyone who would listen. And the rest of the time they were praising God.

The good news about Jesus changes lives.

What does this all mean to us?

First of all, the baby Jesus was God, who became one of us.

God's greatness isn't demonstrated by His isolation but by His intimacy.

He became one of us. He was born into a poor family.

- in extremely poor conditions.

His birth was revealed to poor shepherds and proclaimed by them.

The one's society marginalizes His soul loves.

Thomas Mallery, a puritan preacher from the late 1600's wrote,

"In the works of creation, God is above us;
 in his works of providence, He is outside us;
 in the law, He is against us;
 in Himself, He is invisible to us.

Only in Christ is He Immanuel, God manifested in our flesh.
 He is God in us, God with us, and God for us."¹

Second, the Christmas story is for the undeserving.

Its message is for those who are unworthy, whose only hope is grace

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor,
 so that you through His poverty might become rich."

(2 Cor. 8:9)

Paul writes,

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

(2 Cor. 9:15)

Gifts were meant to be received.

The arrival of Christ is God's gift to us.

What do you do with a gift?

What will you do with Christ?

¹ Richard Rushing, Ed., Voices from the Past, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), p. 171.