

Transcript

The Jesus Story – Birth Story

In the last session we took a quick overview of the life of Jesus. Now I would like to look in more detail, not just at the life of Jesus, but at the things that were going on around Him.

Today I want to look at the things that surrounded the actual birth story of Jesus. Luke is the one who gives us the most detailed account of The birth of Jesus. In a very clear way he begins in the first chapter by describing the birth of Jesus. He then goes on to tell us of the His childhood, and development.

Luke shows to us the humanity of Jesus. He describes how the birth became possible, He describes the conditions that surrounded His birth.

Also, in the first chapter of Luke's gospel v6 to v25, we find the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, receiving the promise from the angel and the birth of their son, John the Baptist. We have recorded the visit of the angel to Mary and the promise of the birth of Jesus.

But, what I would like to do is to look at what really happened when the Son of God came to dwell among the sons of men. First of all we need to understand that the incarnation did not begin in Bethlehem. The incarnation began in the womb of a virgin girl.

God spent his first nine months on earth as a preborn baby. Fully alive. Fully human. Fully God. He didn't become the God-man at Bethlehem. He was God incarnate from the moment of conception.

However, After conception, Mary's pregnancy followed the normal course of all human pregnancies, leading to the momentous night in Bethlehem when she gave birth to the Lord Jesus in a stable.

The simple truth of the birth of Jesus, is found in this one phrase:

The Word became flesh.

I love the way Eugene Peterson translates the first part of John 1:14:

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.

Luke chapter one and the first four verses, this is probably as good a place as any to begin. Luke is the one who gives us the fullest account of those things that surrounded the birth of Jesus, and in the first four verses of chapter one, he tells us why he wrote his gospel.

1 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us,

2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us,

3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent

Theophilus,

4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

Names in the bible are very significant. Theophilus, who Luke addresses this letter to, can be translated in two ways - either 'Lover of God' or 'Loved by God'.

There are some who would tell us that there was no real person called Theophilus, and this gospel was written to all those Who Loved God or were Loved by God.

I personally believe that it was written to a real person called Theophilus, so, Lover of God, Loved by God, or Theophilus,

I believe Luke was writing this so that all of us can know beyond the shadow of doubt the truth concerning the story of Jesus.

But I would like to start this session by looking at the things that surrounded the actual birth story of Jesus. First of all we will be looking at something that happened just before the birth of Jesus.

Before the birth of Jesus there were two angelic visits. The first visit by the Angel would set the stage. The second one would help to clear up any miss understandings.

Both of these visits were wonderful, but between these two visits there would be a very painful interlude.

This is how Luke introduces us to Mary in verse 26, with the first angelic visit:

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

First of all we shall be looking at what we read concerning Mary and Joseph, because they would play a major role in the life of Jesus. But, what a powerful situation we find here! We can lose the significance of this if we are not careful.

Just listen to it again:

26 The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Things do not get any more personal than that. If anyone could say that 'they had a word from the Lord', Mary and Joseph certainly could.

Luke, tells us two very important things about their situation. Mary was a virgin, and she was betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph.

We shall return to these two points a little later, but first of all we need to look at the message that the angel brings to Mary:

28 And having come in, the angel said to her "Rejoice, highly favoured one,

the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”

29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

30 Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

31 “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.

32 “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.

33 “And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

34 Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”

Mary does not ask how will she know that she will have this child. She accepts that she will have a child. She is simply asking how will this happen, given that she is a virgin, and she assumes that she will conceive before having any sexual relationship with Joseph?

The angel answers her question just how this birth would come about, in verse 35:

35 “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

36 “Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.

37 “For with God nothing will be impossible.”

38 Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”

And the angel departed from her.

Mary submitted herself of her own free will to what she felt was the will and wish of her God. This gives us just a glimpse of the commitment of this young girl.

Two very important things that we find from passage that we read. Mary was a virgin; And she was betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph.

Another thing that I feel is important, is where this meeting took place Nazareth in Galilee.

Where does the angel find the one that God has chosen to bare His Son? It was not in some major city or some great mansion. The angel was sent to poor young woman, betrothed to a carpenter in the despised town of Nazareth.

There is no suggestion that Mary came from anything other than very ordinary circumstances. Just an ordinary girl, from a poor background.

I believe that it is our availability more than our ability that God is looking for.

And, just look at the place that she came from this despised town of Nazareth, and Jesus would always be identified with this place, being repeatedly referred to as Jesus of Nazareth.

Nazareth was a small, unattractive town with a bad reputation. This was Nathanael's opinion of Nazareth when Philip told him, that they had found the Messiah (John 1:45):

45 “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

So when thinking of the kind of people that God chooses, we have a very good illustration here. A poor young woman, from a very poor and unattractive village.

Let me digress for just one moment, because there is a great lesson here for all of us, when we see the kind of people that God calls, and why he calls them.

Paul, when writing to the saints at Corinth, tells them (1Cor 1 v26):

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.

And then he gives the reason for His choice in verse 29:

29 That no flesh should glory in His presence.

So, let's get back to our story with the first angelic visit we find God's Choice. A poor young woman from a very poor village.

Matthew in his gospel sheds a little more light on what was happening at this time. This is what we read in Matthew 1 v18:

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

What happened between these two angelic visits, we just don't know. It would really help if only we could talk for a short while to Joseph and Mary, but, we can't do that, so, we can only try to imagine just how they were feeling.

They had just gone through a very harrowing few months. I don't think that we could even begin to understand just how Joseph must have been feeling at this time, to find that the woman that he was betrothed to was pregnant; and he knew that he was not the father.

The only thing that Joseph could think was that she must have been unfaithful to him, And yet he was not prepared to make a public example of her, but he was minded to put her away privately.

Who knows the pain that Joseph must have been feeling at this time; the thought that the one that he loved the most had been unfaithful to him, and yet Joseph could do nothing to hurt or harm Mary in any way. He planned to put her away privately.

There we have a glimpse of the kind of man Joseph was. Mary was betrothed to Joseph.

It might help if we knew just what betrothal meant? This was far more serious than a couple being engaged. When a couple were betrothed, they were under a very serious obligations to each other, so much so, that a divorce was needed to break the betrothal.

This was not just some sort of casual promise. This puts Joseph in a very difficult position, Joseph had little choice.

If a man's betrothed wife became pregnant, he would bear great shame in a culture that was obsessed with shame and honour. Jewish law required a man to divorce a wife who had been unfaithful. Joseph could have divorced Mary publicly in a court.

The court would not only prove his innocence, but also profit him financially. He would be able to keep all of Mary's dowry (the money her father gave her for her marriage).

By planning to divorce her privately - this was done simply by writing out a certificate of divorce in front of two witnesses - Joseph chose to forfeit any profit as he did not want to see Mary shamed any further.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

It was now time of the second angelic visit.

20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

21 "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

There is a statement that the angel makes when talking to Joseph, that demonstrates, that Joseph was entrusted just as much as Mary to rear Jesus.

21 "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call

His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

We have the advantage of knowing what was really happening to this young couple.

But, the people around them, in Nazareth did not. To them, this would be just a young couple having a baby out of wedlock, and all the stigma attached to that. This is all that the bible tells us concerning their marriage, and took to him his wife:

25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

This is perhaps a good place to take stock of the situation. From a human standpoint, this pregnancy was a disaster from the start. Here we have a young couple, with a baby on the way, a baby that had been conceived outside of wedlock, having to get married in a bit of a hurry, there would be no time save up for everything. In a small place like Nazareth there would be plenty of gossip going on about this young couple.

Then, on top of all this, Luke 2 v1 tells us:

1 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

Joseph and Mary had to make a journey from Nazareth, to Bethlehem.

6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

I think that it would be good, if we were to look at just what the bible tells us about the events that surrounded the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we are not careful we can fall into the same false impression that we find portrayed on the Christmas cards, the picture of Joseph leading a donkey, with Mary sitting all serene on the donkey's back, smiling just like the Mona Lisa.

They paint a picture of a spotless stable, with various clean looking animals. A group of shepherds watching from the door. As three Kings are offering various presents, and nearly everyone has a halo around them.

It is always a picture of absolute serenity never even a piece of straw out of place. It would be good just to look at the real story.

Now, at this time Mary could only have been a teenager. Both Joseph and Mary had been visited by the angel of the Lord, and now Mary pregnant, and her time to be delivered almost upon them.

Their first child and they have to begin the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a journey of about eighty to a hundred miles on very rough roads, ready to give birth at any time.

Both very weary, Joseph must have been worried out of his mind at this time. What a sense of relief they would feel when Bethlehem came into sight. It would not be long now, soon they would be able to wash the dust of the journey away and relax in a

nice comfortable bed.

But when they arrived, what they found was that all the inns were full. No room anywhere. No one opened their home to this weary young couple. All that they were offered was a stable and that would already be filled with the animals of other travellers.

I don't know if you have ever imagined just how Joseph and Mary must have felt at this time. Eighty to a hundred miles of very rough roads and no one to welcome them. All the shelter that they had was this dirty old stable, and on top of all this Mary had started to bring forth her first born son.

Well I don't know about singing Joy to the World; if I had have been them I think I would have felt like sitting down and crying.

And it was into these circumstances that Mary brought forth her first born son into the world.

This must have been a lonely birth, there was no midwife, or any female help Mary had to do things for herself, we read that. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. Mary, her great worry was she doing everything right.

Remember Mary was still only a very young woman. Try to imagine yourself in her position just what would be going through her mind. Mary and Joseph knew exactly who this child was. Had she any right, to put the Son of God in a box used to feed animals?

Well if she had not put him in the manger, the shepherds may have been looking in the wrong place for him. This was the message the shepherds received from the angel 2 v12:

12 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

Mary did not know whether to give him milk or to give Him praise, so she gave Him both.

As far as she could see He was both - hungry and holy.

Joseph did not know whether to call Him Son or Father, but, in the end he called Him Jesus, since that was what the angel said. In any case; he did not have the faintest idea what to call a God that you could cradle in your arms.

The son of God had come, and, if we are to understand just what the birth of Jesus was really like, we need to look at what the bible has to say about it, and not what the Christmas cards depict.

The son of God had come, and all that this world could offer Him was a trough, the box that the animals food was put in, in the manager of a dirty old stable; and at this time, Joseph and Mary were the only ones on earth who knew just who this child really was.

God had come near. He came not as a flash of light, or as an unapproachable conqueror, but as one whose first cries were heard by a peasant girl and a sleepy carpenter.

The first hands that held him were unmanicured, calloused and dirty. No silk, no ivory, no hype, no party. Were it not for the shepherds, there would have been no reception.

Luke 2 v8-14, tells us:

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

11 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.

12 This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.”

The world may have remained indifferent to the wonderful things that were happening that night. But heaven could not.

The first hymn of praise when God was manifest in the flesh came from the angels. The absolute wonder of it all

Emmanuel - God with us. Jesus Christ who was equal with God, taking upon Himself the form of a man, but really the greatest miracle as far as I am concerned about that first Christmas was not the virgin birth, but the very fact that Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity, God the Son, could be confined to a human frame.

To me the real Wonder of the incarnation is not, the angels singing or the Shepherds in the fields, or even the Wise Men with their gifts.

The real wonder of the Incarnation to me is the simple message of the crib. That Jesus came to where we were. I love the way that Paul describes this when writing to the Philippians (2 v7)

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

After the angelic choir sang, they returned back to heaven. The shepherds said to one another (Luke 2 v15):

15 “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”

16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which

was told them concerning this Child.

18 And all those who heard it marvelled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

At creation, God performed a wonderful miracle. He created man in the image of God. At the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see an even greater miracle. Here we have God made in the image of man.

The voice that thundered in heaven now cried in a manger. This must be one of the greatest mysteries that this world has ever known.

He became man without ceasing to be God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This was not done by the change of one nature into another; the divine into the human. Jesus remained what he was, and became what he was not. Not blended together, to make a third nature. Nor are they separated and divided, so as to be two people, a divine person and a human person. They are so united as to be one person, and this union can never be dissolved.

Jesus was really human. Jesus was a baby who cried when He was hungry. He was completely dependent upon his parents for meeting His every need. He could do nothing for himself.

With His little hands he grasped fingers held out to Him. He couldn't communicate at first except by crying. He would take months to learn to crawl, and more months to learn to walk and to speak. Jesus was a normal, human baby.

Just think about this. Those same infant hands which grasped Mary's finger were the hands that created the myriads of stars. That same voice that cried out moments after birth was the voice that named each of those stars. The tremendous truth of the incarnation!

We get so used to the words: 'Immanuel, God with us, God incarnate, God in the flesh', they roll off our lips and we don't begin to understand what they really mean.

Jesus, came into this world In just the same way as you and me, through His mother's strong efforts.

The point of all this?

Jesus was a baby, a normal baby, born in the normal way. The real miracle of the incarnation is found in the fact that Jesus was fully God and fully man. This description of Jesus, found in Hebrews 1:3:

3 Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power.

That describes perfectly who He was.

The next part of the verse describes what He did.

3 ...When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

We shall round off this session by taking a look at the first two visits to the temple. Eight days after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jerusalem, a journey of about five or six miles, in order to have Him circumcised.

A month later they returned for a purification rite. The offering which Mary made was specially appointed to be made by poor people. If she was unable to bring a lamb, then she needs to bring two turtle doves or two young pigeons.

It was at this time that Simeon and Anna, two people that were in the temple at this time, both spoke concerning Jesus' future and confirmed that this child was truly the Messiah.

Simeon is in touch with God's heart, he had waited expecting the completion of God's promises. This revered old prophet reveals just what the arrival of this child means (Luke 2:32):

32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."

Anna was a woman who loved God's house (Luke 2:37);

37 She departed not from the temple.

She regarded it as the place where God especially dwelt.

In the mouth of these two witnesses it was established that Malachi's prophecy was fulfilled.

This is what we read in Malachi's 3 v1

1 "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple.

This was done to confirm and encourage Joseph and Mary because they were the only ones to hear this prophecy.

In the next session, still taking the story of Jesus in chronological order, we shall, God willing, be looking at: the visit of the wise men, the first attempt on the life of Jesus, the visit to the temple when Jesus was twelve, and the eighteen years from twelve to thirty years as Jesus developed into manhood.