

Christmas 2013 ~ Luke 2:1-14 Our Misconceptions Concerning the Birth of Christ

Our special study today is in Luke chapter 2. We have a study guide for you, Luke 2:1-14. In our reading and study today we are going to focus on our misconceptions concerning the birth of Christ, Luke 2:1-14.

Luke chapter 2 verses 1 to 7 is the introduction to the birth of Christ. And verses 8 to 14 the pronouncement of the birth of Christ to the shepherds.

In Luke chapter 2 we want to focus on our misconceptions concerning the birth of Christ as far as the circumstances go.

Luke chapter 2 verse 1, in fact the first three verses, is the historical setting for the birth of Christ. **It came to pass in those days, that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the inhabited world should be registered.** Caesar Augustus is a title, this is Gaius Octavius. Julius Caesar was the first Emperor and so the emperors after him took his name, Caesar. But this Caesar took *Augustus*, which means *one who is exalted*. So this is a very prideful arrogant title of Caesar Augustus. Caesar the Emperor, the exalted one, who is in historical setting Gaius Octavius. **A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole inhabited world should be registered.** Some of your English translations say *to be taxed* but in reality it was a registration for the taxation that was coming up. The Roman government made the Hebrew and Jewish people go and register so that they could bring about a tax. They had these registrations about every fourteen years, and it took two to three years for the entire registration to be completed.

In verse 2 it says the date for us. **This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.** Important translation. He was not governor of Syria; he was governing Syria. Some opponents to Scripture say that since Christ was born we know around 4 to 5 BC, that Quirinius was not governor of Syria during that time. But he was governing, in other words he was taking the place of and was substitute for another governor. And so the literal translation should be noted here, and it coincides with the date of Scripture.

Verse 3, the duration of this, **And all were going to register themselves, each one into his own city.** Imperfect tense, showing continuous action in the past. All were going. This is again a two-to-three-year period of time where people had to according to the rules and the laws, they had to go to the city of their lineage. And both Joseph and Mary were from the household of David, and he was born in Bethlehem; and so they needed to travel to Bethlehem in order to register for this tax that is coming up. So this was a census that they were going to register for.

Verses 4 and 5, the geographical setting. We had the historical setting to place us around 4 to 5 BC and the emphasis was on the circumstances. That it was actually a Roman decree that caused them to go to Bethlehem. They did not read Scripture in Micah 5:2 and say, "Oh, the Christ child is supposed to be born in Bethlehem, and you are eight months pregnant, Mary, so we better get over there, so that God's Word can be fulfilled." No, they were forced through their

circumstances. Again she was around eight months pregnant. The trip was seventy to eighty miles one way.

Here we have the geographical setting in verses 4 and 5. **Now Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, into the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, on account of that he was from out of the house and family of David.** So it was required that they go to Bethlehem. **To register himself with Mary the wife having been betrothed (or engaged) to him.** That is a literal translation, and I am not going to spend too much time unraveling this. But basically she was engaged to or espoused to Joseph during that one-year pledge of purity time, all within Jewish social structure was a marriage. You became engaged through a ceremony. You waited one year for the pledge of purity, living apart. After one year then the actual wedding ceremony took place. During that pledge of purity if the woman was found to be pregnant, then a divorce had to be filed in order for that engagement to be broken. So both the engagement and the marriage itself was all considered marriage, and it took a divorce to break even the engagement during that pledge of purity. So when they were traveling she was his wife. **Having been engaged to him, she being pregnant.** Like I said, she is about eight months pregnant, and they are traveling seventy to eighty miles.

Verses 6 to 7, the physical setting, as we study their condition. **Now it came to pass and while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should give birth. And she gave birth to her son, the firstborn.** That is how it literally reads. That term *firstborn* is a title. **She gave birth to her son, the firstborn, and she wrapped Him in linen cloth, and laid him in a feeding trough.** Very poetical. **On account of there was not a place for them in the inn.** So they were in among the animals, many believe in the cave where the animals were kept. And when He was born He was placed in a feeding trough.

Much different than our concept of the birth of Christ as we celebrate it today. When God sent His Son, He sent His Son in a very lowly condition. And sent His Son in such a way that it would not be the praise of man, nor the worship of the human, but all the work of God to send His Son. Not taking away from the purpose for Him coming, to die for our sins.

So it is interesting that God would cause Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem to register. It was not a Christmas parade that took them to Bethlehem, it was a decree from the Roman government. It was circumstances that were very difficult and there was no place for them in the inn. And so when it came time for her to give birth she gave birth in the stable, where the animals were kept. Not a way that we, in our human imagination, would bring the King of kings and our Creator into this world to dwell with us. It is the way God chose.

In verses 8 to 14, the proclamation to the shepherds. Verses 8 and 9 emphasize God's choice. **And shepherds were in the same country staying (or living) in the field and keeping watch by night over their flock.** Now I emphasize this to you. First of all, shepherds and tax collectors were considered to be unclean because they lived out in the fields, and they did not come in and go through the time of cleansing that Jewish and Hebrew people needed to do in order to come into the temple and participate with the feasts. So shepherds were considered religiously to be unclean, along with tax collectors because they were considered traitors against

the Jewish people. So here were these shepherds who were out in the same country, in the field, and keeping watch over their flock.

Reading verse 9, **And look, an angel of the Lord stood over them, and the glory of the Lord shone** (or shined) **around them; and they became afraid with great fear.** God's choice was not religious leaders. It was not the prominent religious people of the Lord's day. God's choice was to first of all reveal the birth of His Son to shepherds, who were out in the fields, considered religiously unclean.

Now going back to, remember, the first hour I talked to you about this Duck Dynasty flap that is going on. I do not take much interest in stuff like this except to listen to the various people talk and to see the thread that is going through. The gentleman that owns the Christian broadcasting company, they interviewed him on the air. And he says, "You know, in all the things that have happened over the years, where the Bible was taken out of our schools, prayer taken out of our schools, the mention of God, the nativity scenes, all these things being removed in our society and people just put up a whimper, and nobody says anything." So one guy, that God uses, who lives out in the woods and has a beard about down to his belt and wears the camouflage outfits and his favorite thing to do is duck hunt, he gets interviewed by a magazine and he talks about Scripture and about the immorality and the sin of immorality in our society, and everybody has a fit.

I just look at God's choice. It is not some clergyman, even though they have gone across from border to border preaching the cause for Christ and nobody even pays any attention. One guy decides to share, and he has been called all kinds of names by some of the opponents to the things of Christ, but God uses this backwoods guy to stir up everybody and the president from the Christian broadcasting company said that maybe this is an awakening.

He said that there are between eighty and one hundred million Christians in the United States. Forty million of them are registered voters. Of the forty million registered voters only twenty million vote. So there is a big gap there of believers that do not say anything about anything, or do not vote. So he says now people are coming out of the woodwork, even nonbelievers, coming out of the woodwork and saying this guy has a right, especially if you ask his opinion, his right is to share his religious views. He has that right. He is not attacking people. He is just saying, "You asked me, I will tell you."

And so he was saying how over the years the professionals have tried to bring about a spiritual awakening in America and God uses a backwoods duck hunter to stir the pot. It is also a challenge to us because he talked about sin and people do not like to talk about sin.

And so God chooses shepherds, unclean people religiously to bring about - they are His choice. **When the angel of the Lord stood over them, and the glory of the Lord shined around them, and they became afraid with great fear.** Verses 10 through 12, the communication of the angel, **And the angel said to them, "Stop being afraid; for look, I announce good news to you of great joy, which will be to all the people; because there was born to you this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. This is to you**

the sign; you will find a baby having been wrapped in linen cloth, lying in the feeding trough." That is this manger scene.

And suddenly, verses 13 and 14, the chorus of heaven. And this is our focal point for the next few moments, the chorus of heaven. **And suddenly there came with the angel a multitude of host of heaven, praising God and saying**, now, notice this literal translation because this is what we are focused on, **"Glory in the highest to God, upon the earth peace among men of good will."**

There are two translations for verse 14. One says, *Glory in the highest to God, and upon the earth peace, goodwill toward men*. We know that one. We are familiar with that one. It is on our Christmas cards. Peace upon the earth and goodwill toward men. Another manuscript says this peace is *among men of good will*. One is pronouncing a universal peace for the world, that Christ has come to bring peace upon the earth. And another one says God's peace will be only upon those who are of goodwill, which in the Greek means *who have a good reception to the things of the Lord*. The people who are open to and are receptive to the things of the Lord, peace to them upon the earth.

We have a misconception of even the message and even the coming and purpose of Christ. The question is, did Jesus Christ come to bring peace upon the earth? To bring peace among human beings? Every human being? Or did He come to bring peace to those who are open and receptive to the things of Christ? One is universal and for the world, and the other is individual. And the text indicates that it is individual, not universal.

The Rev. Dr. Mark Richardson in the Santa Maria Times yesterday, he says that the Christmas message at the first Methodist Church in Santa Maria today will be, God With Us from Matthew chapter 1. That He is Immanuel, God with us. He says, "We wonder if God is with us as a society and a church, if we continue to marginalize our LGBTQ neighbors to second-class citizens?" That is the lesbian society. Is God really with us if we marginalize them to be second-class citizens? "We wonder if God is really with us as our nation deports mothers and fathers of children born in the United States, using inhumane immigration policies. We wonder if God is really with us as guns legally fall into the hands of the mentally troubled individuals who shoot innocent people. Jesus came to save us from our sins, including the sins of exclusion, inequality, discriminations, and inhumanity." And these are the things that He came to loose us and free us from. Somebody does not understand the message. *God with us* does not mean that human relationships are going to be better. That is not the message and is not the purpose for Christ's coming.

Now I am going to make a statement to you. You will have a reaction to it, but I want you to think about it for a while before you actually give it your full response. If every single human being on the face of the earth right now received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and Messiah, if they were truly born of the Spirit of God by receiving Christ as their Savior, every single human being on the face of the earth, there would not be peace upon the earth. Because there is still Satan and there is still sin. Even if every single person got saved, there would not be peace upon the earth still. There will not be peace upon the earth universally until Jesus Christ comes at His second coming, sets up His kingdom in Jerusalem, binds Satan for one

thousand years; so there will be no more sin, no more harm, and He sets up His kingdom, and rules in peace for one thousand years. Then there will be universal, earthly, global peace. It will never come through human effort. It will never come unless Satan and sin is removed. We will always have trouble upon the earth.

So every year at this time there is a misconception that we need to focus on Christ's coming because He came to bring peace upon the earth and goodwill among men. No. He came to bring peace upon the earth *among men of good will*.

Even Jesus, listen to this, Jesus in Matthew 10:34 says, **Do not think that I came to bring peace upon the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.** Matthew 10:35, **I came to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother or son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me.** He said, "I came to bring division, not peace." He said, "There will be a family of five and two of the family are going to respond favorably to Christ, and the other three are going to reject Christ, and there is going to be division." Not unity. Jesus said, "I came to bring division, not peace."

There will be those who are receptive to the things of Christ, those who surrender to Christ, those who receive Christ and are saved; and there will be those who reject Him. And God's peace will be only to those individuals who have a good response and a good receptivity to the things of Christ. See, peace is personal.

Ephesians 2:14, the Bible says, peace is Jesus Christ himself. He is our peace.

In Romans 5:1 Paul says that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are now at peace with Him because we have received Christ and Christ is my peace. Now I have peace with God, and I have spiritual internal peace as I live in this world of chaos. But peace is established in individuals, it is not universal or global.

And it is true we need peace on earth. That peace will never come as long as Satan and sin is in the world. Even amongst believers. I mean you can see it, believers fighting with other believers. Why? Because we are still in the flesh, and we still have our sin nature, and Satan is still around to stir up trouble. There will never be universal and global peace until Christ comes.

But until then He comes quietly, as God picks a poor family traveling to Bethlehem for the Christ child, the King of kings and Lord of lords to be born in a stable. And His first crib is a manger. And the announcement comes to shepherds, the ones that are considered religiously unclean, the ones that the religious people have no interaction with because they are unclean. But yet God chooses them to announce the coming of the Christ child. Why? Because they are receptive. They are open to the things of Christ.

Later in years, as the Lord had His public ministry it was the religious leaders that rejected Christ. It was the prominent religious people that argued against Him. Yet it was the sinners on the street there were receptive because they knew of their sin, and they knew the

burden of the consequences of their sin, and they knew when they came in front of Jesus face-to-face, they knew they needed a Savior. The righteous people, religious people, did not need a Savior.

So I share with you this text this year to emphasize our misconceptions about the birth of Christ. The Lord is not honored by the best that human beings can produce with our public celebrations. I am not against celebrating. But again, it was not a parade that took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. It was not meant for the praise of man or human effort. But Jesus Christ came lowly; through a poor family, through hard and difficult circumstances, to come into this world and bypass the high-profile public presentation of the birth of Christ because Jesus came for sinners. And the praise comes from the hearts of people who have received Christ, and sense that, and experience the release of the burden for their sins. It was not for the religious and professionals to celebrate.

Christ is celebrated in the hearts of individuals, who get together with other people who have Christ in their hearts, and we celebrate that we have peace with God. It is like an anniversary when we get together and celebrate Christmas. It is like an anniversary. We get to celebrate that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And He is our peace. He is our anchor. He is our rock. No matter what is going on around us, we have peace with Christ in our spirit. That is the message and the purpose for Christ's coming.

But we have our misconceptions. We put it into a very religious and humanly glorious outward celebration, and we miss the true meaning of the birth of Christ.

Let's close in prayer.