

Text: Luke 2:1-21

Date Preached: 26 December 2021

Venue: Living Hope Baptist Church

Event: Sunday service (Christmas)

Title: The real Jesus' birth

The birth of the real Jesus was ...

1. ... in the right town (1-4)
2. ... to the right person (5)
3. ... in the right manner (6-7)
4. ... testified to by divine witnesses (8-14)
5. ... testified to by independent human witnesses (15-20)
6. ... the birth of the Son of God (21)

SING: "Joy to the World!"

Open your Bibles to Luke chapter 2 this morning.

Today the Word of God will clear up any and all incorrect perceptions of the birth of Jesus. Today the Scriptures will remind us of the Christmas story, not for the sake of tradition, but for the sake of clarity, certainty, and truth.

Let me remind you of what Luke wrote in chapter 1:3 & 4, "... it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you ..., that *you may have certainty* concerning the things you have been taught."

Certainty about Jesus—that is the purpose of Luke's research and writing of this NT book. "True stories about the real Jesus" is the criteria for every account that we read in this book.

As we come to chapter 2, we find one of the most important events in Jesus' earthly life. It is such a momentous event that God pours out a whole host of miracles to accompany this event. Virgin conception, angelic appearances, a special star calling distant astronomers to attention, and most importantly of all, the Son of God taking on the form of a man. Just listen to how Paul, the theologian, explains the momentous significance of this event.

Philippians 2:6-7, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but *emptied himself*, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." The God of Heaven and Earth, the Creator

and Sustainer of all things, emptied Himself of His rightful claim to full equality with God the Father, and added to His nature, humanity. Jesus' birth – the Christmas story, is indeed one of the most important events in Jesus' earthly life.

Yet, Luke records the event for us in strange simplicity. Six short verses—most of them are about *political* details so you know when this happened. Unlike the account of the birth of John the Baptist that includes the conversations of his mother, father, friends and relatives, this account just gives the facts. *Four* verses detailing for us the *political* setting. *Two* verses affirming the facts of Jesus' earthly *birth*. Strange simplicity.

Then, as though Luke's mind was opened to the glory of this short account, he spends *thirteen* verses recording in full colour the events that *followed*. All this makes the brevity of the birth account even stranger. Luke is not a man for little words – quite the contrary, his writings are more than a quarter (27%) of the NT and he writes more than Paul did and more than John did. He is also medical doctor—you would think a birth story would be told with the eloquence of an excited medical practitioner detailing the well-being of mother and baby in the most precise of terms! Yet, just two verses.

I believe this is no temporary memory lapse or lack of diligence on Luke's behalf. Luke's purpose in writing is *certainty*. He wants you and me to know with *certainty* what the true facts about the real Jesus's birth are. So he gives the basic facts, but dedicates the majority of his account to the

witnesses testifying to the certainty of those basic facts.

That is why the political situation takes up five verses, the birth only takes up two verses, and then the testimonies of the first eye-witnesses take up thirteen verses. The rest of chapter 2, and it is no short chapter, is dedicated to many more reputable eye-witnesses of the childhood of Jesus. There is righteous Simeon, devout Anna, and the honourable temple teachers.

The point is this. The Jesus of the Bible is Who Scriptures claims Him to be. This account validates our faith. Factual simplicity, with plenty of evidence.

Luke gives us **six facts of the birth of the real Jesus.**

Fact #1,

Jesus's birth was in the right town (1-4)

Not just any town would do. The prophet Micah states in no uncertain terms that Bethlehem, or its synonym, Ephrathah, would be the insignificant town that produces the Messianic Ruler of Israel who is also known as the Ancient of Days.

Listen as I read Micah 5:2, *"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."*

But, we know from Luke, that Mary would be the mother of Jesus, but she herself lives in *Nazareth*

on the other side of the country. So, in an incredible display of providential genius, God arranges for their travel to Bethlehem, scheduling their arrival to be just prior to the time of birth.

READ 2:1-4.

First of all, the Emperor of the Roman Empire, Caesar Augustus, grandnephew of Julius Caesar [Henriksen, 137], orders a census of the entire Roman Empire. This most likely took place in 8 B.C – a few years before Jesus' birth. Every local governor or king within the Empire had relative freedom in how to execute this census, and Herod, who was king over Israel at this time, seems to have waited quite a few years before implementing the Emperor's decree. And so, about 2 to 3 years after the Emperor's command, Herod finally thinks the time is right, and orders all in Israel to travel to their city of ancestral origin for this census.

Since Joseph is from the line of David, he must travel to Bethlehem for this government census, and Mary, heavily pregnant with Jesus, travels with him.

You might ask yourself, why does Luke record all this political drama? Why does he spend only two verses on the birth of Jesus, but four verses on the political issues? It appears Luke is building a case for the truthfulness of his historical record.

The birth of Jesus is no accident. A pagan Emperor's decree, and a local king's political delays, are specially arranged by God to provide the occasion for a particular Nazareth resident to travel across the country to Bethlehem.

The Jesus we believe in, is the real Jesus—one of the most basic requirements for the Messiah was his town of birth, and by God's providential arrangement of politics, Jesus was born in the right town.

SING: "Once in Royal David's City"

The **next fact of Jesus' birth** is that

Jesus' birth was to the right person (5)

READ v. 5.

Here we are reminded that Mary is pregnant, but that she and Joseph have not yet had any relations. This virgin conception was one of the extraordinary requirements for the real Jesus' birth facts. Isaiah 7:14 predicted, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the *virgin* shall conceive and bear a son...". Jesus' birth was to the right person—a woman who conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by a man.

Philippians 2 adds a theological reason why Jesus had to be born to a virgin. Jesus was 100% human, but to be the Saviour of the world, that would not be enough. Jesus also had to be 100% God. Only then would Jesus be an acceptable substitute for mankind and only then would Jesus be an effective mediator between God and man. And so we thank God for the virgin birth of Jesus!

Born to a woman, 100% man. But conceived by the work of God, not man, making Jesus fully God too. **Jesus birth was to the right person.**

SING: "He Who is Mighty"

Third,

Jesus' birth was in the right manner (6-7)

Being the Saviour of the world, the Ancient of Days, and the Lord of all Creation, you would expect the Lord Jesus Christ to be born with great pomp and celebration. But, if you know the OT, you know God said the Messiah would be born in incredibly humble surroundings. Micah 5:2 mentions a little town – Bethlehem, not Jerusalem or Rome. Isaiah 11:1 refers to the Messiah as a “shoot from the stump of Jesse”—a small growth out of an insignificant family. Isaiah 53:2 says: “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” Well do we reflect on this humble birth according to the words of 2 Corinthians 8:9 as it says: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

READ vv6-7.

The simplicity of these two verses in Luke might be lost on us if we don't think about it seriously. Instead of a chapter in the official records of the Roman Empire, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ gets only two verses. The almighty creator God, who according to Colossians ch 1 holds everything in Creation together, was wrapped in swaddling cloths to restrain his involuntary movements as a human infant. As one song-writer composed so aptly: “The hands that created the world—made

the hands that were now holding Him.” [Buddy Davis]. When the God of the Universe showed up on earth, not even one peasant moved to make place for Him.

Such was to be the birth of the Christ. The man from history, Jesus, was born in exactly that manner. The very simplicity of the facts in these two verses is the whole point.

SING: "How Low Was Our Redeemer Brought"

But now things change. The birth of the real Jesus is truly no little event. It is a cosmic event! Heaven bursts open to give earth a glimpse of the true greatness of this event! The humble birth of the Lord Jesus quickly becomes a well-testified to event—both on a divine level, and on a human level.

Our **fourth fact of the birth of Jesus** is that ...

Jesus' birth was testified to by divine witnesses (8-14)

READ vv. 8-14.

Angels from the realms of glory, fly across the earth, to descend upon this field outside Bethlehem, to proclaim Messiah's birth. Birth announcements come in all shapes and sizes—perhaps a phonecall or whatsapp message from the new father, or perhaps a card in the mail with a photo, or perhaps even an impersonal broadcast across the world wide web and facebook, but angels? Not even the Emperor's birth was announced by angels! First one angel, with the

magnificent brilliance of God's throne room still glowing around him. Then a whole army of them, filling the skies.

Their testimony is clear, factual, and precise.

First the necessary disclaimer is given. READ v. 10. Real angelic appearances instil death-awaiting fear, but since this occasion is one of joy, not fear, the angel turns the shepherds' hearts from shaking terror to an anticipation of joy.

The reason for this joy is clear. READ v. 11. We just read how Jesus was born, and so we know this testimony to be true. We have an advantage over the shepherds. We read the historical account before we met the witnesses, so we know this is 100% true. But, since the shepherds did not have the advantage that we have, the angel gives them a way to verify the facts. READ v. 12. 1

Since all you need from a witness is the simple facts and a way to verify them, the angel then stops talking, and is joined with thousands of thousands of similar angels for a closing doxology. This doxology rightly sends a chill down your spine.

Jesus' birth is the most amazing event in all of history. God, becoming like His creatures. God, condescending to the world of rebels and sinners, to make peace. A man, Jesus, receiving God's nod of pleased approval, and therefore setting the stage on which all of redemption will take place.

This angelic doxology is the grand opening scene of the most perfectly arranged plan of salvation. In eternity past, God has set in place the way of

salvation. Since Genesis 1:1, thousands of years before all this, God has carefully been planning one event after the other. And now it was show time. The time had come. The Christ was born.

Before you read the rest of Luke to see the rest of the plan of salvation unfold, you need a brief musical interlude. An interlude that will touch your soul, thrill your senses, and stir up a profound desire to worship. READ vv. 13-14. Jesus, the Saviour; Christ, the Lord, appeared. Salvation is now in the active execution phase.

SING: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

All mankind believing this story is so incredibly important to *God*, that He sends the best of witnesses to the shepherds—His own angels. But believing this story is so incredibly important to *Luke*, that he records the words of these divine witnesses for our sake so we too will not mock, but worship.

The shepherds believed, and so they went and found the evidence as was predicted.

The **fifth fact of the birth of the real Jesus** is that the real ...

Jesus' birth was testified to independent human witnesses (15-20)

Nameless shepherds with no connection to Joseph or Mary except for the fact that they were near the same town, become the first independent human witnesses to Jesus' birth. READ vv. 15-20.

As we believers know, true faith always makes the evidence easier to recognise. So also these disciples, believing the angelic witnesses, go and affirm the facts. In an excited hurry they run over to Bethlehem, and eventually find Mary and Joseph, with baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Exactly as the angels had said.

From this point on, therefore, the shepherds are no longer just repeating the testimony of the divine witnesses, from this point on, the shepherds act as a whole new set of eye-witnesses. They quickly spread the news of what they had seen. Their testimony matches that of the angels. All the witnesses to the birth of the real Jesus agree. **It is true**, Jesus was born in exactly the manner in which Scripture records it for us.

Many accuse Christians of having a blind faith, and that is simply not true. Faith doesn't need evidence—that is true enough, but in the case of the true faith, God has dumped us with a whole boatload of evidence.

Divinely ordained decree by the Emperor. Kingly delay by Herod. Travel across the country. Overbooked hotels. Available manger. Simple birth. Angelic witnesses. Human witnesses. The facts are almost unbelievable!, and yet, so perfectly true.

SING: "Who Would Have Dreamed"

All of them are perfectly appropriate considering the **last fact of the real Jesus's birth** that we see in the closing verse. READ v. 21.

Jesus' birth was the birth of the Son of God (21)

Let me explain. Who has the right to name a child? Grandparents? They might think so, but not really. Friends? Not exactly either. Nameless shepherds popping in from nowhere? Definitely not. It is the *parents* who decide the name. The right to give an infant the name that he or she will live with for the rest of their life is ultimately the right of the parents.

In v.21 special mention is made of the naming of Jesus, and why "Jesus" was the given name. READ v. 21. This little boy is not primarily Joseph and Mary's son, he is *God's* son.

The angel Gabriel had told Mary nine months before that God had already picked a name "Jesus". In case, after reading this account of Jesus' birth you think Mary and Joseph should have a say in the matter, then remember, as v. 21 indicates, remember who was responsible for the conception of this baby. It was not Joseph. It was not even Mary. The reason for baby Jesus, was the Holy Spirit of God. This is God's baby by very nature of how the conception took place. Jesus' birth, was the birth of the *Son of God*. This is what this whole account is all about. **The real Jesus, who lived in Israel 2,000 years ago, was in reality, the true Son of God.**

For thirty years this fact of Jesus being God's Son, would be veiled under the normal humanity of a growing Jesus. So much so that Joseph and Mary's other children, Jesus' half-brothers, would not believe in Jesus until after the resurrection (John 7:5 & Acts 1:14).

But it wasn't veiled forever. Nathanael realised that Jesus is the Son of God when he met Jesus and exclaimed: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!" (John 1:49). The Apostle John writes that it is through this earthly-born Jesus, "The Son of God" that all believers receive eternal life (John 20:31). This lowly-born baby Jesus, is, according to Hebrews 4:14, "Jesus, the Son of God", the great high priest of every believer. This baby Jesus looks like an ordinary cute baby with round little eyes and pudgy little feet, but He is the "Son of God", revealed in Revelation 2:18 as the one "who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze". This baby was the virgin born, Son of God, Saviour of the world, and coming King of Israel who will rule the world in the future with the soul-piercing eyes of omniscience, and will tread through this world with impeccable and omnipotent justice.

SING: "The Son of God Came Down"

Six basic facts—facts every human being is obliged to believe. But, against all evidence, many mock, willfully rejecting the clearest of historical evidence. Others might marvel in silent amazement as many in Bethlehem did that day,

but still not believe that Jesus is "Immanuel"—God with us. Yet, it is all too clear, too proven, too historical, to do anything less than accept, believe, and spread this news.

The angels sang. The shepherds believed. The shepherds proclaimed. Mary treasured these facts in her heart. We will learn from the rest of Luke ch 2, that Simeon blessed God when he met baby Jesus saying "my eyes have seen your salvation".

Anna, an elderly widow, thanked God for Jesus acknowledging Him to be the redeemer. Twelve years later the rabbis at the temple marvelled at the young boy Jesus. At age thirty John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and announced "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

At age thirty-three this same Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice, taking all God's wrath against your sin, absorbing it all in your place and making salvation possible and final with His words "*It is finished.*" At the end of the world, it is this Jesus, who sits down on the judgement seat, and judge each one according to his deeds, and only those whose names are written in the book of life will receive eternal life. On that day, this Jesus will receive all the honour and glory that He was due and did not receive at His birth. On that day, "at the name of Jesus, every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth ... and every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". (Phil 2:10)

Those who confess Jesus during their earthly life, will enter the presence of God. Those who deny

Jesus during their earthly life will be cast into the lake of fire.

Understanding Jesus is not rocket science. It begins with **six basic facts regarding His birth**. You are obliged to believe, and today is one more day to express your faith in the Son of God.

Amen

SING: "Oh Come, All You Unfaithful"