

LESSON 4

December 22, 2024

Unit I: Jesus, the Heir of David

Breaking News!

DEVOTIONAL READING: Micah 5:1-6
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-20
PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 2:1-16

KEY VERSE

It came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. (Luke 2:15, KJV)

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When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (Luke 2:15, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Consider the significance of including shepherds in the news of the Messiah's birth.
- Become shepherds or pastors for one another by proclaiming the Good News.
- Practice proclaiming the Good News of God's peace and what it means to you.

*Key Terms

Betrothed (verse 5)—Greek: *mnésteuó* (mnace-tyoo'-o): asked in marriage; engaged; "espoused" (KJV); "pledged to be married" (NIV).

Family (verse 4)—Greek: *patria* (pat-ree-ah'): "lineage" (KJV); ancestry; tribe; "line" (NIV).

Glory (verse 9)—Greek: *doxa* (dox'-ah): praise; honor; renown; an especially divine quality; the unspoken manifestation of God; splendor.

Manger (verse 7)—Greek: *phatné* (fat'-nay): a feeding trough; stall.

Register (verse 2)—Greek: *apographé* (ap-og-raf-ay'): enrollment; inscription in a register; registration (or census taking); "taxing" (KJV); "census" (NIV).

Watch (verse 8)—Greek: *phulaké* (foo-lak-ay'): a guarding, guard; a watching; a guard, prison.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

Luke's purpose for penning his gospel was to present an accurate account of Jesus' life as gleaned from secondary historical research and eyewitness testimonies (see Luke 1:1-32). Hence, in Luke 2, as a historian, he connects Jesus' birth to historical events, namely a census commanded by Roman emperor Augustus and perhaps implemented during Quirinius's governorship in Syria (Luke 2:1-2). This census's purposes were militaristic and economic. However, because Mary's betrothed husband, Joseph, was a descendant of David's, they went to Bethlehem to comply with this decree. Mary gave birth in the city as it was foretold by the prophet Micah about seven hundred years earlier (see Micah 5:2). After briefly summarizing Jesus' birth and the shepherds' arrival as directed by angels, Luke reports additional facts about His early life unique to his gospel account and not mentioned in either of the other three gospels: His circumcision, dedication in the Temple, astounding teachers in the Temple at an early age, and a brief account of His early childhood and maturation in Nazareth.

Introduction

Does this sound familiar: “We interrupt the regularly scheduled program to bring this ‘breaking news’”? Most likely, we’ve all had this experience, especially while watching television. Something so extraordinary or tragic happens somewhere nationally or globally that it must be shared immediately. When NBC and MSNBC viewers were asked to name the biggest breaking-news stories of the 2010s and why they mattered, respondents mentioned forty events. These included Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential election and its re-definition of America’s presidency, climate change’s grave threat to the planet, Russia’s interference in the 2016 presidential election, mass shootings, and increasing overt acts of racism in America. While these and other news stories captivate, inform, or trigger emotional responses from fear to anger to grief, none supersede the greatest breaking-news story of all time. More than two thousand years ago, before the invention of mass communication, God dispatched His “angelic reporter” with the breaking news that the long-awaited Messiah had come. Like a trained professional, the heavenly messenger announced what happened, why, and where to a group of frightened shepherds. God intervened in human affairs to carry out His plan of salvation with the birth of Jesus Christ, the

Lord, in the city of David. Although this breaking news is centuries old, its message is still good news for all who trust in His name. We should emulate the lowly shepherds who heard, received, and became the first “breaking newscasters” to announce our Savior’s birth to others.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Savior Is Born! (Luke 2:1-7)

KJV

AND IT came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

NIV

IN THOSE days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke's gospel stands out for its unique portrayal of Jesus' birth and early life. As a meticulous historian, Luke looks into the political backdrop of the time, particularly the reign of Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, to set the stage for Jesus' birth. His narrative includes the crucial census decree that led Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecy from Micah 5:2. Luke's account points out that it was customary for one to register in his/her ancestral home—hence Joseph's journey to Bethlehem with Mary (**verses 1-5**).

The circumstances of their travel were unusual; their journey was driven by more than an adherence to the census. They were aware of the timing of Mary's pregnancy and knew that she would likely give birth while they were away from Nazareth. Above all, their actions were guided by divine purpose. Whether the couple realized it or not, God's plan required Jesus, a descendant of David, to be born in Bethlehem.

Verses 6 and 7 note that Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem, marking this as her firstborn (a clue that she had other children later). The humble circumstances of Jesus' birth in a manger and being swaddled in cloth contrast sharply with the event's significance. While some may focus on the simplicity of His birth surroundings, the essential message of Luke's narrative is the profound importance of Jesus' birth. He came as the promised Savior to redeem humanity, the perfect sacrifice for the world's sins. This profound truth is central to celebrating His advent and should motivate us to proclaim it now and in the future.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises motivate us to demonstrate our faith during less-than-favorable circumstances?

The Savior Heralded (*Luke 2:8-16*)

KJV

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

NIV

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

11 "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

12 "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one

another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

“Breaking news” refers to newly received information about an event that is occurring or developing, usually so urgent that its announcement interrupts whatever else is happening. Jesus’ birth was such an event. An angelic herald and other angels appeared at night to a group of shepherds announcing the Savior’s birth in Bethlehem, David’s city. These ordinary men were the first to hear that the promised Messiah had finally come. Bethlehem was near Jerusalem, and many sheep used in temple sacrifices came from prime grazing land in the surrounding hills. Because of the nature of the work, it was not unusual that the shepherds were found on the job at night (**verse 8**). The angelic herald’s sudden appearance, accompanied by God’s radiant glory, was so unusual and awesome that the shepherds were terrified (**verse 9**). No doubt these men feared for their lives, but they were comforted by the angel who then delivered a message that was the source of great joy for all humanity: a Savior (deliverer), who is Christ (the Messiah), the Lord (God Himself), was born (**verses 10-11**). The proclamation that this news was for all people hinted that the Savior had come to benefit all the world, not just the nation of Israel.

The angel’s “breaking news” included specific details informing the shepherds how to identify the Baby (**verse 12**). Although they were not told to go to Bethlehem, the angel’s explanation implied that they would go and see for themselves what God had done. To add to the inexpressible wonder of this announcement, the shepherds were privileged to see many angels collectively praising God, celebrating His glory, and the peace that the Savior would bring (**verses 13-14**). As was anticipated, the shepherds went to Bethlehem to see the Baby and tell what the angels relayed to them, thus becoming the first of humankind to herald Christ’s birth to the world (**verses 15-16**). God’s sovereign choice of these men—considered outcasts because of their profession—should remind us that God chooses to use ordinary people to do extraordinary things for His glory and honor. Also, it should remind us that one of the greatest gifts we can give to others this season and in the future is becoming “breaking-news heralds” like these shepherds and proclaiming the hope of salvation that Jesus brings to all who accept Him as Savior by faith.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can you and your congregation share the “breaking news” of the Savior’s birth beyond “telling”?

A Closing Thought

One of the most significant “breaking news” stories in human history was the announcement that the Savior, Christ, the Lord, was born. It was a message of hope for those who waited for centuries for His coming. Equally as significant was the fact that it proved God’s

faithfulness to keep His Word. His sovereign choice of ordinary shepherds to herald Christ's coming reminds us that He can and will use even the least likely to accomplish what He promises. Thus, we are responsible for availing ourselves to Him by seeking His will and willingly and humbly submitting to it.

Your Life

God's use of these ordinary shepherds to herald the breaking news of the Savior's birth should remind us that despite our humanness and status in society's eyes, He can use us to accomplish His will in ways beyond our imagination. Make yourself available to Him this season to proclaim the good news of the Savior's birth through acts of kindness and compassion toward others.

Your World!

Sin's darkness shrouds our world and needs God's radiant glory, as experienced by the shepherds. Although we are not the Light, we are the world's light. We can share that light by proclaiming anew the message of hope and peace that the angels and shepherds heralded to those in our homes, communities, and congregations during this Advent season.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank You for the opportunity to be heralds of the "breaking news" of our Savior's coming to redeem us from sin. Please help us share it joyfully with others without regard for who they are. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

As you prepare for next week's lesson, consider your response to this question: "How can we best respond to the needy's cries for help?" Read Luke 18:35-43.

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, December 23	"Mercy for Those Who Suffer"	(Luke 4:14-21)
TUESDAY, December 24	"Show God's Mercy to All"	(Luke 6:27-36)
WEDNESDAY, December 25	"God Delights in Compassion"	(Micah 7:14-20)
THURSDAY, December 26	"Remember Your Mercy, O Lord"	(Psalm 25:1-10)
FRIDAY, December 27	"God Relieves a Troubled Heart"	(Psalm 25:11-22)
SATURDAY, December 28	"Mercy for Sinners"	(Luke 18:9-14)
SUNDAY, December 29	"Lord, Let Me See Again"	(Luke 18:35-43)