

A Study in Luke

Week Four

Luke 2:1-24

Day One

2:1 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 his own town to register.

v. 1 – The Lord rules all the nations. That is a truth that startled me years ago. I knew that the Lord ruled in the Church and over His people, but I never realized that He ruled in the affairs of all men. It was then that I began to see that Isaiah and Jeremiah didn't just prophesy to Israel, but also to other nations. Why? Because the Lord rules over those nations as well, whether they acknowledge Him or not. They may be in rebellion, but our God is their God and King.

Here we have an example of how the Lord rules. He used the Roman government to issue a ruling that forced Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem for the census. While they were there, the Scripture was fulfilled that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2). The Lord chose not to use a prophet, a dream or an angel in this case. He chose to use the Roman government. I think of the proverb, which states:

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases (Proverbs 21:1).

This is why I am not uptight about the political process in my country or any other land. I know that God is working out His purposes, whether I understand them or not. I also realize that I must not be "politicized." In my country, God is not a Republican or a Democrat. While I should vote as a good citizen, I should not be too closely identified with either party as well. I must maintain a prophetic stance so I can deliver the word of God to both parties.

v. 2 – As more research and information becomes available to us today, the more we see that the Bible is historically correct. I never fret over seeming contradictions between the Bible and historical records. But in this case, we can pinpoint this particular decree for a census and acknowledge that it did indeed happen, just as the Bible says.

At the same time, we must keep in mind that the Bible is not a history or science book. It is a book about God and His relationship with His creation. My confidence in God's word would not be shaken if I were to find that some historical facts in the Bible were not exactly correct.

v. 3 – The census decree sent everyone in motion, including Joseph and Mary, and I doubt if anyone knew exactly what was happening. Everyone was simply performing

their civic duty, but God was working behind the scenes to fulfill prophecy. The same may be happening in your life. It may not feel like anything spiritual is happening, but God is working behind the scenes. Can you thank Him for what He is doing today, even though you cannot see or understand it?

Day Two

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 room for them in the inn.

v. 4 – God had promised that He would put one of David’s descendants on the throne and He would rule forever.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Keep in mind that these promises were hundreds of years old. I get uptight if the Lord doesn’t fulfill His promises to me in a week or a year! I realized years ago that I may die in faith, not having received all that the Lord promised me. I made a decision that I would rather die in faith, than live in un-faith or presumption.

v. 5 – Joseph and Mary were still not married. We can only speculate what Mary’s family thought about this or what rumors circulated among the people. I don’t think that Jesus ever lost the stigma that He was “illegitimate,” and Jesus never seemed to clarify the issue. God surrounded Jesus’ birth with mystery and misunderstanding, so that anyone who followed Jesus would do so from a revelation of who He was and not some prophetic or political perspective.

v. 6 – God did not give Mary an easy time. Not only did she have to endure the ridicule of her peers, but then she had to make a trip while she was nine months pregnant. She did this on a donkey perhaps or maybe she walked. Either way, I doubt if it was an easy trip.

vs. 7&8 – Not only did she have to make a trip while nine months pregnant, but she went into labor in a strange town with no family other than Joseph there to support her. The hotels were full and she had nothing with which to clothe her newborn baby. Remember,

Mary had said, "I am the Lord's servant; may it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). She was tested in her resolve to serve the Lord no matter what the circumstances.

Just because God is with you and using you, doesn't mean that you will have it easy. God will teach you to trust in Him not only when you receive a word, but afterwards as well. Are you surprised by the circumstances you are in and how difficult it is to carry out the will of God at times? We must all overcome idealistic impressions of what it will be like to serve the Lord. At times, it is so hard, that everything in you wants to quit. It is at that point that you must abandon all hope in anything but the Lord. He will not disappoint you, but He may test you severely. Are you in the midst of a test? Then be encouraged by this passage today:

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers. Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you (Deuteronomy 8:1-5).

Day Three

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 of great joy that will be for all the people.

v. 8 –The shepherds were working the night shift keeping watch on their flocks. It is said that shepherds were not among the highest ranking employees in Israel at the time of Jesus' birth. They probably reported to work that night the way they had countless nights and nothing special had ever taken place. But that night proved to be different.

By the way, it is highly unlikely that Jesus was born on December 25. It would have been too cold for the sheep to be out at night. In most cases, the sheep "came home" from the desert during September at the latest. I am not upset that we celebrate December 25, but that date was instituted by the Church to counteract a major pagan festival in December. We don't know, nor is it important to know, when Jesus was born. It is just important to know that He did indeed come to us!

v. 9 – I have heard people tell of seeing angels and they never seem to be terrified. Yet almost every time an angel appeared to someone in the Bible, they were scared out of their wits. It is of note that there was light associated with God’s glory that the angel carried. God is a God of light; there is no darkness or “shadow of turning” as the hymn states. Man is always intimidated by God’s light because we live in the darkness of our sins.

v. 10 – I have no idea why the angel appeared to the shepherds. Do you? We can speculate but I think it comes down to God chose to do it, and it was probably the last place people would have expected Him to make such an announcement. Why didn’t He announce this to the priests or to other holy people?

Day Four

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ 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, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

v. 11 – I wonder if the shepherds were even able to comprehend all that was told them. They now had a Savior and He was born not to Mary and Joseph but to the people of Israel. And this Savior was the “Christ,” the anointed One, who was also the Lord of all creation. Those three concepts—Savior, Anointed One and Lord—would have been a hard combination for them to understand.

v. 12 – The angel gave the shepherds specific information that would prove the truth of his statements about Jesus. This is the third appearance of angels in the first two chapters of Luke. The will of heaven was being played out on the earth and the word of the Lord that had delayed for centuries was now being fulfilled at breakneck speed. It may take the Lord a while to act, but when He does, He moves quickly.

v. 13 – Suddenly the shepherds are confronted with a host of angels singing. What a night that was! They not only received a heavenly message, but also a heavenly concert!

v. 14 – The angels were announcing a new era of peace on earth between God and man. Jesus had been born to save men from their sins and restore their relationship with God. The angels could not help but sing and give glory to God for what He had done.

God reveals Himself not to high and exalted, but to the humble and lowly. What does God want to show you today? What does He want to reveal to you about Himself and His love for you and others? Are you going about your business like the shepherds? Then maybe you should raise your expectations that in the midst of your daily activities,

God can break in and reveal Himself to you. I cannot promise this will happen to you today, but it could. Be it done unto you according to your faith! I pray that the Lord will speak to you today as you go about your business.

Day Five

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.

v. 15 – The angel did not tell the shepherds to go see the child. That is something they decided to do and it makes sense. I have found that sometimes people can get too spiritual about some things—"The Lord hasn't told me to do this or that." Well, He hasn't told them *not* to either. I am not trying to make light of the importance of God's guidance and direction, but I think God is interested in having partners and not just robots.

We are God's co-workers as stated in 2 Corinthians 6:1. The word for co-worker in that verse is *sunergeo*, which is where we get our word synergy. Synergy, simply stated, is the reality that one plus one can equal three—a team can often achieve more than the sum of the individual team member's efforts.

At some point in our relationship with Him, God wants to move us from the role of servant to friend. Consider this passage from John's gospel:

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other (John 15:13-17).

I want to willingly and creatively bring all my experience, my gifts and my mind to serve the Lord and His purpose for me. I want to add my flavor to the mix, so to speak. The Bible talks about freewill offerings; they are just that—"freewill." The offer-er decides to give; there is no pressure from any party, including God. So what can you decide to do today for God?

v. 16 – Joseph and Mary suddenly had company but I doubt if they were quite up to entertaining guests. They were probably getting the message that their lives, which had been turned upside down to this point, were never going to be "normal." Their life had been radically altered by God's visitation, but that visitation had brought and would bring many difficult things. When you tell the Lord that you want Him to use you, He will; but

He will do so on His terms and that may mean an end to your privacy, career path or leisure time. When you surrender all to Jesus, that means all—not part, some or most. Joseph and Mary had given their all to Him and He would use it for the remainder of their days on earth. For that, they are honored as a great man and woman of God. For you to be great, you will have to do what they did. Are you up to the task?

Day Six

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,
18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.
19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

v. 17&18 – The shepherds became the first evangelists of sorts, spreading the good news of the coming of Jesus. Nothing has changed. We are still required to share this heavenly headline with any and all who will listen. But too often I have not passed the news on to others as I should have. Is there anyone you can tell the good news today?

One of my problems is that I don't know many unsaved people anymore; most of my contacts are in a church setting. It takes time and a desire to develop relationships with people who don't know the Lord.

v. 19 – In some ways, I wonder if the shepherds' visit wasn't more for Mary's sake than anyone else's? Perhaps she was in the manger, wondering why things were so hard? After all, she had just given birth to a special child, but there no room in the inn and she had just finished a journey. Suddenly a group of shepherds arrived to tell her that a host of angels had entertained them with music celebrating Jesus' birth. Perhaps that caused Mary to remember her own celestial visitation. And I don't think that Mary still understood who Jesus was and what was happening, so she continue to meditate on all these events and the things the Lord had showed her. In time, they made sense, but right now, it was a little too much to fully comprehend.

So Mary was encouraged. Do you need encouragement today? Then ask the Lord to send you some and then watch for what He sends. God will never leave you discouraged, but you must receive what He sends and then “treasure it” in your heart—value it and not let it slip away. Then you must treat that encouragement like a piece of hard candy; you must roll it around in your mind, savoring its flavor until there is nothing left of it.

v. 20 – The shepherds went home praising God because of the accuracy of God's report to them. God is the beginning and the end of everything. The scene started with the angels praising and ended with the shepherds praising. Take a moment today to praise God for the accuracy of what He has shown you and for how well He has taken care of you.

Day Seven

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord
23(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"),

24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

v. 21 – Lest there be any doubt about Jesus' birth, this verse tells us that He was conceived just like every other human baby. Yet He was conceived with divine seed, so Jesus was fully God and fully man. Praise God!

When I teach missions classes, I point out that Jesus was the perfect missionary. He went to a foreign culture and become totally immersed in that culture so that He could minister to the people in that culture with accuracy. Think of it: Jesus learned the language and customs, spending 30 years before He ever preached a sermon. What cultural adaptation are you willing to make to reach someone else in the name of God? Paul's missionary strategy was:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

As I write this, I am in Africa. Cross-cultural ministry is hard, but it is made easier if you make every effort to learn about, relate to and ministry from the context of the country you are in. Jesus left us this example; Paul followed it and now we must take our turn to emulate them both.

v. 22 – Jesus needed no purification, but of course no one would have known that. For Mary to not be purified would have opened her up to being disobedient to the Law. And it is another example of how closely Jesus identified with the sin of mankind. He was willing to be considered just like everyone else, even though He was divine. This purification is also symbolic that every child born into the world carries the sin of Adam and introduces some measure of fallen-ness just by being born.

v. 23 – Jesus did not come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it. Yet in His fulfillment of it, He did away with the old covenant and introduced a new one. Yet

throughout His life, Jesus fulfilled every requirement of the Law as a good Jewish boy should. What submission! What patience! The ways of God are so magnificent. Here was Israel crying out for a Savior and Mary was changing His diapers. Israel was expecting a king in the fashion of the warrior David and instead they were sent a humble son of poor parents.

v. 24 – This tells us that Joseph and Mary were poor, for they could only afford the two pigeons to be offered. Jesus was not born into a family of means or prominence. There was nothing of social standing that would give Jesus an advantage over anyone else. Yet God exalted Him to the throne of his ancestor David and Jesus submitted to this role with joy.

What a God we serve and worship! Who would have ever thought that God would fulfill His promises in such a manner? I hope that you will spend some time today meditating on Jesus' humble origins and what it tells you about the Lord. His ways are not our ways, but His ways are marvelous. Many were disappointed in Jesus, but millions of others have, just like the shepherds, worshipped Him and given glory to God for His birth.

Thank you, Lord, for your servant Jesus. We worship you for His life, His humility, His compassion for His flock. We thank you that our flesh is on the throne in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. It is almost too wonderful to comprehend, but it is true. And now we ask that we could duplicate His humility, His desire to serve You and others, and His love in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.