

ADVENT
Week Two: He Keeps His Promises
Luke 2, Micah 5.2

Merry Christmas Lake Wylie. If you have your Bible go ahead and begin turning to Luke chapter 2. If you're using one of the Bibles in the pew rack you can find out text on page: 857

I hope you are all having a great Christmas season so far. As we've said already, one of our hopes for you this Christmas is that you would carve out time to back away from some of the commercial trappings of the season. We tend to put huge expectations on ourselves this time of year. There's a lot of work to finish before January. There are presents to buy with money we don't have to impress people we don't like.

And you know, I've realized that we don't just exaggerate our expectations on our own Christmases. We do it with the story of Christ's birth as well. We over romanticize the nativity scene and turn it into a very porcelain, Precious Memories scene instead of the chaotic mess it really was.

Think of the song Silent Night. It's one of my favorites. But it's actually silly if you think about it. "Silent Night. Holy Night. All is Calm." Now, I have been in the room for 2 births— and neither of them were silent or calm.

Or how about this one, "The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes. The little Lord Jesus no crying he makes." Seriously? If your newborn wakes up and is staring at a cow you think he isn't going to cry?

Many of you have already begun putting out your nativity sets, and I hate to wreck them for you, but did you know it's more likely that Jesus was born in a cave than a stable. The text never tells us, so we can't know for sure but historical data suggests that farm animals were kept in caves in Bethlehem.

This is a time of year when we all love to tell stories and sing songs like Rudolph and the Little Drummer Boy. They're fun songs. They're cute stories. But—if we aren't careful, we'll begin to treat the story of Christ's birth as just another story among many. It will lose its historical significance.

Today, in Luke chapter 2 Luke is going to remind us to take the story of the nativity serious. And he's going to give us three reasons why we should take it seriously:

- 1. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS A HISTORICAL EVENT (v. 1-3)**
- 2. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS A PROPHETIC EVENT (v. 4-5)**
- 3. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS AN OFFER OF PEACE (v. 6-7)**

For those of you who are new to the Bible, Luke was a physician who was a travelling companion with the Apostle Paul in the first century. If you look back in Luke 1:1 you'll find that Luke had a man named Theophilus who was a patron. This man paid for Luke to travel around and collect eyewitness stories, corroborate evidence and write this gospel that we have.

So Luke is taking down an orderly account of the life and events surrounding Jesus. Here's what he says in chapter 2 verse 1:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to 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, who was with child.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

First, we should take the birth of Jesus seriously because:

1. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS A HISTORICAL EVENT (v. 1-5)

Look back at verse 1 with me:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David.

In these verses Luke lists out multiple references to historical figures and places. Here's what's interesting to me about these references. They aren't meant to move the narrative along. There's nothing about Quirinius, or his being the governor of Syria that actually pushes the story along.

In other words, if Luke was just writing a novel this would be a cardinal sin. But Luke isn't writing a novel. Luke is incredibly concerned that you not read this as a novel, but as a history. And if I want you to read something as a history one of the things I would do is write historical markers into the text so that you could fact check me.

Now, I know we just got through the election, and no one really wants to revisit it, but if you think back to all the presidential debates one of the big things that the news agencies try to do is fact check what each candidate says and then give the nation a report on the truthfulness of the candidates. And CNN says the conservative is lying about everything, while Fox News says the

liberals are lying about everything.

Well, regardless of that, by writing these historical markers into the text Luke is saying, "Fact check me! This really happened as an event of history."

- Caesar Augustus
- First Registration
- Quirinius was Governor of Syria
- Now, someone is going to be looking at Nazareth and Bethlehem in their Bible map and say, "Luke made a geographical error. Bethlehem is south of Nazareth", but Luke says, "Joseph when up from Nazareth to Bethlehem." Well— Luke is actually referring to geographical elevation, not the points on a compass. Nazareth is about 1,200 feet above sea-level. Bethlehem is about 2,700 feet above sea-level. Luke is so detailed in his depiction of this event that he even gets the elevation right.

That's actually why, no matter where someone is in Israel they're always said to go "up" to Jerusalem in the Bible. It was common knowledge that Jerusalem was a city set on a hill so you had to go up to get to it regardless of whether you were north or south of it.

Imagine if I said, if you go down here and cross Buster Boyd Bridge, take a right at 5 Points and that will take you to Walmart. You'd say, "Ok this guy knows the area."

But imagine if I was talking about Clover and started mentioning an iHop, a Brugger's Bagels and a Nordstrom. You'd probably nod and smile at me because that's what we do with stupid people here in the South, then you'd whisper to everyone around to not take directions from me because I obviously don't know the area.

Luke is giving you and me these historical markers because the birth of Christ isn't to be understood as a myth, but as a historical fact. 2,000 years ago God broke into human history by sending

his Son, to be born of Mary. It happened. Luke is saying, “This is a historical event.”

Second,

2. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS A PROPHETIC EVENT (v. 4-5)

Look back at verse 4:

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to 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, who was with child.

Why does Luke make 2 explicit references to King David when mentioning Bethlehem? You see the two links there:

- “to the city of David”
- “because he was of the house and lineage of David”

Most people reading this letter from by Luke would have known what Bethlehem was. They knew that Bethlehem was a bedroom village on the outskirts of Jerusalem, just like Lake Wylie is to Charlotte. So, if everyone would have known where Bethlehem was, why does he feel the need to insert these references about one of Israel’s ancient kings?

Here’s why: **Luke is trying to jog your memory.** If you have any familiarity with the Old Testament Luke’s reference of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, the city of David you know there are two Old Testament prophecies Luke wants you to recall:

The first is Micah 5.2 and the other is 2 Samuel 7. Now, do you remember how we said last week that the Bible is not a bunch of different stories, but one great narrative of God rescuing his people in Jesus? Last week we looked at the very first prophecy about Jesus in Genesis 3. This week Luke is having us look at 2

more:

Micah 5.2:

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

In this passage of Micah God had been speaking out against the evil of his own people. They are oppressing the poor. They are breaking God’s law. In other words, they have no hope of seeing God because their hearts are consumed with evil. So God promises to bring a ruler out of the little town of Bethlehem.

That’s the first reference Luke wants you to see. **He is connecting the birth of Jesus to God’s prophecy in Micah that a ruler will be born in Bethlehem.**

The second prophecy that Luke wants you to remember is 2 Samuel 7:

¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

This is a prophecy that God gave to King David. He says that David’s line will one day produce a king who will never die. He’ll sit on David’s throne forever. The line of the king will never be broken.

Here’s what all that means: **as Luke is doing his research to write his gospel he begins to realize all the points along the way that God is in control of this story.** Luke begins, and so

does Matthew, Mark and John— all the gospel writers begin to realize that the birth of Jesus isn't just a historical event— it was a prophetic event. **Luke realizes that even though Caesar decreed this global registration, there is a greater narrative at work in the world than that of human rulers. God is the true author of this story.**

Now, if you're new to church, or you are questioning Christianity I realize that the idea of prophecy might sound weird to you. When someone says prophecy you only think of weird TV preachers finding secret prophetic codes in the Bible that aren't really there.

Or you might think, "So, big deal that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. I'm sure plenty of babies were born in a suburb of Jerusalem. That doesn't make Jesus the Messiah"

Well, let me take a moment and explain the depth of the prophecies to you.

- There are around 322 direct prophecies in the OT about Jesus. And not vague stuff either like, "There will be a man, who will do great stuff, and while lots of people will like him he'll die tragically." That's not what these 322 prophecies are like.
- We've already seen the prophecy about where he would be born in Bethlehem (**Micah 5.2**) And that happened.
- **Psalm 22.6** says he'd be crucified by having his hands and feet pierced. That happened.
- **Isaiah 53:12** says he'd be killed alongside criminals. That happened.
- Those who would execute him would gamble for his clothes (**Psalm 22:18**) That happened.
- He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver and that the silver would be used to purchase a potter's field (**Zechariah 11:13**) That happened.

- He would be born 173,880 days from the decree of Artaxerxes decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem (**Daniel 9.25**)

And more than 300 others. When Luke references Micah and 2 Samuel he's saying, "You can't just overlook the massive amounts of detailed prophecies about Jesus."

You might say, "Well, Jesus was just an opportunist. He knew some of these prophecies like the one about riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. He could have just manufactured that." Yes, while it is easy to ride on a donkey into Jerusalem, it would be tough to choose which city you were born in.

You might say, "Jesus just got lucky. He just lucked into these prophecies lining up with him." Well, Dr. Peter Stoner, Professor Emeritus at Westmont College did a statistical study on one person fulfilling all these promises. The chances of that happening, concluded Dr. Stoner are 1 in 10 to the 157th power.

To illustrate what that probability would look like Dr. Stoner said it would be like covering the state of Texas 2 feet in silver dollars and then making a little mark on one. Then you would catapult a blind man into Texas from Mexico and have him reach down and pick out the marked coin.

Besides, some of these prophecies concerned Jesus enemies— and they never would have gone along with anything that promoted Jesus as the Christ.

The bottom line is that there is a litany of prophecies that Jesus fulfilled entirely through his birth, life, death and resurrection, and what Luke is trying to get you to see that the birth of Jesus was a prophetic event.

So the question is this: if it is the case that God is directing all of these historical events and prophecies, why is he doing it? What is

he directing all to?

3. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST IS AN OFFER OF PEACE (v. 6-7)

Go back to that passage in Micah 5 with me that Luke is referencing. We say that passage says that a ruler would come out of Bethlehem. But that passage actually elaborates a little more. Look at verse 4:

*And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.
⁵ And he shall be their peace.*

It's that last phrase I want you to focus on today. **“He shall be their peace.”** It's an interesting phrase. In fact, it almost looks like it's written incorrectly. As if it should say, “He shall bring them peace.”

That's what everyone wanted in a ruler 2,000 years ago. Everyone wanted someone who could bring them peace. But the text doesn't say that.

This is the claim about Jesus that sets him apart from every other leader, every other ruler, every president, every religious figure.

Caesar Augustus could promise to bring peace. And in many ways, he did. Rome experienced a peace that had never been experienced in history. But, while many people said, “Caesar brought peace, no one said, “Caesar is our peace.”

If you miss this you'll misunderstand everything about Christianity. **Jesus is our peace.** He, himself, is our peace. He doesn't bring us peace, so much as he is our peace.

This is what makes Christianity different from other religions. Muhammed said, “I'll show you the way to paradise.” Jesus said, “I am the way.”

Buddha said, “Here is the 8 fold path to enlightenment.” Jesus said, “I am the path. I'm the way. I'm the truth. I'm the light.”

And in Micah, one of the 322 prophecies about Christ is that he won't just bring us peace, but that he will be our peace.

Let me tell you how it is that Jesus is our peace.

The Scriptures teach that from the very beginning, every human has made the choice to, not only ignore God but to live in rebellion to him. Now, I realize that rebellion is a harsh word. But that is the natural state of your heart and mine.

We don't naturally look to God.
We don't naturally seek his will.
Our minds don't drift towards him, but away.

Instead of acknowledging his rule, we set up our own kingdoms where we make the decisions, we set the rules, we set the budget, we set the schedule. Everything is under our control.

When we accomplish something great we take as much credit as we can get. And when something gets botched we shed as much blame as possible.

We've all broken God's laws. We've lied, cheated, and stolen.

Now, get this. When a group of people 2,000 years ago rebelled, how did the ruler stop the rebellion?

He'd squash it. Caesar would marshal his troops, and set out for war. He'd go into the rebellious territory and raze it to the ground, and the rebellion would end, and peace would be re-established.

Now, look at what happens when God stops a rebellion. There's no marshaling of the angels. God doesn't grease up his thunderbolts in the clouds. God doesn't adopt the posture of a Roman general coming to crush the rebellion.

In Luke two here's how God begins his advance against our rebellion:

*⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.
⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

The start of God's counter attack against our rebellion doesn't begin in Rome with fanfare, it begins in Bethlehem with a poor carpenter and his betrothed.

It doesn't begin in a palace, with a royal court, it begins in a cave, in a feeding trough surrounded by goats and donkeys.

It doesn't begin with a flash of light tearing the sky apart, so that everyone can see the God has come to put down the rebels. It begins with one faint star. One tiny light lit.

And listen, this is one of the reasons we stopped this morning to rest from all of the commercialization of the season. Jesus birth didn't happen in a Macy's with lights, glitter, and the smell of Chanel #5. It happened in a barn with hay, and animal feces, and the cries of a woman in labor.

God works in the exact opposite way that we expect him to. Everything that we are trying to gain, he sheds. Everything we value as important, he divests himself of. I said this last week, Jesus left the most exclusive gated community in the universe to come to rescue us.

God doesn't come as a general. he comes as a baby. Few people

can approach a Caesar, but anyone, even the lowest of the low can approach a baby.

When Luke tells us that the in-breaking of God into our world happened in a stable, and that the crown prince of heaven was laid in a feeding trough what's he telling you?

He's saying that everyone is welcome and invited. Jesus didn't just come for the up and in, he came for the down and out.

He didn't come for the politically connected, he came for the disenfranchised, the homeless, the hurt, the helpless, the hopeless. This is what the manger means!

So how does this baby conquer our rebellion against God? How does he become our peace? He doesn't do it like Caesar. The rulers of this world conquer rebellions by bearing the spear and bringing judgement.

Jesus Christ, the child that was born, conquered our rebellion, not by bearing the spear and bringing the judgement, but by taking the spear and bearing the judgement.

That's why Micah says that **he is our peace**. Not, "He brings us peace." But, "He, himself, is our peace." When we stand before God and all our sin condemns us the only thing we can offer to God is Jesus. He is our peace.

Let me ask you this morning: Is he your peace?

Has he been made to you peace.

Perhaps today your peace isn't found in him. Maybe it's found in your work. How much you can accomplish. But there's this gnawing sense that that will never be enough.

Maybe it's in your children. If you could just raise them to be right. If they would just start acting right, then you would have

peace.

Maybe you've already been caught up in the business of this season. You've worn yourself out shopping and decorating, and hanging ornaments, and lights and making cookies, but you have not rested in the truth of what this season is about:

2,000 years ago—God wrote himself into your story, as a little baby. It's a historical fact. It really happened.

It's a prophetic event. God is the grand designer and author of your story. You aren't. Can you just rest from trying to write your own story for a bit?

But, most importantly, it's an offer of peace.

For all our sins one day He'll die
To make us sons of God on high
Let every heart prepare Him room
The promises have all come true

Emmanuel has come to us
The Christ is born, Hallelujah!
Our God made low to raise us up
Emmanuel, has come to us