

Good News for 2020

Luke 2:1-20 - NCBC, December 20, 2020

Main Point: **Jesus' birth is good news for you!**

- The news you should believe (1-7)
 - Real history
 - Real humility
- The news you should need (8-14)
 - Real forgiveness
 - Real peace
- The news you should celebrate (15-20)
 - Real assurance
 - Real praise

Application: **Worship and share the news of Jesus' birth!**

Opening Announcements:

- **Remember to visit myncbc.org** and follow our NCBC Facebook page to stay informed on all ministry/event updates during this season of careful regathering.
- **Please make plans to join our very special Christmas Eve Service**, this Thursday, (12/24) at 4pm. We will enjoy a special hour of worship celebrating Christ's birth together. Everyone is welcome!

<<Come Thou Long Expected Jesus!>>



Jesus is the joy of every longing heart, so what a privilege to be able to gather together this morning to worship and celebrate that He has come to us.

Today our Bibles are open to **Luke chapter 2** as we get to hear some Good News for 2020! So please prepare for our Scripture reading by having God's Word open to **Luke chapter 2** in front of you.

A special welcome to those worshipping online or in our Extra Precautions Chapel today. For those online, please use the links alongside the livestream for fill-in-the-blank sermon notes, the preaching manuscript, and children's coloring pages. At any time you may pause this video, print those files, and then rejoin our worship with those notes in front of you.

Today we turn our attention to Jesus' birth when He took on human nature in order to set His people free from sin.

Never before, and never again will there be a birth like this one in human history. It's almost too wonderful to fully comprehend. The Supreme King of Glory humbling Himself to be born to humble people in the most humble way in order to rescue us from our greatest problem.

So let's listen to these familiar Scriptures with fresh awe this morning, as we stand together for the reading of **Luke 2**, in the English Standard Translation:

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.

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 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. 10 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. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

15 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." 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This is God's Word. Please be seated.

Let's Pray.

2020 has been quite the year, hasn't it? A global pandemic. A polarized election. And a tireless news cycle of anger that has fatigued all of us. Many have referred to 2020 as the year of bad news.

Many have lost significant income or employment this year. Many have lost loved ones. Some have lost cherished friendships due to conflict, bitterness, and unrepentant sin.

So it's only fitting that we would take time together to open our Bibles and receive some good news from Heaven for 2020. For this hour at least, try to distance yourself from all the raging voices in our culture. And open your mind to receive news...really good news...from heavenly messengers.

Today **Luke chapter 2** offers us three reasons why:



Jesus' birth is good news for you!

For many of us who have grown up around Christian Christmas traditions ... we can grow so familiar with the news of Jesus' birth that its profound joy becomes muted.

So this morning, let's take all the nativity scenes out of our minds, and just soak in truths of **Luke chapter 2**. There's no oriental astrologers with camels. There's no star yet. There's no inn-keeper. We are not even sure there's a stable...all we know from **verse 7** is that the newborn is now laying in an animal's feeding trough after these new parents cleaned him up and wrapped him in strips of cloth to give his little body security and warmth.

God Himself had come in human flesh!! Listen friends...contrary to all the fake news of 2020... this is,



The news you should believe (1-7)

This news is trustworthy. It comes with no bias other than for God's glory and praise.

After all, we must admit that in our culture, the birth of Jesus gets quickly cannibalized by flying reindeer, skating snowmen, and a large bearded man in a red suit.

But Jesus' birth is not just another fairy-tale, legend, or sentimental fantasy. Luke's account of Jesus' birth goes to great pains to make sure we understand that Jesus' birth is,



Real history, pertaining to real people in real time and real place.

Verse 1 starts with the phrase “In those days.” In the nearest context, it’s pointing back to **verse 80 of chapter 1**, or in the days of the birth of John the Baptist.

But in the big picture, it’s helpful to realize that these were days when the Jewish people were under the control of the Roman empire, and the emperor was a powerful man by the name of Octavian who was the great-nephew of Julius Caesar.

In 27 BC the Roman Senate gave Octavian the esteemed title, “Augustus,” meaning the “honored” or “revered.” Caesar Augustus, as Octavian was thereafter called, inaugurated a time of prosperity for the Roman empire that lasted nearly 200 years!

But this was not a prosperous time for the Jews living in modern day Israel. Caesar Augustus had appointed Herod the Great, a descendent of Esau, as his puppet king over all the Jews in Judea.¹ This meant that the descendants of Jacob were now under the sinful rule of Esau’s family!

And in those days, **Luke 2:1** says, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all of the world should be registered. Now since the Jews were exempt from Roman military service, we know the purpose of this census was for taxation.

World history tells us that the Quirinius in **verse 2** was governor over Syria (which included modern day Israel)

and led the census that is referenced in **Acts 5:37** in the year 6 AD. But the registration mentioned in **Luke 2** is the *first* census that Quirinius helped to administrate *before* he assumed the official role of governor after Herod’s death.

Probably in observance of Jewish customs, **verse 3** tells us Quirinius allowed the Jews to register themselves in the city of their own ancestral home.

So shake all the tinsel out of your mind today, and remember...while the birth of Jesus is certainly miraculous and Divine... it is also real history. Joseph and Mary were real people just like you and me from a real town called Nazareth southwest of the Sea of Galilee.

A little more than 2,000 ago, **verse 4** tells how this young couple made the 70 mile trip...going south towards Bethlehem, but having to travel uphill the entire way since Bethlehem is a much higher elevation than Nazareth.

Which leads us to note the,

¹ C.f. Matthew 2:1



Real humility of Jesus' birth as well.

If you were to make up a story about how God would enter the world to save those who had rebelled against him... this is not how you'd expect God to arrive, is it? Truly, the profound humility of Jesus' birth is another proof for validity of Jesus' birth. Jesus' birth is good news you should believe because only true historical facts could be so humble.

This trip was not easy, nor quick. Yet Joseph and Mary humbled themselves enough to submit to this untimely governmental oppression.

How many first-time moms who are near full-term would sign up for a 70 mile uphill trip – perhaps riding a camel or a donkey – perhaps walking alongside your husband – but certainly not in the comfort of an air-conditioned minivan?!

Verse 6 makes it clear – they finally arrive, and Joseph gets registered and humbly signs up to pay more taxes to Rome ... *and while they were there, the time came for Mary to give birth.*

This first-time mother is not at home in Nazareth – but instead in the middle of rural Bethlehem. The end of **verse 7** describes some of this emotion, giving the reason why she had to lay baby Jesus down in an animal's feeding trough...*because there was no place for them at the inn* [or room].

The word “inn” here is not the same word Luke uses in the parable of the good Samaritan in **Luke 10** for a motel. Instead this word refers to a guest room or place to stay.

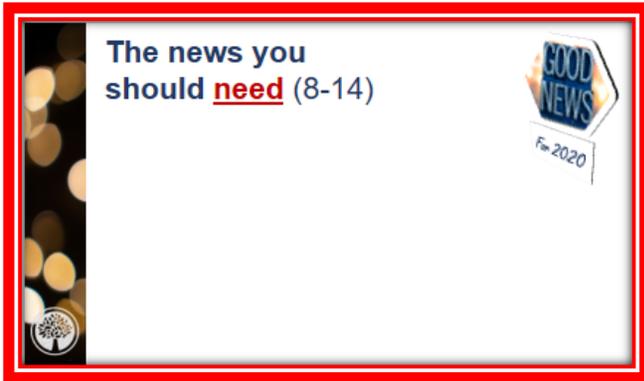
Remember Bethlehem was a very small village. The registration likely had brought a lot of visitors into town. Perhaps Joseph and Mary just found a quiet cave where animals were kept, and used that place to painfully and privately bring God into the world in human form.

We don't know the details of all this arrival...but this we do know: there was no royal robe or fanfare for the new-born King.

Yes, in the verses to come we'll read about angels rejoicing and special visitors... but in that painful moment that Jesus decided to enter the world... it was a very humble arrival.

O friend... Jesus' birth is real history, and it is real humility...and it is good news for you! It's good news because it's honest and true, and second, it's good news because it answers our greatest need.

Whether you're willing to admit it or not, Jesus' birth is,



The news you should need (8-14)

Verse 8 says that *in the same region* [likely just 1 or 2 miles outside of the little village of Bethlehem²], *there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

Now put all your Christmas nostalgia out of mind for a moment. We must understand that under the influence of Roman culture, shepherding had become a corrupt and despised trade.

These outcast herders picture our need for good news.

After all, shepherds were known sinners. Like tax-collectors, their reputation was so dishonest and unreliable that they were not allowed to testify in Jewish court. Many were regarded as robbers. Shepherds were at the bottom of the social rung... but someone had to do it, right?

After all, the Jewish sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem required a large supply of sheep. Accordingly, Jewish Rabbis had decreed that all the sheep raised outside Jerusalem as far as Bethlehem 7 miles away, should be used for religious animal sacrifices.³

So we don't know for sure, but this could mean the shepherds in **verse 8** were actually raising sheep for burnt offerings in Jerusalem.

And the Pharisee's scrupulous inspection of these lambs for any blemishes required the most careful care from the shepherds. Jewish tradition⁴ tells us shepherds would have the baby lambs born in a cave, rather than outdoors where they were more susceptible to danger. Then after birth, the shepherds would carefully inspect the lamb – even wrapping it in strips of cloth to swaddle it just like a baby – keeping it secure and preventing it from harming itself in the first few hours of its fragile life.

Have you considered the joyful irony of God choosing to announce the birth of Jesus – the perfect Lamb with a capitol "L", to a group of spiritually outcast shepherds who were responsible for raising sacrificial lambs for Jerusalem's worship?

How many times had the Pharisees told them that their lambs weren't good enough to be used for sin offerings? How many times had they been laughed out of town for smelling like sheep – or pushed out of the synagogue for being unclean?

² According to local Bethlehem tradition the sheep fields were approximately 2 miles from the center of Bethlehem's village.

³ MacArthur, Luke Commentary

⁴ Alfred Edersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah

And yet in **verse 9**, the angel of the Lord appeared to *them*. Yes – to the low and outcast. And the glory of the Lord shone around *them*. There's good news this Christmas for us dear friends – because Jesus' birth is good news of,



Real forgiveness.

Notice what the heavenly messenger said in **verse 10**, *Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*

Literally, the angel says, Fear not, I'm an evangelist – and I'm preaching some good news that will bring great joy to anyone and everyone who believes my message.

Salvation has come for *all* people! Ceremonially clean and ceremonially unclean. Shepherds and Pharisees alike. Today salvation has come for you!

Look at **verse 11**,

For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Here's why you should be full of joy: A child has been born today in Bethlehem – and this child is your Savior, Christ, and Lord!

Savior is a title for Jesus that Mary uses back in **chapter 1, verse 47**. This child who has been born is the Son of God – and He is your Savior!

In **Matthew 1:21** the angel told Joseph to name the child Jesus, *for he will save His people from their sins.*

Listen carefully. Jesus is not just a moral teacher, or a historical prophet. Jesus wasn't born in human flesh to help your golf game, or marriage, or career path.

He was born to save you from your sins. To bring you and me real forgiveness!

The perfect Lamb of God was born for sinful shepherds and outcasts like you and me – so that through His substitutionary life and death our sins might be taken away forever.

Do you acknowledge your need for this news today?

This is good news – not just for the privileged, or the strong, or those who seem to have it all together. No. The news of God bringing salvation to sinners is good news to every heart who hears... even if you are a religious vagabond... just like these Bethlehem shepherds.

The angel told the stunned shepherds in **verse 12** that they could find the One who was sent to bring

forgiveness for their sins swaddled and lying in a feeding trough.

God was no longer just present among His people – He was now one of them. Incarnation. God in the flesh. Emmanuel. God with us.

And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God

The holy of Holies was no longer in Jerusalem behind a curtain – God Himself was now lying in Bethlehem, accessible for the worship of all people.

So the angelic army exclaims in unison,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.

Or it may be preferable to translate the last phrase, *peace among those upon whom God's favor rests*, since the angels were praising God, not men.

In other words, Jesus' birth brings news that you can have real peace with God again.

God's saving favor, or electing goodwill, brings peace through the call of repentance and faith.⁵

No matter if you're an outcast, or a top 40 under 40, you need to embrace this good news. Will you believe that sinners like us can now have peace with God through the finished work of Jesus our Savior?

Verses 15-20 illustrate well how Jesus' birth is,



The news you should celebrate this season. (15-20)

God becoming one of us, in order to give us real forgiveness and real peace with Him... is still the best news that you could ever celebrate this year!

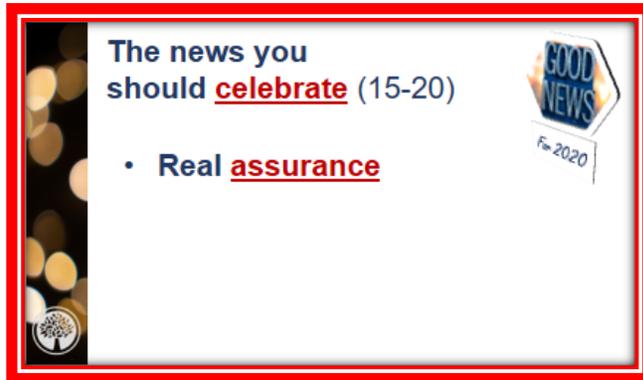
Loved ones – when God opens your eyes to see and understand your salvation through Jesus Christ – it changes you. You can't just wink at Jesus in mental assent... you must worship Him with a whole-person



⁵ 2 Timothy 2:24-26

response of submission and delight. No one can participate in the saving Gospel of God and not have their entire life revolutionized by His saving grace!

This week I was struck by the,



Real assurance that follows the shepherd's personal investigation of this heavenly message. News like this can only be celebrated once it is personally experienced!

So, in **verse 15**, *when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,*

Let's go check this out for ourselves!

It was a huge sacrifice to leave the flock – shepherds can't just leave the flock... Someone has to watch the sheep!

But after some quick planning – **verse 16** makes it clear, with great haste – *they went and found Mary, and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.*

Everything was just as the angel had proclaimed to them! Look at the end of **verse 20**. The shepherds left that

night, *glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen*, [and then underline this phrase:] *as it had been told them*.

You see, Jesus' birth is real. God becoming a man happened...just exactly how it was promised.

And just like these lowly shepherds, when you believe the good news that your sins can be forgiven simply by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you surrender the authority of your life back to your Creator... God confirms His Word and gives you real assurance.

God never promises to give us an easy life. This year of 2020 has been a testimony to that for many of us. But God does give us the assurance that His promises are true, and your sins can be forgiven!

And once you experience this good news personally, it can only lead to,



Real praise.

Look at **verse 20**, when the shepherds had saw that everything was just like the angel had told them – what did they do?

They returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

And in their celebration, they kept spreading the good news to all who would listen to them, and **verse 18** says that all who heard their testimony wondered at what the shepherds told them.

The angels had departed, but now the shepherds continued in their place.

This good news of Jesus' birth had changed the very identify of these shepherds. Because of Jesus, they had gone from herders to heralds!

When human shepherds encounter the Lamb of God, outcasts become evangelists!

I believe the shepherds never got over their experiences that night. They must have talked and talked about it through the years together – told all their families the story hundreds of times.



So there's the point: **Jesus' birth is good news for us!**

It's news to believe, because it's good news we need, and it's good news worth celebrating.

So how will you respond to the good news of God bringing salvation to you today through His Savior Jesus Christ, the Lord?

Will you be like Mary in **verse 19** who *treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart*? Mary obviously didn't understand everything that God was doing. She didn't have all the answers, and didn't know all of the Bible. But she believed what God had revealed to her – the verb tense tells us that Mary continually and repeatedly pondered all these things...and she believed.

In contrast, the people in **verse 18** just wondered about what they had heard from the first New Testament evangelists for a time. For them, their amazement was just a passing emotion.

How will you respond to this good news? Will you leave here today waiting to drown the conviction of this invitation with snow, and lights, and presents, and the

passing of time? Or will you follow the shepherds' response – and with haste – today,



Worship and share the news of Jesus' birth!

Dear friend – I implore you to turn from your sins and believe that God is able to save you through faith in Jesus Christ.

No matter how challenging your circumstances may be after living through 2020... understand that God is still working in all of it to deliver you and draw you closer to Him.⁶

Stand amazed at the compassion and gentleness of a holy all-powerful God who loves you, and cares for you, and desires to draw near to you in real relationship – so that He can enter into the mess of your life and transform you from the inside out by His Spirit!

You don't need to clean up your life before you're good enough for God. Admit you're no better off than the

⁶ Romans 8:28-29

⁷ Romans 10:13

shepherds. To receive the gift of salvation requires you to accept this bad news first. You are a sinner. Your peace with God has been broken.

But God keeps every one of the promises He's ever made. And all those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved!⁷

So humble yourself and receive the amazing gift of eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ alone. God desires for you to be saved.⁸

Let's celebrate Christmas 2020 by surrendering our pride, and worshipping our great God who is worthy of our praise and sharing with others!



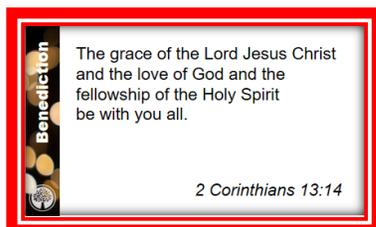
Let's Pray.

<Go Tell It On the Mountain>

⁸ 1 Timothy 2:4

<<Reminder: You are all invited to attend our special Christmas Eve Service at 4pm this coming Thursday>>

Let's pray our **Benediction** now as we are dismissed,



*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be
with you all.
2 Corinthians 13:14*



Recommended Resources on Good News for 2020:

- Genesis 3:15
- Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-7; 40:3-5
- Jeremiah 31:15; 33:14-16
- Hosea 11:1
- Micah 5:2
- Malachi 3:1
- Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-23
- John 1:14
- Romans 8:3-4
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Galatians 4:4-7
- Philippians 2:5-11

- <https://www.gty.org/christmas>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/books/good-news-of-great-joy>
- <https://studios.vidangel.com/the-chosen/welcome>
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-popular-misconceptions-christmas-story/>
- *The Dawning of Indestructible Joy*, John Piper
- *Come Let Us Adore Him*, Paul Tripp

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Luke 2:1-7. Why is our “familiarity” with the birth of Jesus so dangerous to our hearts each Christmas? How do you cultivate awe and wonder of Christ at Christmas?
2. What is your favorite Christmas Carol? Share why this one is your favorite, and then read the lyrics of the carol to each other. How do these lyrics agree or differ with the biblical account of Christ’s birth?
3. Compare Luke 2:17-18 with 8:39. Do you believe the shepherds received salvation in Luke 2? Why or why not? Is a desire to share the good news of salvation with others an evidence of saving faith? Why or why not? Is it possible to receive salvation and not desire to tell others?
4. Read together one of the Old Testament prophecies above that refer to some aspect of Christ’s birth. How was this prophecy fulfilled? What does this teach us about God’s sovereign control over history, and our lives today?
5. Read John 1:14. How can you use the Christmas season to point others to Christ? Discuss ways with your biological family, your church family, and those who don’t know Christ.