

Luke 2A

- Welcome to Christmas in July
- The story of Christ's birth is well known and often told
 - At least once a year we are reminded of the story of Joseph and Mary looking for room in the inn and forced to stay in a manger to give birth to their child
 - Of the shepherds and the angels and the wise men with gifts, etc.
 - Well, this year you get it twice
- But this story can and should be studied for its spiritual depth even as it's been enjoyed for its poetic beauty
 - But to do so, we're going to have to take a step back from the popular account and almost force ourselves to let go of the childhood storyline of which we've become so familiar
- So, we begin with Mary's labor and birth in Bethlehem

[Luke 2:4](#) 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,

[Luke 2:5](#) in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

[Luke 2:6](#) While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.

[Luke 2:7](#) And 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.

[Luke 2:8](#) ¶ In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

[Luke 2:9](#) And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

[Luke 2:10](#) But 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;

[Luke 2:11](#) for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

[Luke 2:12](#) "This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

[Luke 2:13](#) And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

[Luke 2:14](#) “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

[Luke 2:15](#) ¶ When 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.”

- Bethlehem was a small town in Christ’s day, as it is even today
 - Dating back to one of the earliest church fathers, Hyppolytus in the 2nd Century, the time of Christ’s birth has been estimated to be late December or early January 5-4 BC.
 - It would have been early winter, but probably the weather that year seems to have been unseasonably mild
 - For example, the shepherds are out at night with their flocks, indicating it was warm enough, even for a clear evening, to be outside
 - Wouldn’t the Father have made sure conditions on Earth were favorable for the birth of his son - exposed as He was – as well all who would be called upon to travel that night
 - Of course, because we know He’s caring enough to watch over every detail in His marvelous plan
- Much has been made about the manger birth and the evil innkeeper, whoever he was, who didn’t make room for Christ that night
 - The innkeeper is getting a bum wrap here likely
 - The Greek word for inn kataluma means more generally a guest room – a secondary guest room in an Israeli house
 - Joseph and Mary were visiting Bethlehem because they had returned to Joseph’s hometown for the census
 - He probably had relatives in Bethlehem, although they would have been little more than long lost cousins
 - But as a distant relative, Joseph could have expected to be warmly received under normal circumstances
 - And he might have expected the guest room in the house

- But either due to the census or because he had a woman with an illegitimate child, he was offered the manger instead
 - Most Israeli houses of that time had two main sections, a place for the family and an attached part of the home dedicated to the animals
 - If Joseph was told there was no room in the guest room, he was likely at least offered the chance to sleep in the manger
- Mary wraps the child in clothes, which was a traditional though modest way to keep the child warm
- Then having been born into this world, Christ is visited by shepherds, who were guided to Christ by instructions given by angels,
 - Shepherds were considered a lowly class of people, much as the Egyptians had seen them to be during the days of Israel in Egypt
 - Because shepherds were seen to be unclean and even untrustworthy
 - Interestingly, Luke doesn't make mention of the way the shepherds found the baby, by the star in the sky as Matthew mentions
 - Matthew was more interested in showing the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy concerning the Messiah (Num 24:17), while Luke simply wants to keep the narrative moving to the main events

Striking Scene

- Taking all the details together, the scene is quite striking
 - Here's the future and eternal King of Israel, the Son of David born in the city of David
 - Yet His circumstances are as lowly as could be
 - Parents are scorned, shunned
 - Born away from his family's home among strangers
 - Sleeping among animals

- God has prepared since the garden for the arrival of His Son to save mankind
 - He has called a people to Himself, the Jews
 - He has given prophets countless pictures of Christ's coming
 - He has prepared every detail for His arrival
- Yet God places Him in the most humble of circumstances, out of way, away from the eyes of the world
- We can only conclude that the Father wanted to sure that nothing about Jesus' arrival could be associated with wealth, success nor privilege in the world's eyes
 - He was nothing like the savior the world expected and represented everything the world rejected
 - It should strike you as odd that God would choose to bring His Son into the world in this way?
 - Why not bring Him into the world in a glorious appearing, like He will appear in the end times?
- It's natural for us to want to jump to the end, to want the good without the bad
 - We like to eat our dessert before dinner
 - We like to know the ending of a book before we read it
 - We also tend to wish that God would simply get around to the end of His plan forgetting that He has also planned a beginning and a middle
 - Likewise, there is a beginning and a middle and an end to the story of our walk with Christ

Christ Comes To Die

- So in our study of Luke today, God has set the circumstances in the story of Christ's birth in such a way that we might understand more about His purpose in coming and of our response to His coming
- The story actually begins before Christ arrives

- Paul tells us in Philippians that Christ existed before he was born as a man

[Phil. 2:6](#) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard **equality** with God a thing to be grasped,

[Phil. 2:7](#) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.

[Phil. 2:8](#) Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- And Christ Himself testified in John 8:38 that he existed before Abraham did
- And of course, John 1 declares that Christ was with the Father in the beginning
- But Christ would be humbled to arrive as a man

[Zech. 9:9](#) Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

[Matt. 11:29](#) "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and **humble** in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

- The Father had several reasons for having His Son arrive in a humble manner
 - First, we know on a practical level that he would come to die, and therefore lowliness and scorn go with the territory
 - But there is more than that going here
 - Christ was to set a perfect example in all things for men by living a perfect obedient sinless life
 - In doing so, He was to be an example of how we are to live
 - But Imitating sinless living is not the only thing Christ demonstrated

- He also showed us what our purpose in living life and our approach to life itself should be

We Must be Humbled

- God speaks frequently and forcefully about the need to be humbled
 - How He will exalt the humble and bring down the proud

[James 4:6](#) But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”

[James 4:10](#) **Humble** yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

[Prov. 29:23](#) A man’s pride will bring him low,
But a **humble** spirit will obtain honor.

[Job 22:29](#) “When you are cast down, you will speak with confidence,
And the **humble** person He will save.

[Is. 66:2](#) “For My hand made all these things,
Thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD.
“But to this one I will look,
To him who is **humble** and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

[Psa. 76:9](#) When God arose to judgment,
To save all the **humble** of the earth. Selah.

- There are two kinds of humility at work here
 - First there is the humility that precedes faith, the humbling of the heart in response to the grace of the God
 - Secondly, there is the daily effort of contending with pride and exalting God rather than ourselves
 - The first form happens in an instant by God’s power
 - But the second form of humbleness is the one that we Christians are to learn from observing Christ, beginning with His arrival on earth in a manger

- Practicing humbleness is a daily exercise
 - I'm particularly proud of how humble I am
 - Seriously, humility is not something you just fake – it's like faking sincerity
 - But it something we can learn and endeavor to obtained with God's grace
- But the question is how? Christ gave the answer, at least in principle, when he spoke to Peter:

[Matt. 16:21](#) ¶ From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

[Matt. 16:22](#) Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

[Matt. 16:23](#) But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

[Matt. 16:24](#) ¶ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

[Matt. 16:25](#) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

[Matt. 16:26](#) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

- The thought of Christ being persecuted this way must have shocked good ol' Peter, so he foolishly comes to Jesus' rescue
- But Christ rebukes him – harshly.
 - Christ tells Peter that his mind is set not on God's interests, but upon his own
 - And then Christ speaks those famous words of taking up our cross to follow him – words spoken even before it was known that Jesus would be crucified.
- A life following Christ is a journey made possible by faith – yes
 - But it is taken in small daily steps of denying of ones' own desires and fleshly instincts – allowing them to be replaced by God's desires

- Essentially, Christ was telling Peter that He intended to pursue a life directed by God and not by His own desires – desires that Peter was inflaming
- In my years as a Christian, I can't remember anyone ever stating the hard truth of those verses to me, so I don't want to make the same mistake for you, so allow me to explain
 - Christ's life on earth – beginning with his birth in a manger - was marked by a humbleness that led to a complete giving up of everything He had for the sake of obedience to the Father
 - First, He left heaven and His place of honor
 - Then to make matters worse, he became an object of scorn at the hands of men
 - And He did this simply because this was the Father's purpose for Christ coming to earth in the first place, so that He could save mankind by His death
 - Christ didn't consider equality with the Father something too great to give up for the sake of His obedience to the Father
 - Likewise, we can't offer any excuse for why we can't following God as He may direct our lives
- So, if we are to imitate Christ, it's not just about living a "good" life
- For that matter, what would a life completely dedicated to God's direction and desires look like?
- It would have to be a life marked by a giving up of everything we would count dear and accepting in its place anything the Father might demand of us – a Christ-like life
 - At the very least, God will demand we relinquish any material desires that may stand in the way of our complete obedience – **house**, car, toys, even our job
 - But what about our prejudices, our bad habits, our fears, our hatreds, our procrastinations, our weaknesses, our selfish interests, our false identities, our prideful self-image

- In fact, I would argue that the degree of sinlessness in your life is less important than your obedience
- We too often choose to get the small things right and ignore the big things
 - What we say, what we see, what we approve of – so often the outward signs of righteousness
 - But we won't consider radical changes in our lives for the sake of obedience when called upon
- If you are going to walk with Him in obedience and receive whatever blessing He may have in store for you, He is first going to ask you to give up anything that might serve as a stumbling block for your walk – anything that might trip you up as Peter tried unknowingly to do to Christ
 - Things that can only distract us from serving Him and being used by Him
 - But do you count those things more dear than obedience to God? Our actions will reveal our true heart – words are cheap and meaningless
 - And in those moments when our flesh stands before us just as Peter stood before Christ and demands a retreat, and a return to the worldly things we used to delight in, we need to declare as Christ did, get behind me Satan
 - And resolve to refocus your mind on God's interests and not your own – preferring to store up your treasure in Heaven
 - For what good is it if we were to achieve everything last thing our flesh might desire – if the price for obtaining it is to lose our souls – as Christ said
 - Obviously, nothing is worth that, which is ironic because we tend to pursue those stumbling blocks as if they could compare in some way
- So we learn from the example God set for us, even in the way he began life, in humble and lowly circumstances
 - And because Christ was willing to be humbled in obedience, the Father was willing to exalt Christ by raising Him up
 - Ultimately, Christ returns in glory

- Likewise, we must first be humbled so that we can be lifted up after death and we will see the fruit of our labor in a time of glory we share with Christ

[Luke 2:16](#) So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.

[Luke 2:17](#) When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

[Luke 2:18](#) And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

[Luke 2:19](#) But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

[Luke 2:20](#) The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

- The shepherds visit and report their experience with the angels to Joseph and Mary
 - This produced wonder in their hearts and Mary treasured these statements
 - And the shepherds continue on in rejoicing and praising God
 - What a beautiful scene and what a great lesson for us all
 - We should never forget to marvel at God's works and keep them in our hearts, coming back to them repeatedly for the purpose of praising God and testifying about Him to others
 - Have you ever considered that trials and difficult circumstances through which God brings you through are intended in part to give you testimonies about Him? Do you use them that way?
 - Consider Mary...what were her 9 months of shameful pregnancy like?
 - And now she rejoices in a full awareness of the special miracle of this child – can you imagine her pondering all these circumstances?
 - And now she shares in a testimony of God's greatness
 - Look for your own opportunity to ponder and praise God's works

[Luke 2:21](#) ¶ And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was *then* called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.
[Luke 2:22](#) ¶ And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord
[Luke 2:23](#) (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD”),
[Luke 2:24](#) and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.”

- After 8 days, Jesus is circumcised as was the Jewish requirement
 - And then the days of purification had to pass before he could be presented before the Lord in the temple
 - The purification was for Mary
 - According to the Law, the woman was considered ritually unclean for 33 days following the circumcision of the child
 - During this time, she couldn't enter the temple
 - On the 40th day after her son's birth, the mother would present a sin offering to atone for her uncleanness following birth
 - The sin offering was a lamb, unless the family was too poor for a lamb, in which case two doves could be substituted
 - The fact Joseph and Mary choose birds could indicate their low economic status
 - The purification for the mother was not intended to suggest that childbirth was considered a sin
 - Atoning for ritual uncleanness was not the same as purification for sins. All sin resulted in uncleanness under the law – yes - but not all uncleanness was the result of sin
 - Mary was simply considered ritually unclean because of childbirth
 - But the fact that she had to be purified is proof that Jesus' birth was a true human birth – the Incarnation was a true event – Jesus was born like every other man

[Luke 2:25](#) ¶ And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

[Luke 2:26](#) And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

[Luke 2:27](#) And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,

[Luke 2:28](#) then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

[Luke 2:29](#) "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,
According to Your word;

[Luke 2:30](#) For my eyes have seen Your salvation,

[Luke 2:31](#) Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

[Luke 2:32](#) A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES,
And the glory of Your people Israel."

[Luke 2:33](#) ¶ And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.

- As Mary and Joseph bring the Christ child into the temple, the Holy Spirit brings a man named Simeon there as well
- His names means announces, comprehends or obeys
 - God had revealed to this man that he would have the privilege of seeing the Messiah born in his day
 - Evidently he had been waiting for this day in anticipation, ready to declare it
 - And as he sees Mary and Joseph arrive at the temple, he apparently knows instantly who the Lord is – remarkable testimony to God's power to direct men to their messiah
 - He embraces him and blesses God
 - Having come to know who his Messiah is, he declares that he has no reason to go on living in this world
 - It's as if there is no other reason for him to exist but to accept the Christ – and now his purpose has been fulfilled leaving him with no other purpose of his own
- Exactly!

- What a beautiful illustration Luke records of the life each of us have in Christ!
 - We all begin a life that feels empty in purpose, seeking something greater than ourselves
 - Somewhere along the way, the Holy Spirit begins to woo us in small ways, softening our heart and offering hope and promise
 - Then one day, the Holy Spirit directs toward our Savior, - just as clearly and just as surely as He did for Simeon in the temple that day
 - And we rejoice and bless the name of God
 - Finally, Simeon gives us a great example of how our life can serve no greater purpose than to know our Messiah and serve Him
- Who are you serving in your decisions today, this week, this month?

[Josh. 24:15](#) ...then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”