

GOSPEL

The Good News Of Christmas Is That Jesus Saves!

December 24, 2017 - Luke 2

1 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 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.

(1) "The description of Jesus as **Savior** is an apt one, since the reason He was born was to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21; cf. Luke 19:10). That obvious truth is often obscured in contemporary presentations of the gospel. Too often Jesus is presented as the One who will rescue people from unfulfillment in their marriages, families, or jobs; from a debilitating habit they cannot overcome on their own; or from a sense of purposelessness in life. But while relief in those areas may be a by-product of salvation, it is not its primary intent. Mankind's true problem, of which those issues are only symptoms, is sin. Everyone (Rom. 3:10, 23) is guilty of breaking God's holy law and deserves eternal punishment in hell. The true gospel message is that Jesus Christ came into the world to rescue people from sin and guilt—not psychological, artificial guilt feelings, but true, God-imposed guilt that damns to hell." (MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2009). *Luke 1-5* (p. 159). Chicago: Moody Publishers.)

(2) "But in this context Lord is no mere elevated human designation; it is a divine title. To say that this Child is Lord is to say that He is God. When used in reference to Jesus Christ, *kurios* (**Lord**) conveys all that is implied by the tetragrammaton YHWH ("Yahweh," which the Septuagint translates *kurios*)—the name of God (cf. Ex. 3:14-15). The most fundamental and basic confession of Christianity is, "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor.

12:3). No one who does not affirm Christ's full deity and equality with God the Father can be saved for, as He warned the Jews, "Unless you believe that I am [God], you will die in your sins" (John 8:24. For a discussion of the "I am" statements in John's gospel in reference to Christ's deity, see *John 1-11*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 2006], 14, 348). Romans 10:9 declares that "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2009). *Luke 1-5* (pp. 159-160). Chicago: Moody Publishers.)

- (3) "To this point the angel had given the shepherds good news, but without actually identifying the child. To do this, the angel listed four titles and announced that they all came together in one person. Who was this child? He was *the son of David*, to which the angel alluded by mentioning "the city of David," meaning Bethlehem. This is now the sixth time that Luke has mentioned David's name. The child born to the shepherds was David's royal son. He was also *the Savior*. This is another special title in the book of Luke, which uses the language of salvation more than any other Gospel. A Savior is a deliverer—someone who rescues people from death and destruction. This implies that we need a Savior, which of course we do. The deliverance that God brings may come in the form of physical deliverance, but it is also spiritual. Jesus came to save us from sin, Satan, and the righteous wrath of God. He delivered us from these deadly enemies by dying on the cross for our sins and then rising again to give us everlasting life. This was more than the shepherds understood, of course, but by saying that Jesus was the Savior, the angel was telling them to look to Jesus for whatever salvation they needed. Then Jesus is *the Christ*. Eventually this became part of the Savior's name, but it is really a title. "Christ" is the Greek term for Messiah, which signifies the Savior that God had always promised to send. Literally, the Christ is "the anointed one." This calls to mind the kings and priests of the Old Testament who were anointed with oil as a sign of their office and mission in life. God had always promised that one day he would send a Savior to end all saviors, and this Messiah—this anointed one—would save his people forever. The Jews had been waiting for this for centuries, but now the angel proclaimed that the Savior had come, making the great confession that Jesus is the Christ. The last title the angel gave to Jesus was *Lord*. This term of honor points to his deity, and to his sovereign rule over our lives. Jesus is the Lord God. Luke has already used the term "Lord" more than a dozen times, and always with reference to the Lord God. But this was the first time that the words "Christ" and "Lord" had ever been brought together. It was an unprecedented combination: Jesus is the Lord Christ. This meant that the promised and anointed Savior was none other than God himself, appearing in the flesh. Savior, Christ, and Lord—Jesus was given the highest titles that can be given: "*Savior* points to his role as deliverer; *Messiah* points to his office in terms of the promised Anointed One of God; and *Lord* indicates his sovereign authority." The good news for the shepherds was that this child was born in Bethlehem to be their Savior and their God. They never would have known this unless God revealed it to them. If the angel had

not appeared to them while they were out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night, the shepherds never would have come to Christ. They acknowledged this when they referred to the good news as “this thing that has happened, which *the Lord* has made known to us” ((Luke 2:15). Ryken, P. G. (2009). *Luke*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, pp. 79–80). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.)

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!"

- (4) “Salvation peace belongs to those to whom God is pleased to give it; it is not a reward for those who have good will, but a gracious gift to those who are the objects of God’s good will.” (MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2009). *Luke 1–5* (p. 161). Chicago: Moody Publishers.)
- (5) “Then the angels pronounced a benediction. The coming of Christ was not just for the glory of God, but also for the good of humanity. So after giving glory to God in the highest, they proclaimed peace on earth. What a contrast this was to the kind of peace that the Romans had to offer. This story began with a decree from Caesar Augustus, which reminds us that this was the age of the *Pax Romana*, when the Romans often praised their emperor for bringing “peace on earth.” But this peace came at a dreadful cost. Nations were subjugated and plundered; peoples enslaved; the poor oppressed. There were peace and prosperity for some, fear and poverty for others. For Caesar only “gave peace as long as it was consistent with the interests of the Empire and the myth of his own glory.” Even those who had outward peace in Roman times did not have rest for their souls. The famous Stoic philosopher Epictetus—a contemporary of Luke—observed that “while the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace.” Nor could the emperor offer peace with God, which is the most necessary peace of all. But now a new King was born, and with his birth the angels pronounced peace on earth—peace like the Hebrew *shalom*: total peace for the whole person. This meant peace with God, first of all. Until we have peace with God, we cannot have any true peace at all. Our sins cry out against us and we are afraid to die, because deep down we know that we deserve judgment. But Jesus came to give us peace with God by paying the penalty that our sins deserve. The Bible says that in Christ, God was “making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). Once we have peace with God, we can have peace with one another by the power of his Holy Spirit. We no longer have to push to get our own way, but we can wait for God to work. “It is the work of Christ to bring peace into all human relations,” wrote

Norval Geldenhuys: “into man’s relation to God, to himself (his own feelings, desires, and the like), to his life’s circumstances (calamities and trials), and to his fellow-men. According as Christ is honoured and is given admission to human lives, to that extent the peace on earth, which He came to bring, becomes a glorious actuality. In so far as people live outside Him, the earth remains in a state of disorder and strife without real peace.” This peace is not for everyone, but only for the people whom God is pleased to bless. The *Gloria* is often taken as a promise of universal salvation: “Peace on earth, goodwill to men.” But as surprising as it may seem, this song actually teaches the doctrine of election. Its wording is important: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14). According to Darrell Bock, who has written the definitive commentary on Luke, the phrase “with whom he is pleased” is “almost a technical phrase in first-century Judaism for God’s elect, those on whom God has poured out his favor.” The peace of God comes according to his sovereign pleasure. The shepherds are the perfect example. They did not choose God; God chose them. They had to respond in faith, of course, but it was by the sovereign grace of God that they heard the good news. As one missionary studied this verse, he struggled to translate it into a native tongue. The term “peace” was especially difficult because there was no equivalent in the local language. But with the help of his assistant, he finally came up with a translation that captured the heart of this verse: “God in heaven is just so good! So the people who live in this world, if God’s heart is happy with them, then their fear is all-gone now!” (Ryken, P. G. (2009). *Luke*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, pp. 82–84). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.)

15When 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. **21** And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. **22** And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") **24** and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." **25** Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

- (6) “Mary and Joseph’s offering. 2:22–24. The couple was required by the Law not only to have Jesus circumcised (Lev. 12:3), but also to present their **firstborn** to God (Ex. 13:2, 12) 33 days later and to bring an offering for Mary’s **purification** after childbirth (Lev. 12:1–8). The offering which they presented for her purification showed that they were a poor couple. They could not afford a lamb, so they bought a pair of doves or pigeons, which were all they could afford. They traveled the short distance from Bethlehem **to Jerusalem** for the presentation and purification at the temple.” (Martin, J. A. (1985). Luke. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 209). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.)
- (7) “**waiting for the consolation of Israel**—a beautiful title of the coming Messiah, here intended.” (Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 100). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.)
- (8) “Like the rest of the believing remnant, Simeon eagerly awaited the coming of Messiah, who would bring **the consolation of Israel**. *Paraklēsis* (**consolation**) has in this context the connotation of “comfort,” “encouragement,” or “solace.” Simeon was both looking for the personal consolation of salvation for himself, and for the national deliverance promised in the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants. Simeon was a man who cared deeply about his people. He was like the apostle Paul, who was so passionately concerned about the salvation of his fellow Israelites that he wrote, “I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3). Simeon’s concern for his people was heightened by the distressing circumstances in which the nation found itself, chafing under the occupation of the hated Romans. Such trying times intensified the believing remnant’s longing for Messiah to come and deliver them. They yearned for deliverance from their Gentile oppressors, the restoration of their national sovereignty, and the national blessings promised in the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants. But most of all they eagerly awaited the realization of the New covenant, with its promise of forgiveness of sin, a new, cleansed heart, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:31–34). The Messiah was the embodiment of the nation’s hope of consolation; the only one who could bring consolation to Israel was the Consoler. Thus the rabbis sometimes referred to the Messiah as Menachem, which means “Comforter” or “Consoler.” Isaiah in particular emphasized Messiah’s role as a comforter. In Isaiah 40:1, he wrote, “‘Comfort, O comfort My people,’ says your God.” In verse 10, the prophet identified the comforter: “Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him.

Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him.”” (MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2009). *Luke 1–5* (pp. 177–178). Chicago: Moody Publishers.)

26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

(9) “Christ Will Reveal Hidden Hearts. Thomas Becon: And as we can see in this case, it is according to what Simeon said to Mary. The Son will convict the world of great crimes—of theft, of manslaughter, of murdering their parents—even those who are now almost counted for gods will be convicted. He will open them up, along with their hearts, so that they will declare with full evidence that they are extreme enemies of God. We now have to suffer that hypocrisy in which the outward appearance hides great offenses, but that will not continue long. When Christ comes along with his gospel, it will be evident that the whole world is full of immoral people, the enemies of God and thieves and robbers. They cannot patiently put up with being called these things, but before God they cannot pretend to be innocent of these crimes. For although their outward living is upright, they still have the fault that there is such great ungodliness in them that they cannot bear God’s Word, which is what can make God’s name agreeable to all people. It only takes a small thing, and some occasion, to drive the tongue and the hands to slaughter, if the heart is already full of slaughter. This vice, which otherwise no one would know or believe, is revealed by the gospel.” (Kreitzer, B., George, T., Manetsch, S. M., & McNutt, D. W. (Eds.). (2015). *Luke: New Testament* (Vol. III, p. 64). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.)

(10) “With these words, Simeon offered the first hint of the great suffering that Jesus would endure to bring salvation. From the former prophecies of Mary, Zechariah, and the angels, we have learned about the glory and greatness of Jesus Christ. We have heard of his royal kingship, his divine lordship, and the peace he brings to his people. But here we learn that he will also be the object of opposition. Jesus is the “sign that is

opposed” (Luke 2:35). People will despise him, reject him, and take their stand against him. In the end, of course, they nailed him to a tree and left him to die. This was the sword that pierced Mary’s soul. Despite her intense joy over the birth of her firstborn son, the day would come when she would suffer a grief of such anguish that it would strike her to the heart. God used this prophecy to prepare Mary for the crucifixion, so that in the end she would believe and be saved. As she watched Jesus grow up, she always remembered what Simeon had said. And when she finally found herself at the foot of the cross, she knew that the prophecy had come true. The piercing sword was the death of her beloved son. Simeon’s prophecy shows that from the beginning, God had a mission for Jesus that required him to suffer and die for sinners. The crucifixion was not some surprising and unexpected development, but the fulfillment of a preordained plan. God’s plan was for the salvation of his people. It was not for the salvation of everyone, however, which is why Simeon spoke about people falling as well as rising. In his song Simeon identified Jesus as the Savior whom God had prepared “in the presence of all peoples” (Luke 2:31). This might lead us to think that all people everywhere will be saved. Indeed, this is what some people think today, like the well-known Christian writer who said, “All will be redeemed in God’s fullness of time, all, not just the small portion of the population who have been given the grace to know and accept Christ. All the strayed and stolen sheep. All the little lost ones.” However attractive this may sound to some people, it is not the biblical truth. Jesus came to judge as well as to save. Notice again what Simeon says: “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ..., so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34–35). Jesus exposes what is really in our hearts. If we are truly humbled by our sin, then we will see our need for grace and be drawn to Jesus, who will make us rise to glory. In fact, the word that Simeon uses for rising (*anastasin*) is used elsewhere in the New Testament for resurrection. Everyone who believes in Jesus will rise to heaven, to the glory of God. Yet some people refuse to be humbled by their sin. They stand proud, not recognizing their need to be forgiven. Thinking that they can make it on their own, they are offended by the idea that salvation comes only through Christ and his cross. Why would anyone else have to die for their sins? For them, Jesus only gets in the way. He is something they cannot get around, something they keep tripping over. This is what Simeon meant when he said that Jesus would cause the “fall of many in Israel.” Jesus is a stumbling block (see Isa. 8:14; 1 Cor. 1:23). Although some receive him by faith, others reject him in unbelief. They “speak against this sign of God’s love that has been offered to them, for it searches men’s hearts and some will be scandalized by a salvation which can only be achieved by way of the cross.” This is the way it has always been. When people truly understand the claims of Christ, most of them are scandalized. This explains why some of our family members scorn our commitment to Christ. It explains why there is so much resistance to Christian truth on the secular college campus. It explains why other world religions are all united in their opposition to Christianity. This is the very thing that Jesus came to do: to reveal the true inward condition of every heart, whether in faith or unbelief. When people are opposed to Christians, it is because they are opposed to Christ. Whatever opposition we face is a

sign that he is truly present in us. What is your response to Jesus? Are you for him or against him? Will you rise or will you fall? This is the great question of life and death, because what God will do with us for all eternity depends on what we do with Jesus right now. He is the Great Divide. God uses his cross to reveal our true character, working out his eternal decrees of election and reprobation. There is no neutrality. Either we are with Jesus or we are against him. And if we are against him, we will fall down to spiritual death, down to physical death, and down to hell itself. Luke tells us this so that we will come to faith in Jesus Christ—not falling, but rising: “Those who imagine themselves to be strong and high, who rely on their own merit and power, will come to woeful ruin and undoing, because in their pride they do not realize their own need and doom and do not take refuge in Christ. But the humble ones, those who bend low at His feet with confession of sin and faith in Him, will be raised up by His mighty arm to eternal life.” (Ryken, P. G. (2009). *Luke*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, pp. 95–97). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.)

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, 37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. 41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." 49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

(11) “What is more important is the answer that Jesus gave: “And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ ” (Luke 2:49). These are the first recorded words of Jesus Christ. They form the climax of this episode, which Luke seems to have included in his Gospel specifically so that he could record this saying. What the boy Jesus said was monumental in what it revealed about his true identity as the Son of God and revolutionary in its implications for our own relationship to God as our Father. Jesus referred to God as “my Father.” This intimate expression was totally new. No one had ever said anything like it before. To be sure, the fatherhood of God is present in the Old Testament. There are at least a dozen places where the Scripture refers to God as Father. However, those who are speaking always refer to themselves in the plural. That is, people spoke of God as “our Father,” but no one ever called him “my Father.” God’s paternity was more a general concept than a personal relationship. Even men like Moses and David, who enjoyed special intimacy with God, never dared to claim that he was their Father. But Jesus said it as if it were the most natural thing in the world. If the temple was God’s house, then it was his Father’s house, because he knew that God was his Father. Here we are drawn into mysteries of the triune being of God. We have already pondered the mystery of the incarnation, that the divine Son of God had a human nature in every sense of the word. Here we are reminded that the one true God exists in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the incarnate Son, Jesus knew God as Father even when he was a boy. Liberal theologians claim that at age twelve he had only “vague stirrings of his own identity.” But the Scripture shows that the boy Jesus knew who he was. He had complete confidence that he was the Son of God. Already at this young age he was speaking to God the way he would always speak to him when he was a man, and the way he taught us to speak to God, calling him “Father.” This meant that when Jesus was at the temple, he was right where he was supposed to be. He was not sinning against his earthly parents. He was not disobeying any instructions they had given him about when to be where. He was exactly where they should have expected to find him. As his mother and father, Mary and Joseph had a right to expect him to be where he was supposed to be. But in this case they made the wrong assumption about where that was. By pointing this out, Jesus was not trying to be some sort of smart aleck. It was just so obvious that he was frankly amazed that his parents didn’t know where to find him. They were only his earthly parents, but his real Father was God in heaven. So Jesus said, “I *must* be in my Father’s house” (Luke 2:49). This was a matter of divine compulsion. Given his unique identity as the Father’s Son, Jesus *had* to be at the temple. The temple was God’s dwelling place on earth, and therefore it was the place for the Son to commune with the Father. In addition to all the other ways that he was growing, the boy Jesus (the incarnate Son of God, human as well as divine) was growing in his relationship to God.”” (Ryken, P. G. (2009). *Luke*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, pp. 110–111). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.)