

## Born in the City of David

Lesson Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

Focus Scripture: Luke 2:1-16

*Key Verse: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." Luke 2:15*

### LUKE 2:1-16 (NRSV UE)

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

3 All went to their own towns to be registered.

4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

8 Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

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, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:

11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

### LUKE 2:1-16 (KJV)

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

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a



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 heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

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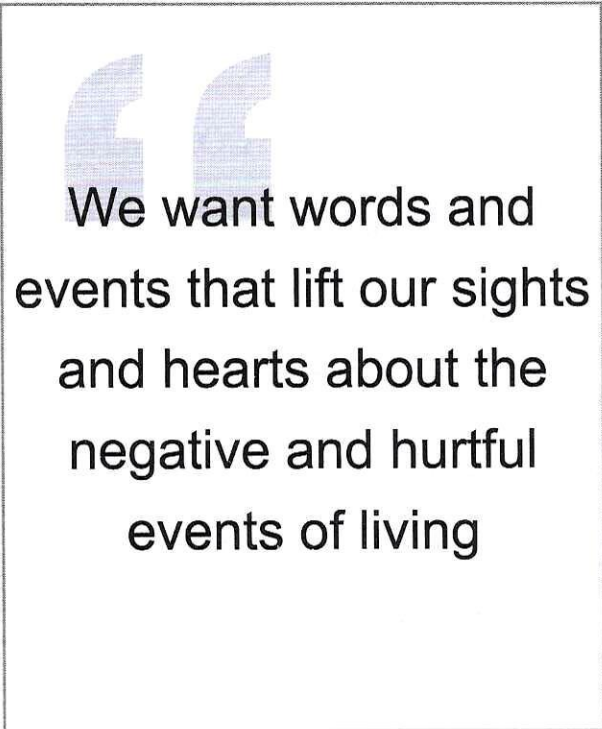
14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

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

**KEY TERMS**

- **Humility** – Having a modest or low view of one’s own importance; not prideful or haughty.
- **Paradox** – An apparent contradiction; things that do not appear to go together.
- **African Socialism** – A theory of governance where leaders use the resources of a country for the collective good of all its citizens rather than for the benefit of a privileged few. Applying this concept in an African context is African Socialism.



shock us. The more horrible the stories of murders, shootings, fraud, rape, and corruption, the more frequently and boldly the media report them. We may be unaware of the effect these reports have on our psyche. But in that environment, even believers develop vicious appetites for shocking news.

Yet in our soul, we yearn for good news. We want words and events that lift our sights and hearts about the negative and hurtful events of living. Yes, we long for stories that highlight our value as humans; stories that shout of our importance and place in the universe. We want to know that there is more to life than what we see in the material world. This is where the good news of

**INTRODUCTION**

Today, news networks bombard us constantly with reports of news that



Christ comes in. And it is “Good News” that Christ commanded us to share with a hurting world. This is the church's core mission noted in Mark 16:15.

As you work through this lesson, consider the magnificent news that unfolded in the Christmas story. Challenge yourself to understand why the events told a wonderful, divine love story. And step beyond the mere reading or hearing of the story. Consider the variety of ways in

which you can become a reporter of the good news of God's great love.

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Scholars have varying views about the location of the “inn” around which Christ was born, and why Mary and Joseph traveled there.

We start by noting that in those times, cities had no hotels and motels as we have today. Nevertheless, a careful study of the language of the text gives useful insights.

Because the census they were responding to was based on ancestry, Joseph and Mary were likely going to stay with

relatives in Bethlehem. From that basis, it would appear that when the couple arrived at their relatives, the guest rooms were already fully occupied. A reasonable reading of the Greek text lends itself to using the term “guest rooms” for what popular translations call the “inn.” In this scenario, Mary and Joseph would have stayed in the only vacant available space on their relative's property: the stable where they keep the animals.

As you work through this lesson, consider the magnificent news that unfolded in the Christmas story. Challenge yourself to understand why the events told a wonderful, divine love story.

The exact timing of Jesus' birth has always been a point of debate. Verse 2:8 gives a useful hint. If everything was happening according to customs, Jesus was actually born in early spring. This conclusion we can infer from the shepherds being out in the night watching their sheep. Traditionally, watching sheep at night only happened during

the lambing season, in early spring.

The inclusion of shepherds in the Advent narrative would be significant to Israel. Sheep rearing was a major activity in the life of Israel. The Bible has hundreds of references to sheep and shepherds in the history of Israel. The stories of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and Amos all have



sheep and shepherd references. Also, note those times when the scriptures describe God using shepherd terms (e.g., Zechariah 11), and Israel in terms of being sheep (Psalm 100:3).

Therefore, using the shepherds as witnesses to the birth of the savior was significant in two important ways. First, it underscored the caring shepherd-sheep relationship between God and his people. The shepherds were symbols of care. In Jesus, we got the ultimate in care – the care for our souls – from the good shepherd.

Second, the shepherds highlighted the humility God wanted to project around God's Son, the king of kings (Luke 1:52). The king was born in lowly circumstances and surrounded by the lowly shepherds. The circumstances of Jesus' birth reflected the message of humility he taught his disciples (e.g., Matthew 20:25-28).

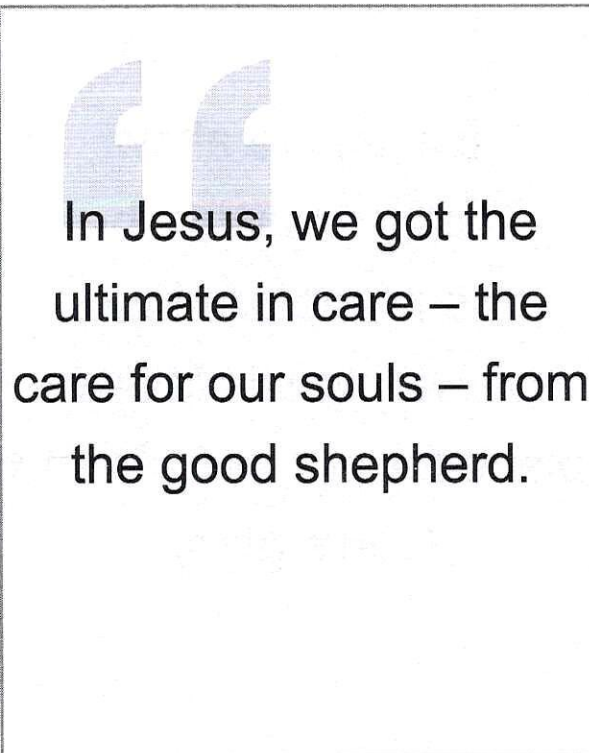
Verse 2:11 when connected to verse 1:32 paints a striking image of Jesus. There can be no doubt about his identity. Indeed, he was the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the true heir in the Davidic promise.

It is as if Luke is screaming, "Let us be clear about this birth. It is God fulfilling the promise he made to David. This is the Messiah." This is a point every believer must be clear about. If we are not fully persuaded in our hearts about this, we cannot step onto the salvation path. Without that conviction, membership in a church is meaningless, and Christmas is just an excuse to have a party.

A huge theme in Luke's gospel is the

concept of being a witness (2:17-18). This is a natural human response when people see or hear of an extraordinary event. They want to share it, tell the world. We see this every day on social media platforms. Something as amazing as the birth of the savior of humankind had to be shared by witnesses.

Note this is exactly the assignment Jesus gave to people who have had an experience with him. Believers must tell the world what they witnessed through their relationship with Jesus Christ. This is the message of Acts 1:8-9 and Matthew 29:18-19. It is a message to all disciples of Christ, irrespective of formal titles in the church.





Mary's response to the unfolding events is instructive. She had received the advanced warning from the angel. She had seen how events played out with Elizabeth and John's birth. Yet she was in unfamiliar territory. Nothing had prepared her for these supernatural events. She could not fully understand all that was happening around her. So, at verse 2:19, we find Mary in a reflective mood. As the events unfolded, she carefully observed them, stored them in her heart, and reflected on their significance. She was trying to make sense out of these astonishing developments in her life.

There is a lesson here for us. When the hand of God is at work in our lives, we must take note and relax, even when we do not grasp the full significance.

Everything will not make sense all at once. But as we allow God to do what he has predetermined, everything will fall into place for our benefit and God's glory.

### **SANKOFA**

The story of Jesus' birth is a paradox of greatness and humility. The king of all

kings was born in a lowly stable, wrapped in lowly clothes, with lowly shepherds as witnesses. As he grew and did ministry, this picture of humility never became blurred in Jesus' life. People whose life experiences have built a strong association between powerful leaders, pride, and arrogance, cannot easily grasp this picture. History rarely shows Strong powerful leaders who are humble, accommodating, and caring.

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One great leader, who broke that mold of prideful arrogance, was Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, who we met before. President Nyerere went against the normal image associated with powerful African leaders. He lived a simple lifestyle in a modest home, without the elaborate trappings of wealth

and power. The diamond he displayed to the world was personal integrity, not an array of personal wealth.

During his reign, President Nyerere emphasized the importance of humility, and communities working together for the common good of all the people. This came from his personal philosophy of

Pan-African Socialism. His clothes, his speech, and his emphasis on education and training of his people all reflected Nyerere's shepherd's heart.

But probably the way he left the presidency was his greatest display of humility. In 1985, Nyerere voluntarily stepped down from the presidency. This was a rare act of surrendering power in a region where presidents cling to power, sometimes at the expense of civil wars. By that time, it was obvious that his approach to governing, African Socialism, had not yielded the desired results. Nyerere saw it was time for a new generation of leaders. So out of his respect for democracy and the will of the people, President Nyerere retired. Contrast Nyerere's act of stepping away from the seat of power with leaders who try to hold onto power, or gain power, at any cost.

When Julius Nyerere died in October 1999, the world paid tribute to his humble yet outstanding example of leadership. His love for his people, commitment to African unity and development, and

unassuming life drew stirring tributes from world leaders and international organizations. This points to a great truth more leaders should learn. Great leadership and humility can sleep in the same bed.

### CASE STUDY

The place of Jesus' birth reinforced his prophetic connection to the lineage of King David. In the ancient Near East,

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residents named cities as we do today. People named cities after the names of their conquerors, founders, significant sites, or memorable events related to the city. Hence Israelis called Jerusalem the “City of David” because King David conquered and developed it.

The earliest mention in the Old Testament of Jerusalem as the “City of David” comes in 2 Samuel 5:7 when David led his men to capture the fortress Zion (the previous reference name) from the Jebusites. After the victory, David made his home in the city and called it the “City of David.” However, before we give too much credit to King David, reflect deeply on 2 Samuel 5:9-10. David went on from that conquest



and became greater, not because he was the greatest warrior. His greatness had one source, "The Lord God of hosts was with him." That is always a winning combination. We also want to note that David later brought to the city the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence of the Lord in Israel.

The importance of the term, "City of David," is obvious by its frequent use in the Bible. Depending on your Bible version, the Old Testament uses the phrase 45 times. It seems that Israel understood that the city bearing David's name had God's stamp of approval. In the New Testament, we find the name only twice. Once it refers to Bethlehem, and this is super important. It was in Bethlehem, that small town in Judah, where King David was born. And in the same Bethlehem, Christ was born. This had to be a divine setup.

### LIFE APPLICATION

Traditionally, Christian believers celebrate the birth of Jesus with elaborate fanfare at Christmas. However, the paradox surrounding the celebrations

is worrying. The birth of Christ marks one of the biggest displays of humility known to humanity. Yet in our Christmas celebrations, it is rare to see significant displays of humility. Indeed, the opposite is often the order of the day. Consider this observation and think about ways to make humility a feature of the Christmas celebration. Discuss this observation with members of your family, church, and community. Then, brainstorm the various ways believers can show more of the humility of Christ this Christmas.

David went on from that conquest and became greater, not because he was the greatest warrior. His greatness had one source, "The Lord God of hosts was with him."

The witnessing of the shepherds was an integral part of the first Christmas. Privately and in small discussion groups, assess the degree to which we are credible witnesses of the good news of Jesus' birth at Christmas. Apart from

the traditional Christmas celebration services, what can we do to emphasize that Christmas is indeed about Christ and the love of God for humanity?

Another paradox of the Christmas celebrations is that when we celebrate Christ, people have less time for the activities that draw them closer to Christ.



Acknowledging this, churches usually suspend their usual weekly activities, because people are too busy to attend the events. Think seriously about this. Plan how you can break from the traditional pattern of Christmas busyness. Resolve to spend more time, rather than less, praying and meditating on the Christ of Christmas.

The image of the shepherd is that of a caregiver, a pastor, someone with a heart for people. Reflect on this and consider people around you who may need a level of care. The shepherds went out of their way to be part of the first Christmas and to share the good news. Consider how this Advent you can be a shepherd to someone in need.

## QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do the traditional

Christmas celebrations reflect the story of humility and divine care God put on display in Bethlehem?

2. What are the main drivers in determining how we celebrate Christmas?
3. The Christmas season, despite its themes of joy and peace, can be a period of great loneliness for various people. Why is this?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn:** "Away in a Manger,"  
*AMEC Hymnal #113*

**Closing Prayer:** Loving God, we thank you for Jesus and the thrilling display of divine love his birth signaled. Guide us in celebrating wisely this good news. Strengthen us to be bold witnesses for the Christ of Christmas. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

December 23-December 29

<b>Monday</b>	Luke 4:14-21 (Mercy for Those Who Suffer)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Luke 6:27-36 (Show God's Mercy to All)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Micah 7:14-20 (God Delights in Compassion)
<b>Thursday</b>	Psalms 25:1-10 (Remember Your Mercy, O Lord)
<b>Friday</b>	Psalms 25:11-22 (God Relieves a Troubled Heart)
<b>Saturday</b>	Luke 18:9-14 (Mercy for Sinners)
<b>Sunday</b>	Luke 18:35-43 (Lord, Let Me See Again)