

And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. ⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. ⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!” ¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸ And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Introduction

Today is Christmas Day and we come to our final message in a three- part expository look at Christmas through the eyes of Doctor Luke.

So far we have focused our attention on the announcement of the birth of Jesus by the Angel Gabriel and the Revolutionary song of Mary about what her baby would grow up to be and do.

We now come to the birth itself and the circumstances that surrounded that birth.

Before we do that we need to briefly look at the passage of scripture that comes between Mary’s Song and the account of the birth of Jesus.

Luke felt that it was important to put alongside the birth of Jesus, the birth of another important baby. That baby was the son of Elizabeth, Mary’s relative and her husband Zacharias.

You will remember that Elizabeth and Zacharias had been praying to have a Son all of their lives but it did not happen.

However, while Zacharias was burning incense in the temple, the Angel Gabriel announced to him that his wife Elizabeth was going to have a son.

He was going to be great in God’s eyes and he would be the forerunner to Jesus, preparing the way for Him. Zacharias didn’t really believe the Angel and wanted some evidence.

The Angel said that he would be struck dumb until the child was born.

In the Jewish custom babies were circumcised after 8 days.

It was at this time they were given their names.

Normally the child would have been called after his father’s name.

However, his mother Elizabeth insisted that his name should be called John.

The father of the child, who was still dumb, wrote the name John on a tablet to confirm his name.

Immediately his mouth was opened and he could speak.

Everybody was amazed at this event and felt that the child, who was called John was going to be a special person in God’s eyes.

Zacharias, burst out in praise, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied.

He spoke concerning his child in v. 76 – 79.

He foretold three main things about his son.

1. His son would be the greatest prophet – v. 76.
2. He would prepare the way for Jesus. – v.76
3. He would teach clearly about the way of Salvation which would be through the forgiveness of their sins. This Salvation would give light to all those who sat in darkness and faced death. – v. 79.

Luke felt that it was important that the birth of Jesus, should run parallel to the birth of John the Baptist. One of the reasons for this is that there was a prophecy in the book of Isaiah, chapter 40: v.3-5 which fits very well into the ministry of John, the forerunner of Jesus.

As we discovered at the beginning, Luke wants to give us a complete account of the life of Jesus, he doesn't miss anything out and therefore we must not miss the significance of Luke's writing.

So with this introduction in mind we are able to approach the text concerning the birth of Jesus.

There are three things in the text that jump out at us concerning the birth of Jesus.

1. The Place of the birth of Jesus – v. 1-7.

Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth and Bethlehem was over 100 kilometres away in the south of the country.

Under normal circumstances Jesus would have been born in Nazareth.

However, God was working His purposes out in the life of His Son.

About 750 years before this event, God had spoken through the prophet Micah (Micah 5:v. 2) that the Jewish Messiah and ruler of Israel would be born in Bethlehem.

So if Jesus was not born in Bethlehem he would not be recognised as the ruler of Israel.

So how was God going to arrange for a woman, who was getting close to the birth of her first baby to travel a very long distance to have her baby in another town many miles away.

The simple answer is that God was going to use the most powerful man in the world at that time to arrange a census and this involved everybody travelling to their home town.

If it wasn't made "Law" I doubt whether Mary would have agreed to do this long distance journey when she was close to having a baby.

This makes it very clear to us that God is in charge of "World History" and not man.

God is able to use the powers and authorities of this world for His purposes without them even knowing it.

The birth of Jesus was a miracle birth, but it was also a miracle of God's hand that it took place where it did in Bethlehem and not Nazareth where Mary and Joseph lived.

Application

I want you to be encouraged on this Christmas Day, a day of celebration and rejoicing, that God is still working His purposes out in this world. Ultimately in the big picture of world events lies a sovereign God who is preparing for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate the first coming of Jesus today, we need to answer the question, are we ready for the second coming of Jesus.

The only people who will delight in the second coming of Jesus are those who know and love Him personally.

Those people who have a personal relationship with Jesus will be delighted at His return.

Perhaps today you don't know why Christians celebrate at Christmas time?

Briefly it is because they know that their sins are forgiven, they have peace with their creator, and they are looking forward to a heavenly place when they die.

It is the real hope and assurance that God's Holy Spirit gives to all His children.

You too can know that this Christmas if you want to?

2. The announcement of the birth – v. 8-14

The birth of Jesus wasn't announced on "facebook" or in the Jewish Chronicle. It was announced by Angels, messengers who worked directly for God.

The birth of Jesus was not announced to important religious leaders, it was announced to the despised lowly shepherds.

Nobody liked the Shepherds because they didn't go to Church, although in those days it was worshipping in the temple.

However, they were hard working men who had a dangerous job to protect the sheep from wild animals. They also had to move them around to find fresh pasture for them every day.

There was something about Shepherds that God liked.

They were honest hard working men and probably supplied the lambs for the sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem.

What is important here is WHAT the Angel said to the shepherds.

1. The Angel said that he had an announcement of great joy which was going to affect everybody in the world.
2. The Angel announced that a baby was born in Bethlehem today and that this baby was the long awaited Jewish Messiah who would act as a "Saviour" and be Christ the Lord.
3. The Angel direct the shepherds to a manger (feed trough for animals) where they would find the baby wrapped up in baby clothes.

I guess it was quite a thing for one person to suddenly appear and say this to a group of shepherds. However, it was probably what happened after this that convinced the shepherds that this baby was somebody special.

Suddenly there appeared a multitude of "Heavenly Beings" praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men."

The scene must have been quite dramatic.

There was darkness on a hillside and then suddenly there was a powerful light and thousands of "Heavenly Beings" were seen by the shepherds praising God about the birth of a baby in a cattle feed trough.

The Angel and the Heavenly beings knew about the worth of this baby.

They knew Jesus when He was in Heaven, they would have known about His mission to the earth.

They knew that Jesus had left the "Glory" of Heaven to fulfil God's rescue plan for mankind.

The Heavenly hosts were excited about the mission of Jesus because they knew that Jesus had come to bring Salvation to lost sinners and to bring peace between God and mankind.

There is something exciting when a person discovers the worth of Jesus for their own soul.

Christmas Day is a wonderful day to discover the worth of Jesus for your own soul.

Perhaps today you might be praising God for saving your soul?

Let us just unpack the message of the Angel for a moment.

First the Angel said He had a message of "JOY" for ALL people.

The Christian Gospel is a message of "JOY" for everybody.

First of all, it is important that you understand the word "JOY".

Happiness depends on our outward circumstances, but JOY depends upon the condition of our heart and soul.

For most people happiness depends upon outward things like money, a good home, a good job, good health, family and friends.

There is nothing wrong with having these things.

However, if you take away your health, your money, your job, your home, your family etc. you will probably become unhappy.

This is why the Angel uses the word "JOY"

"Joy" is about the condition of your heart.

The Angel was saying that the "Saviour Jesus was able to give people "JOY" in their hearts.

This "JOY" would not be affected by poverty, health, or family circumstances. This "JOY" would be everlasting and could not be removed.

The message of Christmas is about a "Saviour" who can bring "JOY" to your heart for everlasting.

The "JOY" comes when you recognise your need for Jesus and trust Him to forgive you.

Nearly 40 years ago I discovered this "JOY" for myself and this "JOY" is still in my heart.

My prayer is that you might know the "JOY" of your sins forgiven and a "JOY" that is satisfied with JESUS ONLY.

The second thing that the Angel announced is that this baby was going to grow up and be a “Saviour” and Christ the Lord.

Q. What does this mean?

First of all, a “Saviour” is somebody who has come to “SAVE” you.

Q. Why do I need saving? and what do I need to be saved from?

Well to put it very simply, the Bible teaches us that the God of the Bible who created us for a personal relationship is 100% “HOLY”.

Our first parents Adam and Eve disobeyed God and brought sin into the lives of all human beings. The punishment for that disobedience would be death.

Romans 5: v. 12 in N.L.T.

¹² When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

We need to be saved from God’s wrath upon us and eternal death.

Jesus came to take the punishment for our sins upon Himself. He was and is our substitute sacrifice.

He came to be a “Saviour” so that we would not be punished by God, but live with Him in Heaven forever.

Not with our present bodies but with a special resurrected body that is fit for eternity.

There is no sin in heaven so if we are hoping to go there one day, we need a “Saviour”, somebody to rescue us from the punishment of our sins.

The problem is that not many people recognize their predicament.

I hope that this Christmas you might realise your need of a Saviour.

3. The evidence of the birth of Jesus – v. 15-20.

It was such a dramatic event for the shepherds to experience that they wanted to check it out for themselves.

Was there really an important baby born in a cattle trough, wrapped up in baby clothes?

There was only one way to find out, go into town and check it out.

They must have left somebody in charge of the sheep on the hill side and perhaps two shepherds went into Bethlehem to find if their supernatural experience was real.

Well the text tells us it was a real experience.

They found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. (cattle trough)

After this the shepherds were so excited about everything that they had seen and heard, they couldn’t keep it to themselves.

We are told that before they returned to the hillside to continue with the care of the sheep that they made the incident widely known in the area.

There was enough evidence for the shepherds to be convinced that the baby Jesus had come from Heaven on a special mission.

He had come to be a “Saviour” to the world.

Not many people know that there is more historical evidence for the life of Jesus here on this earth, than for any other historical event of that time in history.

Reliable history is always accredited through historical documents as near to the event as possible.

There is so much evidence concerning the life of Jesus that it is never in dispute that a man called Jesus, claiming to be God, lived in Israel, produced many miracles to authenticate his claims.

He was crucified on a cruel cross and rose from the dead and appeared to many people individually and to 500 people at one time.

The question I need to ask you today is, do you believe in this historical Jesus?

Do you believe that He is able to rescue you from God’s wrath? And give you eternal salvation when you die?

If you do believe then you need to take a step in faith that will change your life for all eternity.

The shepherds believed and they went home praising God.

You too can do that same, if you believe in your heart that Jesus died for your personal sin.

Christmas day is a time of celebration for a “Saviour” who left the glory of Heaven to come to this sin sick world for one purpose.

The purpose was to rescue us from God's wrath when we die.

If you want to be "Rescued" today, please go to the lift sign at the rear of the hall and somebody will pray for you.