



Lesson 211

The Birth of Christ – Part 2

Story Elements

- **Text:** Luke 2:1-23
- **Setting:** circa 6 BC in Nazareth and the hill country of Judea
- **Main Characters:** God, Mary, Joseph, Jesus, angels, and shepherds
- **Plot:** Christ's birth is attended by angels and shepherds.
- **Key word(s):** "unto you is _____" (v 11) This is the key phrase because it captures God's gracious plan of redemption through incarnation in four brief words.
- **Climax:** **Luke 2:11** *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.* As with the key phrase, so with the climax: gracious redemption is brought to humanity through the birth of a baby; God has put on flesh to be our Savior.

Shepherds in the Field

1. (v 8) That Luke describes shepherds in the field *keeping watch over their flock by night*, has given rise to speculation about the timing of Christ's birth. The argument goes that it would have been too cold in December for shepherds to watch their flocks in the field. This is a poor argument for three reasons:
 - (a) The average low temperature of Bethlehem during December is in the _____. This *might* contradict¹ some of the lyrics of traditional Christmas carols (i.e., "In the Bleak Midwinter"), but it would hardly prove too cold for shepherds to be in the field.
 - (b) But even if the weather was frigid, ancient shepherds often endured such conditions. Even the patriarch Jacob complained of shepherding through the _____ *by night* (Gen. 31:40).
 - (c) Alfred Edersheim² describes these Bethlehem shepherds as ones specially assigned to watch sheep in Bethlehem for the purpose of being used as sacrifices in nearby Jerusalem. These flocks were kept in the field _____.³

APPLICATION → Though the Bible does not say that Christ was born in December, it is erroneous to say that he could **not** have been born in December. What is most important is that we believe *the Word was made _____ and dwelt among us*, no matter what time of year the incarnation took place.

Angels in the Sky

2. (v 9) During the night, while the shepherds kept watch, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and surrounded them with glorious light. Of course, the unsuspecting shepherds were affrighted by their heavenly visitor, *they were sore afraid*.

APPLICATION → _____ is the common reaction to encounters with heavenly beings. Mary feared when Gabriel appeared unto her, saying, *do not be afraid* (Luke 1:30). How blessed will we be when we will not *die any more*, for we will be *equal unto the angels* (Luke 20:36), and, **without fear**, we will with them stand *round about the throne* worshipping together before Almighty God, *saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever.* (Rev. 7:12)

¹ Of course, freezing temperatures and snowfall aren't entirely unknown in Bethlehem. In 2013, Bethlehem experienced an unusual blizzard: <https://www.denverpost.com/2013/12/16/mideast-storm-dumps-snow-on-jerusalem-bethlehem-ramallah/>

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, <https://ccl.org/ccl/edersheim/lifetimes/lifetimes.vii.vi.html>. Some critics of Edersheim point out that his information was gathered from the Mishnah, which was written in the 3rd century. However, the Mishnah was not *written* in the 3rd century; it was *compiled* in the 3rd century. This is an important distinction.

³ Additionally, there was a watchtower in Bethlehem mentioned in Gen. 35:21 (the *Migdal Eder*) from which it was possible that these shepherds in Luke's gospel were staying while watching their flock.

3. (vv 10-12) The angel's message to the shepherd's was three-fold:
 - (a) The tone of the message was _____ – *I bring you good tidings of great joy*
 - (b) The extent of the message was universal - *which shall be to all people*
 - (c) The nature itself was gospel, each phrase **full of grace and glory**:
 - i. *For unto you is born this day* — grace is God's gifts freely given to us. Christ is born *unto* us.

APPLICATION → The angel said **unto you is born**, but the prophet said **unto us a child is born** (Isa. 9:6), because the prophet was not an angel, and neither is the Savior. He came as a man to save men.

- ii. *in the city of David a Saviour* — Christ is given to us to save us, to meet a need which we neither were able to fill ourselves, nor worthy to have another – even God himself – fill on our behalf.
- iii. *which is Christ the Lord* – he is Savior and Lord. **To open the heart to the Savior is to bow the knee to the _____**. Christ is both, and to have Christ as Savior is to own him as King.
- (d) The confirmation of the message was an unexpected sign: *Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger*.

APPLICATION → **Where does one find the newborn King amongst so many of David's descendants?** The angel gives the sign: look not for a child in earthly splendor — look to the lowest, to where no other child would ever be laid: look *in the _____*.

4. (vv 13-14) The messenger angel was suddenly accompanied by a multitude of angels that filled the sky with a mighty doxology:
 - (a) *Glory to God in the highest* – God will receive the glory for his great work of _____.
 - (b) *And on earth peace, goodwill towards men* – That which praises God prospers his people. Conversely, what is meant for our good is meant for his _____.

APPLICATION → The incarnation was a glorious event that demonstrated the mediation of Christ by extending to God in the highest all glory and praise, and to men below, the divine had is held out to offer **peace** and the **goodwill** of God.

Baby in the Manger

5. (vv 15-16) When the angelic choir departed, the shepherds *came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger*. Notice their response to seeing the Christ-child:
 - (a) (v 17) They became the very first _____ by spreading *abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child*.
 - (b) (v 20) They picked up where the angels left off, they *returned, glorifying and _____ God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them*.
6. (v 19) Mary kept no scrapbook of her child's infancy, but she *kept (_____)* *all these things, and pondered them in her heart*. We too should treasure up and ponder often the Lord's gracious dealings with us.

Answer Key: Key word(s): "born" • 1. a) 40's; b) frost; c) year-round; → flesh • 2. → fear • 3. a) joyful; c) iii) Lord; → manger • 4. a) redemption; b) glory • 5. a) evangelists; b) praising • 6. treasured