



Proclaimed

Jesus brings salvation to all who trust in Him.

LUKE 2:4-19

Some birth announcements are as simple as a phone call; others involve grand proclamations. When most of us were born, each branch of our extended family was likely notified and given the vital information—weight, length, and the name. On the other hand, birth announcements of royalty come as major proclamations. After all, these are potentially future kings and queens. The birth announcement of Jesus, the King of kings, was different from what anyone might imagine. His announcement included a blending of the ordinary with the heralding of royalty.

How does your family make birth announcements? What do the birth announcements reveal about the family expectations for that child?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 2:1-20

During the time of Jesus, the Jews lived under the authority of the Roman government. Over 300 years before the time of Christ, Alexander the Great had begun his conquest of the world. His desire in these conquests was to preserve—not destroy—local culture. He also wanted to spread the Greek language and culture. This resulted in the spread of a common language, common political structures, roads, and economics. God would use Alexander’s influence to help pave the way for Jesus.

After a period of self-rule among the Jews, known as the Maccabean Period (167-63 BC), the Romans conquered the Holy Land, establishing the rule of the Roman Emperor over that part of the world. Caesar Augustus was the ruler in that day and had absolute jurisdiction over the entire empire, though he also allowed rulers under him in each area. Herod was the ruler over Judea at the time of Jesus’ birth. Augustus favored a strong hand ruling the empire, and one could understand the desire to conduct a census to count the people he conquered and to facilitate taxation.

It was customary practice for subjects to return to their original home to register for the census. Luke attributed this particular census to Quirinius, who served two terms as Roman governor of Syria (6-4 BC and AD 6-9). History records there was also a census during the second term of Quirinius (Acts 5:37). By requiring Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem, Augustus’ desire to count his kingdom and Quirinius’ order to take a census resulted in the direct fulfillment of prophecy concerning where the Messiah would be born. God used secular rulers and kingdoms to bring about the fulfillment of His own word. With that setting and background, God was prepared to send His Son into the world as the Messiah.

Read Luke 2:4-19, identifying each action step. How does each action point to the identity of Jesus?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FULFILLED (LUKE 2:4-7)

⁴ Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵ to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

VERSE 4

Joseph left his home in **Nazareth**, a small town located about ninety miles north of Jerusalem. Though the distance was not far by modern standards, it involved an ascent from 1,830 feet above sea level to 2,564 feet above sea level in **Bethlehem**, thus the designation that Joseph **went up**. Nazareth was a small town in **Galilee**, and Bethlehem was located a few miles outside of Jerusalem of **Judea**. The previous verses describe why a man whose betrothed wife who was soon to deliver would travel such a distance. Caesar Augustus had issued a decree that the people of his empire should register for a census. This required that Joseph leave his current city and return to his hometown of Bethlehem. Bethlehem was called **the city of David**. The Lord had promised to David that He would establish a kingdom led by one of King David's descendants (2 Sam. 7:12). He also promised David that this kingdom would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:16). Joseph and Mary returned to David's city so that the One who would fulfill this promise would also be born in Bethlehem.

VERSES 5-7

Mary accompanied Joseph to Bethlehem, and Luke emphasized that she was **engaged** to Joseph, a process known as betrothal. The marriage had not been consummated (Matt. 1:25), but the couple was committed to each other in a process similar to but more binding than modern engagement. Luke also noted that she was **pregnant**. The angel had already explained to Mary that she would have a child as a virgin (Luke 1:35), and the angel had explained this to Joseph

(Matt. 1:20). As they arrived in Bethlehem, ***the time came for her to give birth***. The text does not indicate how long they were in Bethlehem prior to the birth, but it could not have been long because the child's bed was a ***manger***, a feeding trough for animals, because there was no ***guest room*** available. A tradition as old as Justin Martyr stated that Jesus was born in a cave, which may have been the stable that shepherds used because wood was scarce in that part of the country.

DID YOU KNOW?

Archaeologists have discovered stone mangers in the horse stables built by King Ahab at Megiddo. Cut from limestone, they were approximately three feet long, eighteen inches wide, and two feet deep.

The scene of Mary giving birth in a stable with no room in the inn screams humility and rejection. Jesus was born where no child—especially the Son of God— should be born. However, Jesus was born exactly where He should be born. When He was born, Mary ***wrapped him tightly in cloth***. This was the usual process of swaddling a child in a blanket or cloth for the child to feel warm and secure. How ironic that the God who had held His people in the palm of His hand (Isa. 41:10) now used Mary to wrap Him and hold Him in her hands.

God used the emperor of Rome to move Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus, fulfilling prophecy of the Messiah's birth. He chose a Jewish family from the line of David to fulfill His promise to extend David's reign forever. He chose a betrothed virgin to give birth to Jesus, fulfilling Isaiah 7:14. The birth stories of Jesus are reminders that God fulfilled His promises to David, to the Jews, and to those who would trust in Jesus as the Messiah.

How do the details of Jesus' birth help us understand His identity?

ANNOUNCED (LUKE 2:8-14)

⁸ In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: ¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!

VERSE 8

The birth announcement came first to *shepherds* who were *keeping watch at night over their flock*. Though the position of shepherds was lowly because they were unable to observe traditional religious practices, shepherding was viewed positively throughout the Bible. God is pictured as a Shepherd (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23:1). David was the shepherd of God’s people (2 Sam. 5:2). Later, Jesus would call Himself “the good shepherd” (John 10:11). *Keeping watch* in Greek is literally “watching watches,” meaning they were protecting their flock through the watches of the night.

VERSES 9-10

An *angel of the Lord* broke the darkness of the night sky as the *glory of the Lord shone around them*. The word *angel* means “messenger” in the Greek language, and this messenger came with the most important news of Christ’s birth. The shepherds *were terrified* by the angel’s presence and the Lord’s glory shining around them, so the angel reassured them by saying, *Don’t be afraid*. This was a common practice when an angel made an appearance (Gen. 15:1; Judg. 6:23; Dan. 10:12,19; Luke 1:30; 2:10). The angel was there to proclaim the good news of Jesus’ salvation. *Proclaim* is the verb from which we get our word *evangelize*. The angels came to proclaim good news to the shepherds, but it would not be for the shepherds alone. It would be good news *for all the people*, which would include both Jew and Gentile, a common theme in Luke’s writing (Acts 15:1-29; 18:10).

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord (Acts 4:12).

VERSES 11-12

The angel announced that **today** God had fulfilled a promise by sending Jesus. ***In the city of David***, Bethlehem, God sent His Son as the ***Savior, Messiah***, and ***Lord***.

Mary had rejoiced and called God her “Savior” (Luke 1:47), and now her child carried that same title. *Savior* meant a deliverer. Jesus’ deliverance would not be from physical enemies but from sin, and His deliverance would not be temporary but eternal.

The term *Messiah* was a reference to the anointed one that God had promised to deliver Israel from the ones who oppressed it. Jesus was the answer to their longing.

The term *Lord* is the translation of the primary name of God in Hebrew (Yahweh). This is the only place in the Gospels where all three titles—Savior, Messiah, and Lord, are grouped together. The angel delivered high news to lowly shepherds, and it was almost too good to believe, especially when the angel told them where to find this special child—***wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger***.

The designation that the baby was *wrapped tightly* would indicate he was newly born. How many newborns would have been born that night in Bethlehem and placed in a stable? Only one. Bethlehem was not a large town in that day and even with the traffic caused by the census, how many babies would have been born that night and laid in a manger? The angel gave the shepherds a clear way to identify Jesus.

How would you summarize in one sentence the message shared by the angel? How does that message compare to what a person might share about Jesus today?

VERSES 13-14

The one **angel** was joined by a **multitude of the heavenly host**, a phrase that is used for an army. The army did not come to start war but to announce peace. The Bible mentions this army of angels on numerous occasions (1 Kings 22:19; Dan. 8:10). These angels were **praising God** and spoke a message to the shepherds.

Saying **glory to God** was not an attempt to give God something He did not already possess; the angels were recognizing the splendor and majesty of God. God deserved the highest praise. The phrase **peace on earth** mirrors the Hebrew concept of *shalom*. This peace included the favor and goodwill that Jesus the Savior, Messiah, and Lord brought. Peace would come **to people he favors**, meaning that it did not automatically come to all people but to those who put their faith in Jesus and thus experienced His grace. The shepherds were blessed because they first heard the message that Jesus alone is Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

BIBLE SKILL: *Review usage of key words or phrases.*

Examine Numbers 7:89, 1 Kings 22:19, 2 Kings 23:5, Nehemiah 9:6, and Isaiah 6:2-6. What different kinds of supernatural creatures can you identify that might have proclaimed God's good news and glory? How does each reference help us gain a deeper understanding of the heavenly hosts?

FOUND (LUKE 2:15-19)

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing them, they

reported the message they were told about this child,¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.
¹⁹ But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them.

VERSES 15-16

The angels left the shepherds and ***returned to heaven***, to the place from which they came. Having heard the good news, the shepherds urgently determined to ***go straight to Bethlehem*** and witness the great news firsthand. They indicated that ***the Lord*** had made this news known to them, even though it was the band of angels that had announced the news of Jesus' birth. The emphasis was not on the angels who delivered the message but on the God who sent them. Urgency is again seen in the word ***hurried***. The shepherds found Mary, Joseph, and ***the baby who was lying in the manger***, indicating that not much time had passed since His birth. It also fulfilled the words of the angels (Luke 2:12).

VERSES 17-19

The shepherds witnessed Jesus and His family in the stable just as the angels had said. The ***message they were told about this child*** consisted of the words the angels had given to them (vv. 12-14). Seeing Jesus was all that the shepherds needed to have the compulsion to spread ***the message***. Firsthand knowledge of the good news led them to proclaim the message to others.

The people's response to the shepherd's message was amazement. ***Amazed*** was a favorite word of Luke's, occurring thirteen times in Luke and five times in Acts. The Greek word could mean "extraordinarily impressed" or "disturbed by something." Some embraced the message, others were curious about it, and still others were probably disturbed by the news. People still respond in various ways to the gospel today.

Mary had experienced much in the previous nine months. She was told she would give birth to a child even though she was a virgin. She traveled from her home to Bethlehem and delivered a baby in a location equipped only with a manger. Shepherds came with stories of angels and the gospel message. She meditated on all these events, seeking to understand what was happening as God brought salvation to all who would trust in Him.

APPLY THE TEXT

- The circumstances of Jesus’ birth fulfilled prophecy about the Messiah.
- Jesus alone is Savior.
- Jesus is available to all who seek Him.

Reflect on the prophecies Jesus fulfilled in His birth. How do these prophecies impact your confidence in Jesus as the Messiah? How does that confidence impact your daily life?

As a group, discuss some of the ways that you could share the message of Christ at Christmastime in your setting. What would you need to do to faithfully share that message with others during this season?

Like Mary, meditate on the story you’ve read in Luke 2 about Jesus’ birth. What things amaze you? What things help you to understand God’s love for you and others? Record a prayer in response.

PRAYER NEEDS
