

October 20

Luke 1

Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 2:1-7, 8-14, 15-20

Matthew 1:25, Luke 2:21

Luke 2:22-24, 25-35, 36-38

Today you read one of the great chapters of the Bible, Luke chapter 2, and you encountered the account of the birth of Jesus Christ. The first chapter of Luke is extremely valuable to us because it gives us much background material that is missing from the other accounts.

Once again it is evident that Luke's source for chapter 2 is undoubtedly Mary herself. How else could Luke know how Mary felt about the events occurring on the night of Jesus' birth? So much of the material here could have only been known to Joseph and Mary. Since Joseph was probably dead before Christ even began His public ministry, and certainly well before it ended, a long time before Luke would be involved in collecting material, his source had to be Mary. One of the most significant events in the history of our race.

Right from the outset of this Gospel, Luke has an emphasis on women. Throughout the ancient world, the place of women was a low one. Even among the people of God this was so. William Barclay reminds us that "In the Jewish Morning Prayer, a man thanks God that he has not made him a 'Gentile, a slave, or a woman'".

Luke mentions thirteen women who do not appear anywhere else. He seems determined to draw out the fact that in Christianity, the true emancipation of women is found. In Chapter 1, Elizabeth and Mary share the spotlight with Zachariah the priest. In Chapter 2, it will be Anna, along with Simeon who will be portrayed for us.

Mary and Zechariah both wrote beautiful songs to God. They are wonderful examples of worshipful responses to the magnificent things that God was doing in their lives. These songs are chock full of Old Testament allusions and quotations. These godly people really "knew the Word" and that is one of the reasons they were useful and ready to be used by God. Oh that we would know the word so well....

The innate linkage between the life of John the Baptist and his cousin Jesus is worth paying attention to. The Old Testament prophets link them together as a herald and a king and an angel announces the birth of each. Both births have a "miraculous" aspect to them. Both children are related to the Holy Spirit in a special way from birth, and both are on a divine mission to bring God's salvation to the earth.

We cannot leave the first chapter of Luke today without at least commenting briefly on the fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus, according to Luke (who got his facts from Mary and was governed in his writing by the Holy Spirit) was a virgin!

All kinds of attempts have been made to deny that the Bible teaches that Christ was born of a virgin. But try as you might, there is no way to dodge the clear teaching of Luke chapter 1.

Mary said, Luke believed, and the Holy Spirit let it stand, that when Jesus was conceived, Mary was a virgin. Some have said that in our modern scientific world, the idea of a virgin birth is no longer acceptable -- we're not that gullible. Well, Joseph wasn't a 21st century biologist, but he wasn't gullible either. This doctrine would have been no easier to believe in the first century than it is in the 21st.

But Scripture clearly teaches it and let me make just one observation here -- the really great miracle is not the virgin birth anyway; it is the incarnation -- the fact that God would actually become a man. If you get past that one, then the virgin birth is really no very great difficulty. Why? Because if God could and would actually become a man and be born into this world of men, then we would almost have to expect that there would be something very strange and very wonderful about His birth.

The only good reason to deny the virgin birth is rooted in the assumption that miracles do not happen. That is an assumption which you and I do not hold. If God would truly deign to become a man, why wouldn't He do it in a way that would be outside the bounds of what can happen naturally? The real miracle remember, is the incarnation. The virgin birth is a much smaller one.

I can't miss an opportunity to call your attention here to the fact that it was a decree of Caesar Augustus that got Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem.

What was that verse we noted in Proverbs 21:1? *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; like a watercourse he directs it however he pleases."*

From what we know of the ancient census, which, by the way, was held every 14 years or so during this period, Mary would not have had to go, but under the circumstances -- about to deliver -- pregnant for less time than she and Joseph had been married -- and in all probability knowing the prophecy of Micah 5:1 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem -- she goes with Joseph to the City of David.

We cannot fail to be impressed, even though the story is so familiar to us, by the fact that the birth of Christ takes place in a setting of extreme humility. This is one King who will be able to relate to even the poorest of His subjects -- and that might be one of the reasons why it happened the way it did. He's born in a cow barn -- a stable -- laid in a feed trough and clothed with scraps of cloth. And then there are the shepherds.

If you were planning a birthday party for a king, who would you invite, and to whom would you send birth announcements? The birth of God's Son was announced to a group of shepherds. Because of their occupation, which rendered them permanently ceremonially unclean, and their lifestyle, that denied them a permanent address, and their reputation as a class of people, which was so bad that anyone could be a legal

witness in court -- except a shepherd; shepherds occupied just about the bottom rung of a social ladder. These are the people God invites to the birthday party. Luke wants to be certain that we get this information because one of the main ideas that he wants to promote in his Gospel is that Jesus is the Savior of all -- the poor and downtrodden as well as the middle and upper classes -- the Gentile just as much as the Jew.

Ok everyone, stores are already starting to decorate and get ready for Christmas. The special winter magazines are coming in the mail hoping that we will all start our shopping early.

Here's a challenge for all of us: that we spend just as much time studying, reading about and pondering on the birth of our great Savior as we do decorating, shopping and getting ready for the festivities that the holidays bring.

As we read in Isaiah not so many months ago:

For unto you a child is born, unto you a savior will be given
And his name shall be wonderful, counselor, the everlasting father, the prince of peace.