

20:20 Vision Ministries -- Devotions by Roger Browning
Week 51 (December 14-20, 2014)

We will continue to study the Christmas story by examining the birth and early days of our Lord in this week's devotions.

Sunday, December 14 (Luke 2:1-3)

In today's text, Caesar Augustus issues a decree for a census to be taken over the entire Roman world (v. 1). God's sovereign will is at work, because Jews had previously not been included in any census since they could not serve in the Roman army. He was unknowingly playing into God's hand (see tomorrow's promise). Caesar Augustus, a grand nephew of Julius Caesar, was named the first emperor of Rome. He was given absolute military power along with the title "Augustus," meaning "exalted one." Isn't it awesome that someone who took such a title would be used by God to fulfill prophecy in bringing the **real** "Exalted One" into the world (v. 2-3)?

Monday, December 15 (Luke 2:4-7)

The census (v. 1-3) required each person to return to his own ancestral home to register. The purpose of the count was to number each nation by family and tribe. It was later used by the Roman government to levy poll taxes as implied by the KJV translation of the word "census." God uses this pagan act (v. 4) to bring His son to Bethlehem, the prophesied birthplace for the Messiah (see Micah 5:2). Every detail of Scripture has to be fulfilled! Mary and Joseph are unable to find lodging in an inn, so they deliver their firstborn son in a cave used to lodge animals (v. 6-7). They place Him in a manger, a feeding trough for sheep. You know the details of the story, but have you praised God for being born into the filth of **your** life when you gave your heart to Him? If not, I encourage you to do so right now!

Tuesday, December 16 (Luke 2:8-12)

God chooses shepherds to be the first evangelists. These men are raising sheep to be sacrificed at the temple in nearby Jerusalem. The Lamb of God (see John 1:29) in the manger will become a **permanent sacrifice** for the sins of the people, replacing the Old Testament system. An angel appears to the shepherds, giving them the "good news of great joy that will be for **all** the people" (v. 8-10). He announces the date and location of the Messiah's birth (v. 11) and calls Jesus by three names for deity (Savior, Christ, Lord). The shepherds will find the child "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (v. 12 KJV). My question for today is: "Have you found Him and received Him as your Savior, Christ (Messiah) and Lord?" He is the Reason for the season.

Wednesday, December 17 (Luke 2:13-20)

A multitude of angels appears **saying** (not singing) “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (v. 13-14). His favor rests on **all** who receive Him into their hearts. Are you enjoying this **peace** the angels speak about? The shepherds waste no time in checking out the angels’ message (v. 15). Upon verification of the story, they hurry off to tell others (v. 16-18). I hope you are committed to doing the same! Mary marvels at these events, but she can only **ponder** them in her heart (v. 19). After all, who would believe her story anyway? Even today, many doubt the trustworthiness of this wonderful message of the virgin birth on which the entire plan of salvation rests. The shepherds praise and glorify God because the story is true (v. 20). I pray you will do the same!

Thursday, December 18 (Luke 2:21-24)

Mary and Joseph comply with the Old Testament Law by taking the infant to be circumcised on the eighth day. At this time, they name Him Jesus, the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Joshua (v. 21). I stated in the December 8th devotion that He was given the Greek name because He came to save the **world**, not just Israel. His name means “the Lord saves” in both languages! Next, they take Him to Jerusalem “to present Him to the Lord” in obedience to the Law (v. 22-23). Isn’t this ironic? **He is the Lord!** They take along a pair of doves or pigeons to sacrifice because they cannot afford a lamb (v. 24; see Leviticus 12:8). Jesus is born in the small, unimportant town of Bethlehem among the filth of the animals to parents too poor to afford a lamb. Do you have any excuse for denying Him birth in your heart?

Friday, December 19 (Luke 2:25-32)

While Joseph and Mary are complying with the Law in every detail, they meet a man named Simeon. This man is “righteous and devout,” walking in the Truth and Hope revealed to Him from the Old Testament (v. 25). The Holy Spirit has promised him that he will not die before he meets “the Lord’s Christ” (v. 26). I pray that none of my readers will either! The Spirit identifies Jesus as the Promised One, so Simeon holds the Lord in his arms and praises God (v. 27-28). Each of us should be able to proclaim the same message of joy and peace that he states (v. 29-32). We should also say, “Now, Lord, I can die in peace because I have seen and accepted Your salvation!” This is the greatest Christmas gift of all time!

Saturday, December 20 (Luke 2:33-40)

After praising God, Simeon prophesies about the future rejection of Jesus’ ministry and the pain that will be coming to Mary (v. 33-35). Then Anna appears in the story. She is a devout prayer warrior who has lived as a widow for many years. After thanking God, she prophesies about this child bringing redemption to Jerusalem (v. 36-38). Luke records that Joseph and Mary return to Galilee where Jesus grows and becomes strong in body and mind. The grace of God is upon Him because He is about to offer grace to the entire world (v. 39-40). Lots of events happen between His birth and His return to Galilee. We will turn to Matthew’s gospel next week to study those happenings.