

The Story That Never Gets Old (Part 1)

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] You can be turning in your Bibles to a very familiar passage of Scripture, especially familiar! And that is Luke chapter 2. So turn to Luke chapter 2. In a little bit I'm going to read verses 1-20.

A passage that we often call the Christmas story. It is the biblical story of the birth of Jesus Christ. And I have to admit to you since I started preaching almost sometime back in the middle 80s, it seems like a long time ago now. Since then I think I have let few if any Christmas seasons go by without at least preaching or teaching or sharing from Luke chapter 2. And there are a lot of reasons for that. One of them, the most obvious one would be that Luke chapter 2 really does give us more information about that first Christmas than any other passage in the Bible. Now it's not the only place that the birth of Christ is mentioned, of course. But really, I think you would admit as you've studied Scripture for yourself, very little of Scripture is devoted to the birth of Jesus Christ. Really, first part of Matthew and first part of Luke, that's pretty much it. There are some implications, some references to it.

But getting back to the point, we have the whole story here. A lot of information about the birth of one Jesus of Nazareth. There's another reason that we love this chapter, chapter 2, Luke chapter 2, and one of the reasons why I just cannot resist every Christmas time going back to it, and that is because of how it is written. I mean, it's just written so beautifully. I think you would admit to that as well. And actually, no matter what English translation you read it from, you know, most of us have learned it and are familiar with it from the King James Version, but really all versions, no matter which one you read it from, the literary beauty of Luke's account of the birth of Jesus Christ comes through. And I think you would also admit that it kind of draws you into the story, doesn't it? Now we have some other reasons why that happens, because we've seen perhaps dozens and dozens of pageants and Christmas programs and dramatical portrayals of the story, and of course the nativity scenes, and you know, all those things. So, you know, we're very familiar with the story and visually familiar with it as well, but it really reads so beautifully and so poetically, again, regardless of what translation you use. And so we're drawn into the story. It kind of reads like a storyboard for an epic movie, and our minds are able to just kind of put all the scenes, to visualize the scenes frame by frame. For example, the throne, we can almost see the throne room of the great Caesar Augustus as he issues this decree. You can kind of maybe even imagine hearing his voice and seeing what he might have looked like. And he issues this decree, this royal decree, that the entire world should be taxed.

[4 : 08] And then we can just kind of go to the countryside of Judea and visualize Joseph and his very pregnant wife Mary making that arduous trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And then we can, we're kind of transported to the humble stable, that stable where Mary gives birth to the glorious Savior, the Son of the Most High.

There in that stable surrounded by farm animals, we can imagine that and see that. And then, of course, to the serene kind of evening that night that on that hillside near Bethlehem where a few shepherds are huddled together there on that starlit night in a night that would forever change them. We can just visualize all of that as we read the story. And so I want to read the story as translated in the old king's English. And so I'm going to read it from the King James, what we usually call the authorized version written back in 1611, though this is not the 1611 version. If I were to read it from that, we probably wouldn't understand some of the verbiage. But let me read it from the King James chapter 2, starting with verse 1. And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made by Cyrenius when he was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea into the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

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. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

[7 : 26] 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. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told unto them. Marvelous story. Beautifully written. And a story that is very old, of course. Very old. 2,000 years old.

And counting still. And a beautiful story. Familiar story. Regardless, again, of which translation you read it in. But it's more, of course, than just a story, right? The Bible is not providing this story. Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did not record this. And it was not included in his writing just to give us information about the birth of Jesus Christ. It's more than that. A whole lot more than that. And this story, you know, reveals more than just the details concerning a birth of a child.

This story reveals something about a sovereign God. And not just about a sovereign God, but about his saving plan for us. And that's what we should always read and understand when we read this story, read this portion of Scripture or hear it read, even if it's Linus in the Peanuts movie, you know. When we hear the story read, we read it ourselves or see it portrayed in some kind of dramatic presentation. We should always understand that this story is revealing to us a sovereign God who has a saving plan for the world, for us.

[9 : 51] And so, I want us to walk through this story, not only this morning, but we'll finish this up next Sunday morning, Christmas morning. Hopefully, the weather will be good. We'll all be able to be here. And I want us to see several things that are revealed in this story. And I've already mentioned the fact that this story reveals a sovereign God. And so, here's number one, what I would call the autonomous master at the birth of Jesus. This story reveals the autonomous master. Now, for us to understand that, let's notice that the story speaks to us about another master in the world of that day, one Caesar Augustus. And so, when we read the story and read the opening verses of Luke chapter 2, have you ever really spent some time pondering how amazing it is that God would foreordain the very place for the birth of his son? I mean, the place mattered. And God foreordained it.

And he told us about it in advance. I mean, God the Father had his son born in, of all places in the world, Bethlehem. Now, Bethlehem, the name of that place, very familiar to us and doesn't seem very insignificant to us, certainly so. But in that day, Bethlehem was a no place. You know, in the backwaters of Judea, it was nothing of a town. And God chose to send his son to be born in Bethlehem. And God announced this in advance through his prophet, the prophet Micah in Micah chapter 5 verse 2, also very familiar to us. But you, Bethlehem Ephratah. Ephratah means fruitfulness, by the way. You, Bethlehem, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to me, the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. So it's all been foreplanned and foreordained.

And so God ordered things, so ordered things in the world to make sure that this prophecy would come true, that it would come about, it would be fulfilled. And I mentioned this last week when we

were looking at Galatians chapter 4 verse 4. This is really the meaning behind the phrase fullness of time. Remember Galatians 4 verse 4, but when the fullness of time has come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman. And the word fullness, you remember I explained this last week, pleroma, it means to makeful, means to make complete. That is the idea of being that God brought it all about. God orchestrated the whole thing. God really literally moved the world so that his son could be born where and when he foreordained he would be born. He prophesied that it would be born. In fact, according to the biblical record, and you know this to be true, I've mentioned it many times before, that when the time came for the Messiah to be born in the place where God said he would be born, in Bethlehem as prophesied, at that very time Joseph and Mary were not living in Bethlehem, were they? They were living in Nazareth, not all that far from Bethlehem, but still. The Messiah could not be born in Nazareth. That would not fulfill the prophecy. And so in order to fulfill his word and bring his chosen servants to Bethlehem so that Jesus, his son, could be born there, what did God do? Well, really you have to go way back in history and notice that God raised up a powerful nation, the nation of Rome, a powerful empire to dominate all the civilized world. God raised them up, according to prophecy also. You can look back at Daniel and see that. And God also raised up a very prideful, I would even say pompous ruler, whose sovereignty ruled over all the people of the civilized world. That would be Caesar Augustus, of course, though that's not really his name. That was a title, a title he gave to himself. He chose for himself. His real name was Gaius Octavius. He was the adopted heir of Julius, the famous Julius Caesar, and he gave himself this title. Caesar Augustus.

I'm the supreme one. See how prideful and pompous he was, and God put it in the heart and mind of this very prideful, pompous king to issue an audacious decree that the entire world would be taxed. Can you imagine? He had the power to do that. And in order for this tax to be taken, to be done correctly, a worldwide census must be taken. And so the heads of every household must be registered. They must travel back to the home of their lineage and be registered there so that the right amount of tax could be levied against them. And that's why Joseph traveled back to Bethlehem. And Mary went with him, not because she had to, but because she was pregnant. No way Joseph is going to leave her there in Nazareth as he travels all the way to Bethlehem, telling how long it would be before he could make it back.

[15 : 51] So she went with him. And God orchestrated all of that. You see, God not only moved the ruler of the world, but he also moved a large part of the population of the world. And here's the point I want you to get is, and it's this, that Caesar Augustus thought that he was the autonomous master of all the world. He thought he was the world. He thought he was the world. He thought he was the one who had all power, that there was no one above him. Caesar Augustus, that's why he picked the name for himself, the title for himself. He thought he answered to no one, that he was the autonomous master of all the world. That's what he thought. And yet Caesar Augustus was just a lowly pawn in the hand of the supreme sovereign Lord of all the universe. You remember Proverbs chapter 21 and verse 1.

The king, the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand, in the palm of the Lord, and he turns it wherever he wills. That's just an amazing passage of scripture. So God moved an empire, raising up a king, and he moved that king to move the world, to move one family from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order that his son would be born exactly where he said he would be born, in Bethlehem. Someone has said, for it is implicit in scripture, that all the mammoth political forces of all and all the giant industrial complexes, without their even knowing it, are being guided by God, not for their own sake, but for the sake of God's little people. Daniel chapter 2 verse 21 says, it is God who changes the times and the epochs. He removes kings and establishes kings. He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding.

The Bible says in Psalm 75 verse 7, but God is the judge, the supreme judge, supreme ruler. He puts down one and exalts another. And so the autonomous master at the birth of Jesus. It also reveals a second thing, and that is what I want to call the mysterious manner of the birth of Jesus. Very mysterious. Have you ever thought if God could have moved a powerful Roman Caesar and an entire empire, powerful empire, worldwide empire, if he could move them to bring Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem, could he not have also seen to it that they had a room in Bethlehem when they got there? And of course the answer to that is he could have. Certainly he could have. But you know, the very pregnant Mary has to travel all that way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. I'm sure not an easy trip. She's great with child. And when they get there, there's no

room for them in the inn. I mean, that's a familiar part of the story. You can almost see the innkeeper there at the door saying, no room for you, though the Bible doesn't mention an innkeeper.

So there's no room for them there. No room. I mean, really. And this is a strange part of the story. In fact, going from really a very clear revelation of the absolute sovereignty of God in getting his family to Bethlehem, and then suddenly they get there and there's no room for them. You think God forgot about that part? I say respectfully. Of course he didn't. But no room, no suitable place for the Lord of glory to be born. No private place. Think about this, ladies. No private place for the mother of the Messiah to give birth to her son. Pretty important thing to have when you're giving birth.

A private place, an adequate place, a good place to give birth. Only a stable. And only a feeding trough in which to lay your newborn child. You would agree that's strange. Mysterious. And I'm just thinking, you know, instead of to poor peasants, Jesus could have been born to a wealthy family.

[20 : 34] It would be even fitting for him to be born to a ruling family. And to be born not in a stable, but in a palace. I mean, he is the son of the highest. He is the king of kings.

Why not have him born in a palace? Perhaps God could have picked a better place. Again, I say respectfully, God. Or perhaps God could have picked a better time for him to send his son into the world, have him born into this world. Can you imagine how different the Lord's birth, how much easier it would have all been if he had come in the 21st century? Rather than in the 1st century. And to come to modern Bethlehem. You know anything about Bethlehem today? It's still a relatively small town, about 25,000 population. I'm sure much larger than it was when Jesus was born.

25,000. But here's the interesting thing. I looked it up on the internet. There are 28 hotels in Bethlehem. I think if he came today, there'd be a room there. Right? In that many hotels.

Unless maybe they're having some kind of convention and everything's sold out. I don't know. And not only that, but there are two major hospitals in Bethlehem. And one of them is a very famous children's hospital, a baby hospital there in Bethlehem.

[22 : 11] The caritas, which means charity, so to speak, the charity baby hospital of Bethlehem. That would have been an excellent place for Jesus to be born. Right? For Mary to give birth to her very first child. And don't forget that. This was her first experience.

To birth a baby. The mysterious manner of his birth. But, you know, the question is not what God can do or what God could have done. And certainly it's not what God should have done.

We're not his counselor. The question is what God wants to do. Wills to do. His purpose. And God's will concerning the manner of his son's birth.

That's explained in a number of places in Scripture. But how about this one? 2 Corinthians 7.13 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich.

That speaks of his pre-incarnate position as God. Though he were rich. Yet, for your sakes, he became poor.

[23 : 25] That you, through his poverty, might be rich. So this is what we're to understand. For your sake, for our sake, my sake, your sake.

His son was born in this mysterious manner. In a very difficult manner. See, God rules all things. Even hotel capacities. And he does it for us.

For your sake, my sake. Because Bethlehem is the beginning of the road to Calvary. Don't ever separate and disconnect the birth of Christ from the death of Christ.

When you think of the ministry of Jesus Christ, it's all focused on his death and resurrection. Now, the birth is important because that identifies for us who he is.

Born of a virgin means he is God, man. He is the incarnate God who became a man so that when he went to the cross he could represent you and me. And when he died on the cross and shed his blood, that blood would be, would have the power to save us because he's God.

[24 : 36] The God-man. Don't ever separate the cradle from the cross at all. So it's the beginning of Calvary's road. Calvary's road begins with a difficult journey from Nazareth and to a no vacancy sign in Bethlehem.

But it ends with a cruel cross in Jerusalem. And so we're looking at this wonderful story, a story that never gets old. It really doesn't, no matter how many times we hear it.

It never gets old. And we're seeing some incredible things in the story. The autonomous master at the birth of Jesus. The mysterious manner of the birth of Jesus.

And third, I would include here the oblivious mortals at the birth of Jesus. I mean, think about it. One of the most amazing fulfillments of prophecy is taking place and the world in that day is completely oblivious to it.

Caesar Augustus, he has no idea what's happening in his realm at that particular time. The innkeeper in Bethlehem, assuming there had to have been one, and I say there had to have been one, he hasn't a clue that he's just turned away the mother of his Messiah.

[25 : 53] Completely oblivious. All Israel, all Israel is just sleeping the night away, completely oblivious to what has happened in that lowly stable there in Bethlehem.

And you know, really the shepherds, it took a heavenly visitation of angels to lead the shepherds to Jesus. They would have been oblivious to it if it were not for the intervention of God into their lives. The wise men, of course, later, you know, it took a supreme miracle of a star. It wasn't really a star, it was a supernatural manifestation, a bright light that led them to the very place where Jesus was. At that time, at that point in time, he was in a house. But it took that supernatural act of God to lead the wise men to Jesus. I think even before that, it took Scripture.

I think they were students of the Word of God. And still today, you know, there are throngs of people crowding the malls. You know, we run into them, been running into them every time we go out shopping to buy those presents for Christmas, you know, and there are throngs of people, you know, in the malls and driving in the streets.

[27 : 12] And most of them, the majority of them, completely oblivious. They have no real idea that Jesus came into the world to die for them, to die for their sins.

Completely oblivious to the real meaning of Christmas. I mean, that's obvious, isn't it? Every Christmas, we're reminded of how totally unaware people are of what this time's all about. It's not about Christmas trees, of course, and decorations and gifts under the tree and those are trappings of the holiday as it has kind of evolved in its celebration and they're not bad things and I enjoy them.

It's not really about that, of course, you know that. It's not about, certainly not about elves and, you know, fictitious people like elves and reindeer that fly and, you know, it's not about that.

It's about the birth of the Savior. But the world is oblivious to that truth, right? And it takes the power of the gospel to lead them to Jesus.

[28 : 28] And so that brings us to a fourth truth revealed here in this wonderful story. That is what I would call the glorious meaning of the birth of Jesus.

And it's also included in the story. The glorious meaning of it. What's it all about? And the meaning, of course, is clearly communicated to the shepherds there tending their sheep, their flocks.

And the meaning is the gospel. I mean, that's what the angel said. The angel said there in verse 10, I bring you good tidings. Good tidings.

Ewingelizo is the Greek word often translated gospel in other places in the New Testament.

Ewingelizo, it's where we get our word evangelism.

Evangelism. Evangelism. Or evangelize. And evangelism means to proclaim the good news. The good news. The gospel. That's what gospel means. That's what Ewingelizo means.

[29 : 31] It means good news. And what is the good news? Well, verse 11, For there is born to you this day in the city of David what? A Savior.

A Savior. Not just a baby. A Savior who is Christ. The Lord. They've been looking for Him. Hoping for His coming.

His coming had been prophesied all throughout their scriptures. They knew those prophecies well. And I think at this very time because of some of the substance of some of those prophecies there was a very high expectation among the people of Israel that the Messiah was coming and coming soon.

And so this is good news. But I don't know that they necessarily understood the word Savior. And to you this day born in the city of David that's Bethlehem of course a Savior.

A Savior. And the Savior is the one you've been looking for. Christ. The anointed one. Messiah. Messiah. The Lord.

[30 : 50] And so they then give the shepherds really the essence of the gospel. The good news. And not just that the Savior has come. The Messiah has come.

But really the angel shares what this Messiah will do for those who believe in Him. And it's really two things that are mentioned here.

God's Messiah the Christ is born in Bethlehem. He has come to give sinners two things that the angels speak of here.

First one is joy in the place of fear. To give joy in the place of fear. And the second one is peace in the place of hostility.

peace in the place of hostility. And so this is the glorious meaning of His birth. First of all the gospel is joy in the place of fear.

[31 : 55] Joy in the place of fear. You might remember what the angel said to Zacharias the father of John the Baptist. John the Baptist the one chosen to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

And in Luke chapter 1 verse 13 the angel said do not be afraid Zacharias. Do not be afraid. For your prayer is heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you shall call his name John and you will have joy.

Joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth. Why? Because he was such a cute little baby? No. Because of what his birth would mean and what his task would be at his birth.

He would be the one to announce make way make a short way for the Messiah. And John would of course be the one who would identify him as well.

You see the point is joy in the place of fear. Very clear in this angelic announcement to Zacharias. And then you might remember also and it was you know we mentioned this I think last week you might remember what the angel said to Mary the mother of Jesus in Luke chapter 1 verse 30 do not be afraid there it is again do not be afraid Mary for you have found favor with God and behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name Jesus he will be great and will be called the son of the highest and then Mary would sing my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has what rejoiced in me my spirit is full of joy joy overflowing that's what rejoicing is it's the overflow of the joy that's in your heart and this is what

[34 : 00] God brought to Mary he said he said to the angel don't be afraid I'm going to replace that fear with joy joy joy in the place of fear this is what the gospel brings this is the good news about it and now here in our passage in Luke chapter 2 verse 10 the angel said to the shepherds do not be afraid there's a third time do not be afraid for behold I bring you good news great tidings of what great joy joy which shall be to all people why how for there is born to you this day in the city of David a savior who is Christ the Lord joy in the place of fear Hebrews chapter 2 verse 14 really puts connects it for it tells us you know why Jesus came at Christmas and he came at Christmas so he could die on

Calvary that's what Hebrews 2 14 tells us that Hebrews says that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death that is the devil and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage what a description of lostness condition that everyone is in and or was in you were in the fear of death in bondage until you were saved see here's the glorious meaning of his birth have no fear have no fear I've come to remove fear Jesus came to remove fear and in its place to bring us great joy joy in the place of fear but also peace in the place of hostility peace in the place of hostility

Jesus came to give you this peace in the place of hostility and the hostility is not between one another the hostility is between us and God that's the hostility between God and the sinner but Romans chapter 5 verse 10 says while we were enemies and I hope for all of us the past tense is correct for us were enemies while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son reconciled peace was made between us because of our sin we were enemies of God hostile toward God and his judgment his holiness and condemnation hostile to us but while we were in that condition enemies we were reconciled reconciled to God by what the death of his son this is the hopeless condition of mankind since the fall of

Adam but the heavenly host in Luke chapter 2 verse 13 announced the end to hostility the hostility caused by sin this is the good news and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace peace goodwill toward men and that's how the new King James translates it and it's similar to the King James more literal translation would be on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased even the NIV which is not really my translation of choice as you know but he gets it right here glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests his grace this is the glorious meaning of his birth a savior has come and there is the favor of God's peace for all those who will believe on him peace in the place of hostility what a story really isn't it not just a beautiful story not just heartwarming when we hear it read you know nostalgic in some sense not just poetic in the way

that

Luke wrote it even conveyed to us in his a foreign language to him in our English not just poetic and beautiful literature but what a story in its meaning what it reveals to us it reveals the sovereignty of God the autonomous master at the birth of Jesus it also reveals the road to Calvary our savior's road to Calvary the mysterious manner of the birth of Jesus it also reveals the ignorance of mankind and the ignorance that that is held captive people millions of people in our world today the oblivious mortals at the birth of Jesus and it reveals the gospel most important the good news the glorious meaning of the birth of Jesus there are a couple more things this story reveals and I invite you and your families and your friends who may be visiting for

[40 : 42] Christmas carve out a little time out of your Christmas day come join us at 10 o'clock for some fellowship and then at 1030 for our worship service and I'll share with you at least two more things marvelous about this story that never ever gets old Thank you.