

Day 1: Luke 2:1-4

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) and everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

Luke uses the fact of the census to date the birth of Jesus. Before the modern calendar, events were dated in relationship to other significant world events, such as the beginning of a king's reign. Rome had areas that were under direct control of a governor and areas that were more self governing. It all depended upon how peaceful the territory was.

Question: Why do you think Caesar wanted a census?

Challenge: Take a look at a map to see how far it is from Nazareth to Bethlehem and what a possible route might be.

Scripture: Ruth 4:13-22

Day 2: Luke 2:5-7

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Mary gives birth before she and Joseph were formally married. An engagement was just like a marriage in that to break off an engagement took a divorce. A manger is a feed bin for animals, especially horses. Because of the census, Joseph and Mary had to make the journey to Bethlehem and have the baby in a strange place. We do not know if there was a midwife because the Bible does not say one way or the other. The cloths were tight bands of cloth that wrapped the baby in the same way a blanket would today. Tradition says that Jesus was born in a cave that served as a stable.

Question: Where were you born? What hospital and town? How far was your birth place from your home?

Challenge: What do you think was going through Joseph and Mary's minds when they arrived at Bethlehem and the baby was coming?

Scripture: Exodus 2:1-8

Day 3: Luke 2:8-14

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Notice that the first thing the angel says is "fear not." The vision of an angel at night would be frightening for anybody. The shepherds represent the everyday normal working person. These shepherds had no idea of the world changing event that had happened. The heavenly host was there to verify what the angel said. Both of these events had to have had a life changing effect on the men. Angels and heavenly hosts did not appear to the everyday working person but to the kings and priests. But notice, God chooses to reveal the greatest event in history to average people.

Question: What is the best news you have ever received?

Challenge: Is there a modern event like God's messengers speaking to humans?

Scripture: Psalm 57

Day 4: Luke 2:15-16

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

The place where the shepherds saw the great light and the angel is about 1-2 miles from the birthplace. This means that they would have left the sheep alone to find the holy family. There must have been something about the baby that caused the shepherds to believe that they had found the correct one. They took the risk of losing their sheep to follow God's direction. This is similar to Jesus' saying about gaining the whole world but losing your soul. Are we willing to give up some safety to find Jesus?

Question: Be honest - would you have passed off the event as a dream or would you have left your sheep and gone to the village?

Challenge: This is a challenge for warmer weather. Park a few blocks from the church as you come on Sunday and pray along the way that God would reveal something special to you in worship.

Scripture: Luke 1:8-24, 59-80

Day 5: Luke 2:17-18

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Not only did the shepherds leave the sheep to find the baby but they took time to tell others of their experience. They told not only of the baby but of the angels that spoke to them. God chose a way to announce the birth that relies on normal everyday people to share their experience of God's love. Paul tells us that the Gospel is foolishness to the wise but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. God turns the tables and uses what the world thinks of as weak to be, in reality, strong. The Cross is the best example of God showing that strength is not what people think it is.

Question: Do you think people were amazed because they were just shepherds or because of what the shepherds said?

Challenge: Find a modern example of something that looks weak but is really strong.

Scripture: I Corinthians 1:18-34

Day 6: Luke 2:19-20

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told.

Mary is thinking about what the shepherds told her that they heard from the angel. The angel told the shepherds that her baby would be the Messiah and she knew what had happened to others who claimed to be Messiahs. There had been some revolts earlier and they all ended with the leaders killed. Mary wondered what would happen to her son. I doubt she ever had in mind what did happen to him at age 33.

Question: What do you think Mary pondered?

Challenge: God is still speaking to us through the scripture. Read the story to see what God is telling you today.

Scripture: Luke 1:46-56