Two Complementary Accounts of the Birth of Christ (Part 2)

Luke 2:1-20 NASB

Scripture for today (Luke 2:1-20)

**Now 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. 3And all *the people* were on their way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4Now Joseph 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 betrothed to him, and was pregnant. 6While they were there, the time came 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.**

**8In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock at night. 9And an angel of the Lord *suddenly* stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10And *so* 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. 12And this *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army *of angels* praising God and saying,**

**14“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased.”**

**15When the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16And they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17When they had seen *Him*, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18And all who heard it were amazed about the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.**

Today is part 2 of a message detailing the birth of Christ. Last week we looked closely at His birth as it was recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Today our Scripture is taken from the Gospel of Luke. Even though these gospels differ in the way that they present the birth of Christ due to the style of the writers, they still present His birth in a consistent way focusing on the fact that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and came into this world to save it from sin.

Since today’s passage is quite a bit longer, rather than looking at each verse we will discuss 4 pastoral points from the Scripture that we can use to help us understand who Jesus Christ is and how we can honor Him not only during the Christmas season, but throughout the entire year. Let’s begin by taking a moment to familiarize ourselves with the writer. Luke was a gentile follower of Christ meaning that he was not a Jew. Even though Luke does not tell us very much about himself, we do find out who his audience was. He addressed it to a particular person whose name was Theophilus. This official whom he mentions was most likely either a Roman official who had converted to Christianity and wanted to know more of Jesus, or the official was wealthy and had financially supported the work Luke did on this gospel. No matter who this person was, we see that Luke’s goal “was to give an ordered account of the events of Jesus’ life” (MacArthur). Luke did this by investigating the life of Jesus using eyewitness testimony. Luke himself was not an eyewitness, but he interviewed many people who had been present during the life of Christ and he wrote down the reports that they gave him. Please read with me quickly the introduction to the gospel: **“Since many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3it seemed fitting to me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it out* for you in an orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus; 4so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).** So, what we have in front of us today is a report regarding the birth of Christ that comes from eyewitness testimony. Very likely Mary was interviewed by Luke, and she told him her experiences. One verse later in the account which I believe shows this fact is when Luke records that **“Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart” (2:19).** I would argue that to know what Mary thought he most likely asked her to share with him her thoughts.

As a history teacher I must say that I find all of this to be very strong evidence for the accuracy of the gospel of Luke’s account of Christ’s birth. Even if I did not believe in the infallibility of Scripture (don’t worry because I do) I would still have to admit that when a historical event is recorded using eyewitness evidence that event is very difficult to discredit for inaccuracy. Luke was a very intelligent writer, and we can see that he took great care in reporting this event accurately.

***Pastoral Reflections on this Scripture and its Application to our Lives***

1. As verses 1-3 inform us, these events took place at a particular place and time in history. When Luke mentions Caesar Augustus and Quirinius he is making the reader aware that all these things happened in real history. This is important because it establishes the fact that God works in real life and has acted in many times in history to carry out His will. The Apostle Paul mentions this point as well in his sermon to the Greeks on Mars Hill in the book of Acts **“He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26).** Paul reminds his gentile listeners in Athens that God has established the times and places for all people who would ever live on the earth. Keeping this in mind we must remember that everything happening in Judea at the time of Christ’s birth had been ordained by God to happen before the foundation of the world. The same can be said regarding our lives as well. The entirety of human history is laid out before Holy God meaning that He able to see it from beginning to its end. Since He is an eternal being God knows what will happen before it does, so we can trust Him for our lives. Just like the old Sunday school children’s song reminds us “He’s got the whole world in His hands.”
2. In verses 4-7 we have the account of Jesus being born in Bethlehem. This echoes what Matthew records, but what we are told in this account is that they went to a stable for the birth because there was no room for them at the inn. With all the people arriving in Bethlehem for the census the lodgings options were limited, so they could not find a place to stay. Thankfully they were provided with a warm stable for the birth. Being born in a stable shows the humility of God showing that He identifies with His creation by being willing to be born in a lowly manger. The Apostle John explains the coming of Christ in this way **“9 *This* was the true Light that, coming into the world, enlightens every person. 10He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, and *yet* the world did not know Him. 11He came to His own, and His own people did not accept Him. 12But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, 13who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God” (John 1:9-13).** We see later in John’s account that Jesus was rejected by the Scribes and Pharisees partly because He was born in such a lowly situation and was from a poor village. Christ did not fit into their preconceived notions of what the coming of the Messiah would be like. God chose to enter human history in a humble manner, which is much different than man would have thought of doing so. In doing this God identifies with the lowliest of His creation showing that He is the Savior for all, not only the wealthy.
3. In verses 8-17 we have the account of the shepherds who were visited by the angels and in haste went to see the newborn child in the stable. What is so powerful in Luke’s account is that God makes the birth of Christ first known to the outcasts of society who would not have normally been included in such a pronouncement. The verse that really shows how God has shown His love to the world is verse 11 which reads “**for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”** For the first time during His incarnation, the gospel message has been proclaimed by the angels. Jesus Christ came to be the Savior of mankind, which means that He came to deliver the people from the bondage of sin. Let us hear the good news of the gospel together: All of us have rebelled against God and have sinned against Him. As the Apostle Paul writes in his epistle to the Romans **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).** Since all humanity has sinned against the holy and perfect God there is no way that fallen man can be in God’s presence or commune with Him. In the Old Testament God provided a way for the sins of His people to be passed on through the sacrificial system. That system, however, was a temporary foreshadowing of the eventual perfect sacrifice that would come in the form of Jesus Christ. Christ came to earth as a baby in human likeness to serve as our substitution in paying the debt for our sin that we cannot pay ourselves. When He gave his life for mankind, which He gave of His own free will, He opened the door to eternal life for all who trust in His name. After His death, God raised Him back to life on the third day confirming that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be, the One and only Son of God. Scripture calls on all people to repent of their sins and place their trust in Jesus Christ for the remission of those sins. To all who do so they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and the promise of eternal life with God in heaven. When the angels came to the shepherds telling them about the arrival of the Savior they were proclaiming that the gospel was being fulfilled in their hearing. This is the good news that each of us need to remind ourselves of daily and share with everyone we know. Only God through Christ can save us from our sins. Praise be to God for that good news!
4. As we conclude our study of this passage today we see in verses 18-20 that these things were done secretly in a humble stable and that Mary treasured all she had witnessed. After the shepherds left from the stable they told everyone they encountered what they had experienced. These were the first evangelists of the good news of Jesus Christ. They did exactly what you would expect after having had such a marvelous experience. What lesson can be learned from the attitude of the shepherds? All of us can speak of the goodness of God and how He has worked in our lives. Had we not ever known the Lord or had someone tell us the good news we would still be lost in our sins. Each of us need to follow the example of these shepherds by sharing with others what God has done in our lives. The power of a believer’s testimony is immeasurable when it is used to bring someone else to saving faith in Christ. Whenever we have the opportunity let us not forsake sharing our faith with everyone we know. The Apostle Peter tells his readers in his first epistle to always be ready to give a defense for the faith they possess. **“15but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect;” (1 Peter 3:15).** This verse commands us to always be ready to share our faith with others because we do not know when the Holy Spirit may be working in someone else’s heart. Just like the shepherds, let us proclaim the goodness of God and share His gospel message with all. It may be through us that God will lead someone to faith!

***Conclusion***

In today’s gospel passage we were given details regarding the visit of the shepherds that Matthew chose not to include in his gospel. This does not mean that Matthew’s account is any less credible, rather it shows us that God uses different ways to present His gospel to others and that each method can be effective. Luke takes the accounts of the eyewitnesses and writes a beautiful account of Christ’s birth. This account shows us the faithfulness of the shepherds who became the first evangelists of the gospel message. They shared the good news of Christ’s arrival with everyone they met. As we celebrate the birth of Christ together let us heed the teaching of Scripture by also sharing our testimony with others and sharing with them the good news of the gospel. The greatest gift of all time is the gift of salvation that can only be found in Jesus Christ. The greatest gift we can give to our friends, neighbors and family is the good news of the hope and freedom that can be found in His name. Let us freely share that gift with all. Would you please join me in a word of prayer. Q/A (Are there any reactions or comments anyone would like to share in response to today’s message?)