

Luke 2:1-21 The Extraordinary From The Ordinary

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[0 : 0 0] Luke's Gospel to Luke chapter 2. Luke chapter 2. And we're going to read the verses marked 1 through 21. 1 through 21 of Luke chapter 2.

Luke chapter 2, beginning to read at verse 1, this is the word. The word of God. In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

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

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

[1 : 2 6] And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy, that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you, you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laying in a manger. 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 among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard, and seen as it had been told them.

[2 : 3 9] And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel, before he was conceived in the womb. Amen. Amen.

This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. The words that were made about Jesus some 300-400 years beforehand were accurately fulfilled.

And as we read Micah chapter 5, we're reminded of one of those prophecies that was fulfilled in the birth of Christ. Micah chapter 5, beginning to read verse 1.

This is the word of God. Now, muster your troops, O daughter of troops. Siege is laid against us. With a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.

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

[4 : 10] Therefore, he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. Then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.

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, and he shall be their peace.

When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men. They shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances.

And he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border. The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like Jew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man, nor wait for the children of man.

And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep, which when it goes through treads down and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver.

[5 : 26] Your hands shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off. And in that day, declares the Lord, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots.

And I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds. And I will cut off sorceries from your hand and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes. And I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands.

And I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities. And in anger and wrath, I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey.

Amen. This is a reading of the Lord's inspired, inerrant word. Let us turn. Let's turn then, please, to Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 2. And we're going to consider these first 21 verses together.

Luke chapter 2, and verses 1 through 21. As most of you, you probably know, one of my great passions in life is cricket. I love watching sport of any kind, but if the cricket's on, then I'll choose to watch cricket over football, rugby, golf, tennis, anything really.

[6 : 48] I played cricket for my local club, Carrick Cricket Club, for many years, until we got married. And every year, Carrick would sign an overseas professional. Generally, a Pakistani or an Indian, a South African Australian, would come over in their winter and play cricket in our summer and earn a little bit of extra money.

One year, we signed this 17-year-old South African called A.B. De Villiers. He turned up. He looked fairly ordinary. He smoked.

He drank. He did all sorts of things that the 19-year-old would do. He looked perfectly ordinary. That was until he went on to the cricket pitch, when it became clear that this 17-year-old was no ordinary 17-year-old.

To this day, he holds the highest score ever scored by a Carrick Cricket Club player. It has to be said he's gone on to do better things than that. He has established himself as a South African international and generally is regarded as one of the best players in the world.

He looked ordinary. But the reality was he was extraordinary. And as we come to Luke chapter 2 this morning, I think that's the sense that we get.

[7 : 59] Everything about this scene looks ordinary. It's a mother with her baby. It's people coming to visit a newborn baby. Everything about it looks ordinary.

It looks like every other birth that there has been. But of course, the reality is that this birth is extraordinary. That this baby is no ordinary baby.

That this baby is the Christ. The Son of God. It looks ordinary. But it's in fact extraordinary.

We want to see three things this morning. Consider three things together. Firstly, we want to consider an ordinary birth. As Luke records Jesus' birth for us, it's very matter of fact.

It's just an ordinary birth. Secondly then, we want to see an extraordinary message. This extraordinary message that the angels bring to the shepherds of who this baby is.

[8 : 58] Of what this baby has come to do. And then thirdly, we want to think about an ordinary sight. That as the shepherds went to see this baby, they didn't find anything extraordinary.

They didn't find anything out of place. It was an ordinary sight for an extraordinary baby. So firstly then, we want to think about an ordinary birth.

An ordinary birth, and we see that in verses 1 through 7. This first kind of paragraph, if you like, of Luke chapter 2. So we finished last week by thinking about Zachariah's prophecy.

We remember of course, as we came to the end of Zachariah's prophecy, he was perfectly content. He knew what the role of his son would be. Luke chapter 1, at the end there, Luke records for us that Zachariah knew his son would be the forerunner.

Zachariah knew that his son would be the one who went ahead of the Christ. And as we come to Luke chapter 2, we see that even in his birth, don't we? We've had Luke chapter 1, John the Baptist is born.

[10 : 04] Then what happens in Luke chapter 2? The very next thing after Zachariah's prophecy, after John's been born, the very next thing that happens is the Christ comes. Luke wants us to make the connection here.

John the Baptist is the forerunner. John the Baptist is the one who goes ahead of the Christ. And then what happens chapter 2? The Christ comes. It's an impossible connection for us to miss.

It's an impossible thing for us not to see. That's what Luke wants us to see. But it's also a birth in which the hand of God can be clearly seen.

Because it was in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus. That all the world should be registered.

This Caesar here is probably the first proper Caesar in the sense of the word in the sense that we think about Caesars today as those who rule. This Caesar was kind of proud, arrogant, he was a vindictive man, he was a power hungry man.

[11 : 16] And he would do anything to cling on to power. And so it's in those days that Caesar kind of is organizing his kingdom. It's in those days that Caesar's registering his kingdom.

He makes this decree that the whole realm should be registered. It's a kind of administrative tax. Caesar wants to figure out well how many people do I actually rule over? How many people are in my kingdom?

How many people am I responsible for? And probably more importantly how much tax should I be collecting from these people? How much money should I be getting? So everyone who lives in this kingdom, everyone who lives within the sphere of Caesar Augustus' influence has to go to be registered.

And then Luke records this detail for us, verse 2. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Now we know that Quirinius was governor of Syria around 6 BC.

And now some people will point to that and say well you know Quirinius was governor of Syria six years before Jesus was born. How does this all fit together? Well to be quite honest you know the man who made the dating system didn't get it right.

[12 : 29] The man who came up with BC and AD got it wrong. That's the simple answer. But there's another problem. Not only does this census, not only is Quirinius governor of Syria six years before Christ was born, but there's no actual, no historical recollection, no historical record of this census occurring.

There are plenty of censuses, there are plenty of registrations that occur during this time, but no record of this one. So does that mean that Luke's making it up?

Is Luke reading what was happening at the time back into what happened in the days of Jesus Christ? That the careful historian that Luke has set himself out to be has simply got his facts wrong.

To say that would be a great disservice to Luke. He's written this account, remember, the whole purpose of this book, the whole purpose of his gospel, is so that Theophilus might be sure of the things that he's been taught.

And is Luke really then at the start going to make such a simple error? Is Luke then at the start really going to make such a basic oversight? It would undermine the complete purpose of his book.

[13 : 45] There's no historical evidence of this census occurring, but there is historical evidence that around this time the Jews were required to swear an oath of allegiance to Caesar, were required to swear this oath, which would sort of line up with what we read here.

The gospel of Luke is an accurate history. The terms that are used in Luke's gospel are terms that were right at the time, accurate terms at the time. Luke was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write an accurate, inerrant account of the life of Christ.

The Bible is to be the final authority in all matters of controversy because it is the inspired, inerrant word of God. Our history, however well researched, however well written, is fallible.

the Bible is not. So we see what happens then. This decree has gone out, it was the first census, first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria, then verse 3, everyone goes to his hometown to register.

Now we might wonder about that, I mean imagine the hassle of having to go to your birth place to fill in the census. Imagine how inconvenient it would be if you had to travel every ten years to fill in the census.

[15 : 13] But yet in a sense for the Jews it was the most natural thing to do, wasn't it? The Jews who were heirs of the promised land, at the moment the promised land invaded, occupied by the Romans, but the promised land nonetheless.

For the Jews the hometown was their bit, it was the bit that God had given them, it was their allotment in the promised land, it was the inheritance that God had given to them. And that explains why they go to their hometown, because this is the bit they belong to, this is the place they identify with, this was the place that God had given them.

So Joseph and Mary head back to Nazareth, head back to the city of David, because he was of the house and line of David, we're told.

Verse 4, While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth, verse 7, 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.

It's exactly what you would see today, well minus the manger hopefully, I don't think NHS cuts have quite got that bad. But as soon as the baby's born today, the first thing that they'll try to do with the baby, a newborn baby today, is give the baby and the mother skin to skin contact.

[16 : 34] But after about 20 minutes, they're keen to have the baby dressed, they're keen to have the baby wrapped, they're keen to have the baby laying in a cot in a blanket. In every respect, it's an ordinary birth.

If anything, it's actually a poor birth. There's no mansion, no palace, no attendance waiting on Mary. Just a man, a woman, and a baby.

It's an ordinary birth. But you notice God's hand in it all. Caesar just happened to be on the throne at that point.

Caesar just happened to call a census. Mary just happened to go to Nazareth with Joseph. You know, it would have been perfectly acceptable for Joseph to go on his own and register for them both.

It would have been perfectly normal for Joseph to say to Mary, look, it's too much. You stay here, I'll go. But she went. And it happens just that while she was there, the time came to give birth.

[17 : 42] God is directing the hand of history here to fulfill his purposes, to fulfill his prophecies. That prophecy we read in Micah chapter 5, God is acting, directing the hand of history to fulfill his purposes.

None of it happens by chance. None of it happens by accident. It's all planned and achieved by the sovereign God. Nothing in your life happens by mere chance or accident, however much it may look like it.

Everything that happens to us comes to us from the hand of a sovereign God. God is using the circumstances in your life this morning to talk to you, to call you to depend on him, to call you to put your trust and faith in him.

God is using the circumstances in your life to call you to praise him for his mercy. The God who directed history here to achieve his purposes uses history today to achieve his purposes.

Whatever comes to us as individuals, whatever comes to us as families, as a nation, we can face with confidence knowing that we know the Lord of history.

[19 : 06] So that's the first thing to say then. It's an ordinary birth in pretty much every respect. Secondly then, we want to think about an extraordinary message, an extraordinary message. And we see that in verses 8 through 14.

Verses 8 through 14. So the scene switches from this ordinary birth to these ordinary men doing an ordinary job.

They're out in the fields, they've got the night shift, and they're looking after the sheep. It's like any other night to them, to all intents and purposes. What are they doing? They're keeping the sheep safe, they're looking after the sheep, making sure that there's no wolves, making sure that there's no bears.

But suddenly then, the Lord breaks in, verse 9, and the angel appears to them in the glory of the Lord shone around them. And notice, notice again the response when the glory of the Lord shows up.

We've seen it time and time and time again in these opening verses of Luke's gospel. What is the response when people see the glory of the Lord? Verse 9, they were filled with great fear.

[20 : 19] The modern view of God, if he's there at all, is that God's a sort of cuddly grandfather in the sky. A God who gives us what we want.

A God who makes sure that we're okay. A God whose presence brings comfort. But notice that the holiness, glory, and majesty of God doesn't instantly bring comfort by itself.

Instead, it brings fear. It brought fear to Mary. It brought fear to Zechariah. It brought fear to Elizabeth and it brings fear to these shepherds.

These men weren't soft millennials, easily frightened by anything. These were men who were used to fighting wolves and bears with their bare hands. And yet the glory of God terrifies them to their core.

It's against God's glory, God's holiness, God's majesty, that we realize how sinful, fallen, and sad that we really are.

[21 : 30] The glory of the Lord does not in and of itself bring comfort, but brings fear.

But what is it makes the difference to them? How do they move from this sense of great fear that we have here to the sense of praising God that we'll find at the end of the section?

Well, it's the word of the Lord to them, isn't it? Look, don't be afraid, verse 10, fear not. Why? Because I bring you great news of good joy.

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. This news that I'm bringing you is going to cause the whole world to celebrate. This news that I'm bringing you is good news, it's gospel news for the whole world.

The royal births of recent years have sparked much joy in the whole world. You'll see them being celebrated on CNN, you'll see them being celebrated around the world, and certainly around the commonwealth.

[22 : 42] But this baby's better. This baby is different. This baby is going to cause more joy to come. And what's the message that the angel brings?

What is it that's going to cause this great joy? Verse 11, For unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

What's the news of great joy? That God has come. That God has broken into their world. That God has come. that the Messiah, the King, the long expected saviour has arrived.

The fact that Jesus has come this morning is good news, friends. Don't miss that. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ has come, that they've broken, the fractured relationship between man and God has been repaired in this baby.

This is the good news that our world most needs to hear. This is the good news that will bring most joy. The good news we need today isn't whether we get Brexit or not.

[23 : 53] The good news that we need today isn't whether the conservatives are in power for 15 years or not. The good news that the world needs is that Christ has come, that sin has been dealt with, that man and God can be friends again.

even in his birth announcement of verse 11, the message is clear. That Christ had come to be a saviour. A saviour from sin.

A saviour from fractured relationship with God. And that's why it's good news. Because the saviour has come.

But how would the shepherds know? How would they know of all the babies born that evening? How would they know which one is to be the saviour?

Well, we will find verse 12, this will be the sign that they're looking for. This will be the baby that you're searching for. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and laying in a manger.

[25 : 03] Of all the babies, that's the one. That's the saviour. Then this company of angels appears, praising God, singing praise to God.

Notice what they offer. Glory to God. Yes, verse 14. Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace among all men. I'm guessing that's probably what your Christmas card says, isn't it?

If I was in your house this afternoon, I'm guessing that that's probably what the Christmas card on your fireplace says. But notice what the angels actually say. Glory to God in the highest.

Verse 14. Earth, peace amongst those with whom he is pleased. This isn't peace amongst all men.

This is peace amongst those with whom he is pleased. How is God pleased with us this morning? How can we be sure that God is pleased with us this morning?

[26 : 07] Well, it comes back to that baby laying in a manger. It comes back to who he is. He is the saviour of mankind. He is the saviour from sin.

He is our peace with God. It's in him and him alone this morning that God is pleased with us. It's in him and him alone this morning that our sin is forgiven.

So the question for you this morning is really, well, is God pleased with me? And if your answer to that question is yes, well then the question is, well, on what basis is God pleased with you?

Is God pleased with you because of all the good things that you've done? Because of all of the rules that you've kept? Because of all the way that you have obeyed?

Or is God pleased with you because of Christ? Because of that baby born 2,000 years ago? It's only in Christ that God is pleased with us this morning.

[27 : 10] It's only in his obedience that God is pleased with us this morning. Amen. So we've seen then an ordinary birth.

We've seen an extraordinary message of peace. But then thirdly, we see an ordinary sight. An ordinary sight. And we see that in verses 15 through 21.

The angels appear. They've told the shepherds about this baby who's been born. They've told them what to look for. And then verse 15. When the angel went away from them, the shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem.

Let's see this thing that has happened. Let's get there as fast as we can. You can sense the urgency in their tone. You can sense the urgency in the way that they speak to one another. Let's go without haste.

They went as fast as their legs would carry them. And they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a man, just as they'd been told.

[28 : 10] Verse 16. A perfectly ordinary, perfectly everyday sight. A man, a woman, and a baby.

And yet notice what they do. Verse 18. Well, they tell Mary and Joseph, first of all, verse 17, what they had saw, what they had been told by the angel. But they told everyone they met.

Verse 18. All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. You can imagine the shepherds as they're going back to their work, as they're going back to looking after the sheep.

They're saying to people on the way past, do you know who's in there? We saw an angel. An angel told us that this is the Christ. An angel told us that this is the Messiah. It may have looked ordinary.

It may have looked everyday. It may have looked run of the mill. But this baby is the Christ. This baby is the Lord.

[29 : 22] This encounter with the infant Christ had turned their lives around. And they went back to their work. Of course they did. They went back to their sheep. Of course they did. But they went back glorifying and praising God for all that they'd seen.

And all that they'd heard. We can be put off this morning by the seeming ordinariness of Christ.

By the seeming ordinariness of his birth. By the everyday sight of a baby wrapped in blankets. But that baby however ordinary it may look.

However everyday the scene. That baby is Christ the Lord. Don't miss that this morning. Don't be put off this morning.

For that baby is Christ the Lord. But maybe you're here this morning and you're a Christian. What's in this for you?

[30 : 30] Well we know the story. We know about the shepherds. We know about the birth. What what can we take away from this this morning? What an example the shepherds set for us.

Anyone they met on their way back to the sheep they told about Christ the Lord. Anyone they saw on their way home they told about Jesus Christ who had come to save them.

And yet how often can we be embarrassed by the Christian faith by the Christian message? How often can we be embarrassed by the virgin birth as we see it here? How often can we be embarrassed by the crucifixion?

Don't be embarrassed don't be ashamed of Jesus this morning. Amen. Because he truly is the saviour of the world. The son of God.

Like the shepherds let's tell all that we mean about Jesus who is the Lord of all. It may look ordinary.

[31 : 44] It's a man a woman and a baby. but that baby is truly extraordinary. That baby will become the man of Nazareth.

That baby will be the man on the cross bearing the weight of sin and judgment. That baby is the only one in whom God is pleased in us this morning.

So look to him. Put your trust and your faith in him. And know God's pleasure. Amen.

Amen.