

**LifeSharing Lesson 1 “Getting Ready For The Rapture—Don’t Be Left Behind”  
Matthew 24:36-44**

1. What has been one of the biggest surprises to happen in your life?

***I was surprised to learn that my wife and I were going to have a baby five years sooner than we had originally thought we were.***

2. Why do health inspectors often do surprise visits to restaurants instead of calling in advance to make sure they are prepared?

***The goal of the inspection is to find out what things are like in everyday situations. The inspector knows that almost anyone can prepare for an inspection if given enough time to do so. Once the inspection is over, people have a tendency to go back to things as they usually are.***

3. What do you think God is attempting to do in the life of every person?

***God is attempting to prepare everyone for a life in eternity to be spent with him. This means God is working on changing the nature of our character. His goal is to have us yield to His Spirit in every area of our lives every day. God wants the transforming work of Jesus Christ to become a reality for us all.***

## Matthew 24:36-44 (New International Version, ©2010)

**The Day and Hour Unknown** <sup>36</sup> “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,<sup>[a]</sup> but only the Father. <sup>37</sup> As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

<sup>42</sup> “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

### Commentary

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."<sup>NIV</sup> While Jesus had given general "signs" to watch for regarding the coming of the end, he clearly explained to the disciples that the exact day or hour was not known by the angels or the Son (Jesus himself). When Jesus said that even he did not know the time of the end, he was affirming his limitations as a human (see [Philippians 2:5-8](#)). Of course, God the Father knows the time, and Jesus and the Father are one. But when Jesus became a man, he voluntarily gave up the unlimited use of his divine attributes. On earth, Jesus laid aside his divine prerogatives and submitted to the Father's will. Thus, *only the Father* knows exactly when Jesus will return.

The emphasis of this verse is not on Jesus' lack of knowledge, but rather on the fact that *no one knows*.

It is God the Father's secret to be revealed when he wills. No one can predict by Scripture or science the exact day of the Second Coming. Jesus was teaching that preparation, not calculation, was needed.

Christ designed that the day of his coming should be hid from us, that being in suspense, we might be as it were upon the watch.

*Martin Luther*

**It is good that we don't know exactly when Christ will return. If we knew the precise date, we might be tempted to be lazy in our work for Christ. Worse yet, we might plan to keep sinning and then turn to God right at the end. Heaven should not be our only goal; we have work to do here. And we must keep on doing it until death or until we see the unmistakable return of our Savior.**

**[24:37-39](#) "For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man."**<sup>NRSV</sup> This verse carries on the theme initiated in [24:36](#) regarding the unexpected nature of the Second Coming and its connection with the need for vigilance. The first outpouring of God's judgment upon sinful people in *the days of Noah* has a natural connection with the final outpouring at the Lord's return. People will be going about their daily business, just as they were in Noah's time ([Genesis 7:17-24](#)). Just as the flood caught them unawares (and after it was too late) and swept them away in judgment, so it will be at *the coming of the Son of Man* (see also [1 Peter 3:20-21](#)).

**[24:40-42](#) "Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."**<sup>NKJV</sup> To further illustrate the suddenness of his return, Jesus pictured "business as usual" in Palestine—the men out working in the field; the women doing domestic chores such as grinding grain. The Second Coming and the angels' accomplishment of their task of "gathering the elect" ([24:31](#)) will happen so suddenly that in the blink of an eye, one of those people may be taken and the other left. The reason? One was ready and one was not. Because no one except the Father knows when Christ will return (the "you" in "you do not know" points to every one of us), Jesus explained that believers must be on guard and alert, constantly ready for him to come at any time. Christ's second coming will be swift and sudden. There will be no time for last-minute repenting or bargaining. The choice that people have already made will determine their eternal destiny.

Jesus commanded his followers to *watch*. "Watch" is an Old Testament concept, arising out of the necessity of maintaining constant vigil on city walls against marauding bands. It also referred to the spiritual vigilance needed to keep people from wandering away from God. In the context of the Olivet discourse, it is active rather than passive. A person maintains vigilance not by passively waiting, but by engaging in good deeds and active discipleship.

---

### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### VIGILANCE

Jesus urged his followers to be ready and waiting for his return. Why is this spiritual preparation so important in each believer's life?

*Spiritual preparation is commanded by God. Jesus' purpose in telling about*

his return is not to stimulate predictions and calculations about the date, but to warn us to be prepared. Will you be ready? The only safe choice is to obey him today ([Matthew 24:46](#)).

*Spiritual preparation is active.* Jesus asks us to spend the time of waiting taking care of his people and doing his work here on earth, both within the church and outside it. This is the best way to prepare for Christ's return.

*Spiritual preparation is focused on Christ's coming.* Knowing that Christ's return will be sudden and unexpected should motivate us always to be prepared. We are not to live irresponsibly— sitting and waiting, doing nothing; seeking self-serving pleasure; using his tarrying as an excuse not to do God's work of building his kingdom; developing a false security based on precise calculations of events; or letting our curiosity about the end times divert us from doing God's work.

---

**[24:43-44](#) "But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."**<sup>NRSV</sup> Jesus' purpose in telling about his return was not to stimulate predictions and calculations about the date, but to warn his people to be ready. In this simple parable, Jesus again pointed out the need for constant vigilance. A homeowner cannot know when a thief might come to break into his home, so he must be always prepared. So with the return of Christ. He will come *at an unexpected hour*.

---

### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### WHEN JESUS RETURNS

At the hour when zealous Christian teachers predict Jesus to return, you can be pretty sure it won't happen. Jesus' schedule is simply not available. No one knows. Yet the uncertainty of the time is no excuse for apathy.

- God's Good News must get everywhere. What role can you play in helping your neighbor, or people far away, come to faith in Jesus?
- God's church should be everywhere, helping people worship and building up their faith. What can you do to help?
- God's people should work everywhere, striving to advance God's interests in public justice, housing, health, environmental maintenance, recreation, etc. What are you doing about it?

This is Jesus' agenda. When he comes, we ought to be caught doing it.

---

4. In the above verses, Jesus is talking about the event that we call the rapture. How is the rapture different from the second coming of Christ. See the passage below on the second coming:

## **2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 (New International Version, ©2010)**

<sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. <sup>8</sup> He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might

The Rapture is the taking of believers out of this world in an instant. Rapture means to be caught up. It is not a word that actually appears in the bible so you will not find it in concordance. The rapture is an event that takes place with no notice and it appears to be a silent event as well. There are three different views of the rapture as to when it occurs concerning the second coming of Christ. In each view, the rapture precedes the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming but by a different amount of time in between. The second coming of Jesus refers to the event in which everyone will see Jesus coming in the glory of the clouds accompanied by his angels to bring destruction on the world.

**RAPTURE** The catching up of believers by Christ at the time of His return. The word came into use by way of the Latin *rapio* used to translate the Greek term of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, *harpagesometha*. Living believers are said to be “caught up” to meet the Lord at His coming. Those of varying millennial views about end time events all hold firmly to the biblical truth of such a rapture. However, it is within the premillennial view that the teaching of a rapture finds major emphasis. This view sees a tribulation period immediately before the second coming of Christ. Pre-tribulationists see the rapture occurring prior to the tribulation. This approach places the church in heaven during the time of tribulation on earth. Mid-tribulationists place the rapture at the mid-point of a seven-year tribulation period. The church remains on earth for the first half of the tribulation, but escapes the last half which is seen to be the time of intense or great tribulation. This view, along with the previous one, sees the second coming of Christ in two phases. The first phase will be a secret coming in clouds to rapture the church. The second will be His return with the church to reign on earth. Post-tribulationists hold the church will remain on earth during the tribulation period. While that time will be one of wrath upon the world system, the church will be protected from divine wrath although experiencing tribulation.

This view avoids dividing the return of Christ into two phases. See Eschatology; Future Hope; Tribulation. *Jerry W. Batson*

**Effects of Christ's Second Coming** The second coming is to effect believers in a number of different ways: Believers are to be watchful. There being no certainty as to the time of Jesus' return, it is important that we be on the alert as to the possibility that it may come at anytime (Matt. 24:42). However, they are not to believe that Christ must return in a given space of time, on a specific date. In His parable of the foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) Jesus told of them sleeping and not being ready when the Bridegroom came (compare Jas. 5:7-8. Peter warned against unbelief that could blunt the expectant spirit and cause people to say, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:3-4). The believers are to use the hope of Christ's second return as a motivation to work. In His parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), Jesus reserved His condemnation for the man who did nothing, simply taking his talent and hiding it. Convinced that their Lord will return at any moment the believers will give all their energies to serving Him. Because Jesus may return at anytime a believer strives to live a pure and blameless life: "Every man that hath this hope purifieth himself" (1 John 3:3; compare 1 Thess. 3:13; Col. 3:1-17; 1 John 2:28).

5. With so much being at stake in the rapture, why do you think God just doesn't tell us when it's going to happen so that we can all be ready?

***God knows that human nature will be tempted to wait until the last minute to try to get in at the deadline. God's desire is to have a love relationship with Him right now because we choose to seek after Him. If all of our motivation for serving God is out of a fear of missing the rapture, then we have not fully understand why God reached out to save us. Everyday we live without God, is a day we have missed God's will and purpose for our lives. It's not that we are to be ready at the rapture, we are to be ready everyday because we choose to make time for the Lord in our lives.***

6. What appears to be the difference maker for those who make the rapture and those who do not?

***Those who make the rapture are those who are living in obedience to God on a regular daily basis as though they expected the Lord to return at any moment. Out of love, they want to be ready whenever God calls them out. Those who do not make the rapture are those who are busy with the everyday events of life. Their priorities are caught up in the things of this world and not necessarily the call of Christ upon their lives. If you looked at their lives, it would be hard to see much of a difference than from a non-believer.***

7. Knowing that the rapture can take place, and your loved ones may be left behind, how should that motivate us in our Christian walk.

***If we really believed what Jesus said, we would be reaching out more in sharing the gospel with others, especially those we love. We should be motivated to allow Christ to live in and through us more than ever, so that even if they do not believe our words, they have to be moved by our actions.***

8. What does it mean to be ready in Matthew 24:44?

***A person who expects his house to be broken into, will take all the necessary precautions to make sure it does not happen. People would be stationed on the outside and inside of the house to prevent the threat from becoming a reality. To be ready means that we thoroughly examine our lives for the weaknesses we have in our lives and in our character through which Satan might attempt to enter into our lives. In stead of saying, that's just how I am, we submit that area of our lives over to Jesus so that Jesus can change us into what we ought to be. Being ready means doing a thorough on going check of the things that could go wrong in the way a pilot goes through a number of steps before taking off in a plane. We have to take offensive and defensive steps in order to be ready. Sometimes the easiest way to overcome a temptation is to take the offensive***

**step of never arriving at the place where we know the temptation is going to occur.**

9. Why do you think we will not be expecting the rapture when it comes?

***I think that for many of us things will be going so well for us, that we won't have any sense of urgency to be about changing our lives for Christ. We will simply be enjoying the good things that this world has to offer and death will be the furthest thing from our mind. I think for some of us, we will either be so busy trying to get what others already have, that we will not have time to be concerned about God's claim on our lives. I think for some of us, we will allow ourselves to have become so discouraged by the troubles of this life, that we will think God has forgotten about us, and so we will begin to walk away from what we know we ought to be doing. We will allow the enemy to deceive us by offering us a delusion.***

10. Is the rapture a blessing or a judgment for those who claim to be living for Christ?

***The rapture is going to be a blessing for those who are sincerely seeking after Christ. It will be the end of struggles, temptations, and frustrations. It will be the beginning of a new relationship with Christ. The rapture is a judgment for those in the church, but not really living for the Lord. They will be among the people who will incur the wrath of Christ in the second coming. They will be punished for not obeying Jesus Christ.***



11. Will other good people who do not know Christ be caught up in the rapture? Why or Why not?

***The only people caught up in the rapture are those who know Christ. The rapture is based on having an active relationship with God. An active relationship is based on God's grace through Christ. We are made worthy through the work of Christ on the cross, not on the goodness we have done. The Bible makes it clear that because of the sin in our nature, none of us are good people.***

### **Romans 3:10-21**

<sup>10</sup>As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous— not even one.”<sup>11</sup> No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God.<sup>12</sup> All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”<sup>13</sup> “Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies.” “Snake venom drips from their lips.”<sup>14</sup> “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”<sup>15</sup> “They rush to commit murder.<sup>16</sup> Destruction and misery always follow them.<sup>17</sup> They don't know where to find peace.”<sup>18</sup> “They have no fear of God at all.”<sup>19</sup> Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God.<sup>20</sup> For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.<sup>21</sup> But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses<sup>22</sup> and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.<sup>23</sup> For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

12. Where do you need more work in getting others prepared for the rapture?

***I need more work on reaching out to others one to one in sharing the gospel of Christ with them. I should be taking a lot more people with me to heaven than I currently am doing.***

## Life-Sharing Lesson 2 “The Pain & Agony Of Christmas” Matthew 1:18-25

1. When was a time you tried to do the right thing, only to have someone else accuse you of intentionally doing something wrong.

*I tried to seek advice from the Presbytery Trustee Committee, before signing a lease with the Charter School at New Life. No one responded to my contacts by letter, phone, or e-mail. Months later I was accused of trying to ignore the trustees in the process. A couple of months after that, the Trustees found the initial letter I had sent to them, buried in their mailbox at the Presbytery office. They never did issue an apology.*

Matthew 1:18-25 (New International Version, ©2010)

<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about<sup>[a]</sup>: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet<sup>[b]</sup> did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,<sup>[c]</sup> because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”<sup>[d]</sup> (which means “God with us”).

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

### Commentary Material

**1:18** *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.<sup>NIV</sup> In [1:16](#), Matthew had stated that Mary was Jesus' mother, but Joseph was not his father. This needed some explanation, for, taken at face value, it sounded immoral.

Jesus' mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. Modern readers need to understand the traditions involved in ancient Jewish marriages. First, the two families would agree to the union and negotiate the betrothal, including a price for the bride that would be paid to the bride's father. Next, a public announcement would be made. At this point, the couple was "pledged." This is similar to engagement today, except that it was much more binding. At this point, even though the couple was not officially married, their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce. Sexual relations were not yet permitted. This second step lasted for a year. During that time, the couple would live separately, with their parents. This waiting period would demonstrate the bride's purity. If she were found to be pregnant during that time, the marriage could be annulled. Otherwise, the couple would be married and begin living together.

Because Mary and Joseph were pledged to be married, they had not yet had sexual relations (the meaning of the phrase "before they came together"). Yet she was found to be with child. Mary was pledged and pregnant, and Joseph knew that the child was not his own. Mary's apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma. According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had the right to divorce her. The law also explained that the penalty for unchastity was death by stoning ([Deuteronomy 22:23-24](#)), although this was rarely carried out at this time. That Mary was "found" to be pregnant indicates that she may not have immediately told Joseph, but had waited until her condition could be seen. This probably occurred after her return from visiting her pregnant cousin Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist) with whom she had stayed for three months (see [Luke 1:39-56](#)).

Removing any doubt of Mary's purity, Matthew explained that Mary was pregnant through the Holy Spirit. During Old Testament times, the Spirit acted on God's initiative (for example, see [Genesis 1:2](#)). Thus, the divine initiative in Mary's conception was made clear. [Luke 1:26-38](#) records this part of the story. When the angel announced to Mary that she was chosen to be the mother of the promised Messiah, Mary asked the obvious question: "How will this be . . . since I am a virgin?" ([Luke 1:34](#) NIV). The angel's amazing answer both surprised and reassured Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" ([Luke 1:35](#) NIV). Mary humbly accepted the angel's words, "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it be to me as you have said" ([Luke 1:38](#) NIV). Surely Mary's mind must have tumbled with concern over how Joseph would respond. She chose to trust the Lord, however, and the Lord took care of Joseph, as we see in the following verses.

---

## LIFE APPLICATION

### FULLY HUMAN, FULLY GOD

*Why is the virgin birth important to the Christian faith? Jesus Christ, God's Son, had to be free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings by Adam. Because Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without any trace of human sin. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. The infinite, unlimited God took on the limitations of humanity so he could live and die for the salvation of all who believe in him.*

*Because Jesus lived as a man, we know that he fully understands our experiences and struggles ([Hebrews 4:15-16](#)). Because he is God, he has the power and authority to deliver us from sin ([Colossians 2:13-15](#)). We can tell Jesus all our thoughts, feelings, and needs. He has been where we are now, and he has the ability to help.*

---

***[1:19](#) Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.<sup>NRSV</sup> Joseph was called Mary's husband, even though they were not yet officially married. However, they were "pledged" (see explanation on [1:18](#)), which was as legally binding as marriage. Joseph had a difficult decision to make. Being a righteous man, he did not want to go against God's laws. To marry Mary would have been an admission of guilt when he was not guilty. To have a public divorce would have exposed Mary to public disgrace, and apparently Joseph's compassion would not allow him to expose her to public humiliation. Therefore, he chose the option to have a private divorce before two witnesses and dismiss her quietly. This way he could keep his reputation, while still showing compassion.***

*Evidently, Mary had not explained her visit from the angel to Joseph at this time. Joseph only resolved to dismiss Mary after her condition had become visible ([1:18](#)). And the angel's words in [1:20](#) indicate that Joseph did not know the Holy Spirit's role in Mary's pregnancy. So, Joseph thought he had only two options: divorce Mary publicly or dismiss her quietly, but God had another option for Joseph.*

*God often shows us that we have more options than we think. Although Joseph seemed to be doing the right thing by breaking the engagement, God helped him make the best decision. We should always seek God's wisdom, especially when our decisions affect others.*

**1:20** But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."<sup>NRSV</sup> As Joseph began to move forward on his decided course of action, God intervened. The conception of Jesus Christ was a supernatural event beyond human logic or reasoning. Because of this, God sent angels to help certain people understand the significance of what was happening (see [2:13](#), [19](#); [Luke 1:11](#), [26](#); [2:9](#)). In this case, an angel appeared to him in a dream. Dreams function in the Bible as a means to convey God's message to people. They occur in three major portions of the Bible: [Genesis 20–41](#); [Daniel 1–7](#); [Matthew 1–2](#). Based on [Numbers 12:6](#), Jews believed that God communicated his will in dreams. In Matthew, dreams are used repeatedly to guide people ([2:12-13](#), [22](#); [27:19](#)). God used dreams in a special way during these key times. We can benefit spiritually from our dreams, but there is no certainty that they are authoritative messages from God.

Angels are spiritual beings, created by God, who help carry out his work on earth. They bring God's messages to people ([Luke 1:26](#)), protect God's people ([Daniel 6:22](#)), offer encouragement ([Genesis 16:7ff.](#)), give guidance ([Exodus 14:19](#)), carry out punishment ([2 Samuel 24:16](#)), patrol the earth ([Zechariah 1:9-14](#)), and fight the forces of evil ([2 Kings 6:16-18](#); [Revelation 20:1-2](#)). Both good and evil angels exist ([Revelation 12:7](#)), but because evil angels are allied with the devil, or Satan, they have considerably less power and authority than good angels. Eventually the main role of angels will be to offer continuous praise to God ([Revelation 7:11-12](#)). The angel who appeared to Joseph was one of God's messengers, sent to correct Joseph in his dealings with Mary.

The angel called Joseph son of David, signifying that Joseph had a special role in a special event. The angel explained that Joseph was to take Mary as his wife, for the child was to be in the royal line of David. Joseph, as "son of David," would establish that royal lineage. Joseph was not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife—no matter what the social repercussions might be. Of course, she was already his wife because they were pledged, but the angel told Joseph that instead of divorcing Mary, he should complete the marriage process and take her home as his wife. Mary had committed no sin. Instead, the angel explained that the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. God himself had caused this pregnancy, and the child would be very special—God's Son. He would also be the fulfillment of prophecy, as described in the next verse.

---

## LIFE APPLICATION

### MAKING GOOD DECISIONS

When facing big decisions, some people freeze with fright. What if I decide

wrong? What if I miss God's will? What if . . . ?

To make good decisions, first take all these worries and put them under God's promise: God cares for you, watches over you, and guides your steps.

Joseph came to the best decision he could, but God had other plans and made them clear. Most of our decisions will not be overruled by angels, but that's no reason for lack of confidence. To make good decisions, pray, evaluate all the options, talk with trusted friends, then act in faith. God is with you, every step.

---

**1:21** *"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."<sup>NKJV</sup> The angel's message included telling Joseph what was to come and what he should do. There seems to have been no doubt that Joseph would hear and obey. Mary would give birth to a baby boy. Joseph was to name the child Jesus. "Jesus" is the Greek form of "Joshua." The name means "the Lord saves." Jesus' name identified him as the one who would bring God's promised salvation. The baby Jesus would be born to save His people from their sins. From the very start, the book explains, to a Jewish audience, that Jesus would not save the people from Rome or from tyranny, nor would he set up an earthly kingdom. Instead, Jesus would save people from sin. The words "his people" form a mystery to be unfolded in the pages of Matthew's Gospel. Who were "his people," and how would Jesus save them from their sins? The answers to these questions will be found in the unfolding story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.*

---

## LIFE APPLICATION

### A NEW LIFE

Jesus came to earth to save us because we can't save ourselves from sin and its consequences. No matter how good we are, we can't eliminate our alienation from God. Only Jesus can do that. Jesus didn't come to help people save themselves; he, and he alone, came to be their Savior from the power and penalty of sin. Thank Jesus for his death on the cross for your sin, and then ask him to take control of your life. Your new life begins at that moment.

---

**1:22-23** *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."<sup>NIV</sup> Throughout his Gospel, Matthew*

*delighted in quoting or alluding to Old Testament Scripture to show how Jesus fulfilled it. Jesus was to be called Immanuel—which means "God with us," as predicted by Isaiah the prophet ([Isaiah 7:14](#)). Jesus was God in the flesh; thus, God was literally "with us." The point was not that Jesus would ever bear the name "Immanuel," but rather this name described Jesus' role—to bring God's presence to people. Jesus Christ, who was himself God ([John 1:1](#)), brought God to earth in his human body—living, eating, teaching, healing, dying. Matthew closed his Gospel with the same promise of "God with us" because, before his ascension, Jesus promised his followers, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" ([Matthew 28:20](#) NKJV). Perhaps not even Isaiah understood how far-reaching the meaning of "Immanuel" would be.*

*Matthew quoted [Isaiah 7:14](#) probably from the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament (the Septuagint). In [Isaiah 7:14](#), "virgin" is translated from a Hebrew word used for an unmarried woman old enough to be married, one who is sexually mature (see [Genesis 24:43](#); [Exodus 2:8](#); [Psalm 68:25](#); [Proverbs 30:19](#); [Song of Solomon 1:3](#); [6:8](#)). Some have compared this young woman to Isaiah's young wife, who gave him a son ([Isaiah 8:1-4](#)). This is not likely because she had already borne a child, Shear-Jashub, and her second child was not named Immanuel. Some believe that Isaiah's first wife may have died, and so this is his second wife. It is more likely that this prophecy had a double fulfillment. (1) A young woman from the house of Ahaz who was not married would marry and have a son. Before three years passed (one year for pregnancy and two for the child to be old enough to talk), the two invading kings would be destroyed. (2) [Matthew 1:23](#) quotes [Isaiah 7:14](#) to show a further fulfillment of this prophecy in that a virgin named Mary conceived and bore a son, Immanuel, the Christ.*

*[1:24](#) When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.<sup>NRSV</sup> The angel had spoken to Joseph "in a dream" ([1:20](#)), so immediately when Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. Joseph had been faced with a difficult choice after discovering that Mary was pregnant. Although he knew that taking Mary as his wife might be humiliating, Joseph chose to obey the angel's command to marry her. He did not hesitate. The decision was no longer difficult, for he simply did what he knew God wanted him to do. His action revealed four admirable qualities: (1) righteousness ([1:19](#)), (2) discretion and sensitivity ([1:19](#)), (3) responsiveness to God ([1:24](#)), and (4) self-discipline ([1:25](#)).*

*Apparently Joseph broke with tradition and took her as his wife, even though the customary one-year waiting period had not passed. However, Joseph did as God commanded and "completed" their marriage by taking Mary to live with him. No matter what the social stigma, no matter what the local gossips thought about this move, Joseph knew he was following God's command in marrying and caring for Mary during her pregnancy.*

---

## LIFE APPLICATION

### **"BUT WHAT WILL EVERYONE THINK?"**

**Joseph changed his plans quickly after learning about God's plan for his life from the angel. He obeyed God and proceeded with the marriage plans. Although others may have disapproved of his decision, Joseph went ahead with what he knew was right. Sometimes we avoid doing what is right because of what others might think. Like Joseph, we must choose to obey God rather than seek the approval of others.**

---

**1:25 But had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.<sup>NRSV</sup> To squelch any doubts about the conception and birth of Jesus while Mary was still a virgin, Matthew explained that Joseph had no marital relations with her until after the son was born. These words also set aside the notion that Mary lived her whole life as a virgin; after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary consummated their marriage, and Jesus had several half brothers (12:46). Two of Jesus' half brothers figured in the early church—James, leader of the church in Jerusalem, and Jude, writer of the book that bears his name.**

**Traditionally, baby boys were circumcised and named eight days after birth. Luke records that "on the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus" (Luke 2:21 NIV). Joseph did everything that God had told him through the angel (1:21), naming the baby his God-given name: Jesus.**

**Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.**

2. Mary had been told by the angel Gabriel, that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and that she would have a son. She was to name Him Jesus. Mary then left Nazareth in Galilee went to a small town in the hill country of Judea and stayed with her aunt Elizabeth and uncle Zechariah for 3 months. When she returns home, she is 3 months pregnant. What agony did God allow to enter her life because of this?

**Mary had no witnesses of the angel speaking to her. She left engaged to be married to Joseph. She's away for three months and comes back pregnant. God allowed her to be the center of gossip as to whom she had been seeing in Nazareth. It is unlikely that Elizabeth made the trip back with Mary because Elizabeth would have recently given birth to her son John. So Mary would not even have Elizabeth's testimony to back up her story. Mary's willingness to say yes to being used by God, caused her agony with her parents as well as with the**



**man she was to marry. Her family must have reminded her of the shame and embarrassment her actions had caused them.**

3. The facts were all against Mary in terms of her unfaithfulness. How is it possible that we can have all the facts before us, and still be wrong about another person's behavior?

***There are times when all the facts will not add up. We will come to a wrong conclusion. This is why its important to trust each other and be willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt. We can't always know what another person's motive was for why he/she did something, without getting it directly from them. We can make guesses, but we can't always know. When the Spirit of God is involved, it may add another whole layer to the facts. Sometimes God will ask us to do something that seems as though the choice we are making is completely illogical and a rejection of good common sense. But we have to do it anyways. When we do, it can be very difficult to get others to understand or to approve of our actions.***

4. How does our misreading the facts cause agony in other people's live?

***Sometimes jumping to our own conclusions can sincerely damage our relationships to other people. Doing so has destroyed relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, best of friends, employer and employee relationships. We may be told that someone said something about us, when in reality the statement was taken out of context. We may then go on the attack against the person who allegedly made the comment, only to find the person is hurt and shocked to think that we would have thought so little of them to have believed the statement. The agony can go in both directions.***

***Remember we are warned in Proverbs 18:17 (NIV) .***

***<sup>17</sup> The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him. The first side of any story is not necessarily the true side of the story. It may only be true from that person's perspective. There is the way I see it, the way you see it, and the way God sees it. Those may be the same, but they may all be quite different from each other.***

5. Why do you think God did not tell Joseph what God was doing from the very beginning to keep Joseph from being in agony over Mary's news of being pregnant?

***God is doing a work in Joseph through his agony. Joseph needs to learn what it is to believe the Lord speaks to his wife. He needs to learn how to trust her and humble himself before her. He needs to learn how to hear from God. Joseph needs to learn how to pay whatever price is necessary to protect this child's life who is coming into the world. His agony pushes him closer to God and ultimately pushes him back to Mary. There's no guarantee that Joseph would have responded with the same yes to the angel's message as Mary did. If they had of been together, it may have been that Joseph could have talked Mary out of offering herself in this matter. Only God knows why God does certain things in certain ways.***

6. We often want God to show us some kind of a sign when something bad is going to happen to us or come into our lives. Why doesn't God do this for us?

***We have a false idea that somehow God wants us to be happy all the time, and not experience any pain in our lives. It is often through pain and suffering that we grow in our faith in God. We live in a dual world. We are citizens of heaven and yet we are citizens of this world. As part of a fallen world, we are going to have pain and disaster fall into our lives. That disaster is not to destroy us, but to lead us closer to God. Just think, how much advance warning would we want of a sudden disaster. Do you want to know, you will be in a car accident and left paralyzed months before it happens, or do you only want to know the day of the event? Knowing when something bad is going to happen can cause us a whole new set of agony and grief.***

7. How does Joseph keep his own hurt and pain, from lashing out to destroy Mary? What does it mean to be a "righteous person" in verse 19?

***Joseph refuses to go on the attack against Mary. He tries to break off the marriage in as quiet a way possible so that she is not attacked and publicly disgraced. To be a righteous person means that you're willing to think about what God wants you to do even in the midst of your anger and pain. A righteous person is going to strive to look at a situation from God's point of view in seeking to make choices about how to react to others. It's not an easy process. The manner in which Joseph is going about this secret divorce means that he cannot ask for a return of the dowry money that was paid to her family. He's actually taking responsibility for help to support the child financially, even though he knows the child is not his. He is showing a huge amount of compassion toward Mary.***

8. Why can we not use our own pain, as a reason or justification to seek to destroy another person who has greatly hurt us?

When we let our pain dictate our actions, rather than the Spirit which is in us, it will always come back to hurt us again. Revenge is not for us to seek, nor is it for us to administer it. We can do a lot of damage in a fit a rage and anger that we can spend a lifetime regretting. When we put our revenge into action, we never know who and how many people are going to be hurt and destroyed by it. Our revenge will never draw us closer to the Lord.

We are told in **James 1:19-20 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

9. The angel came to Mary in secret. The angel came to Joseph in private in a dream. Neither of them can prove God actually spoke to them. Why do you think God did this in such a private manner which undoubtedly caused them both a lot of pain and agony and stares of disapproval from others?

***What God is doing is larger than Mary and Joseph. If all of this had been done in public, it would have been much easier for Herod to locate and kill the child Jesus long before the wise men from the east arrived. They had no idea that the child's life would be in danger. Can you imagine what the Romans may have done to Mary and Joseph if they knew a new Jewish King had been born who would challenge their authority. Jesus needed to be able to have a private beginning so that he would not be revealed before his time. Mary and Joseph were being entrusted with the most precious gift to come to humanity. They both needed such a strong experience from God so that they would know this child was to be protected at all cost. They were to be willing to experience a lot more agony from people in order to get Jesus to the point he needed to get to in his life as an adult.***

10. This Christmas who caused you pain, that you need to turn over to God and allow yourself to be reconciled to the other person.

***I felt betrayed by a person once who left me in a time of need. I just had a hard time accepting that God had placed a different call on the person's life, and that my plan for the person was not necessarily God's plan for the person.***

## LifeSharing Lesson 3 “Why Does God Choose The Wrong Kind Of People”

### Luke 2:1-20

1. When was a time you were chosen for something and you were surprised to have been chosen?

*I was chosen to be put in the front of the batting order on the school recess ground. I was always at the end of the line, and hardly ever got a chance to bat before recess was over.*

### Luke 2:1-22 (New International Version, ©2010) Luke 2The Birth of Jesus

<sup>1</sup> In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while<sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.

### Commentary

As a historian, Luke identified the time period of Jesus' birth by naming the Roman emperor and the local governor. The contrast between Jesus, the divine King of kings, and Augustus, the first Roman emperor, would have been striking to Luke's first readers. Octavian, who had been renamed Augustus (meaning "reverend") by the Roman Senate, was the first Roman emperor, ruling all of the vast Roman Empire under his sole authority. The month of August was named after him—to honor him. In contrast, Jesus was born into humble circumstances, even having a livestock's trough as his cradle. Jesus, the beloved Son of God, did not shrink from coming to this earth to the most modest of circumstances. Augustus is the emperor who began the worldwide Pax Romana (Roman Peace), but only Jesus brings true peace with God. Jesus did not come as a conquering king but as a servant; and he calls people to follow him, in denying themselves and finding ways to serve others ([9:23-27](#); [22:25-30](#); [Philippians 2:5-11](#)).

**2:1-3** 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.)<sup>NIV</sup> Luke is the only Gospel writer who related the events he recorded to world history. His account was addressed to a predominantly Greek audience that would have been interested in and familiar with the political situation. The Romans ruled Palestine; Emperor *Caesar Augustus*, the first Roman emperor, was one of the greatest of all Roman rulers. He was a good administrator and was fastidious about the financial accounting of his empire. Augustus ended the civil war in the land and brought peace and prosperity throughout the Empire. He reigned from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14. The Roman rulers, considered to be like gods, contrasted greatly with the tiny baby in a manger who truly was God in the flesh.

A Roman *census* (registration) was taken to aid military conscription or tax collection. The Jews didn't have to serve in the Roman army, but they could not avoid paying taxes. Augustus's decree went out in God's perfect timing and according to God's perfect plan to bring his Son into the world. No one had a choice about participating in the census. Thus all went to their own towns to be registered.<sup>NRSV</sup>

There has been much debate over the facts presented by Luke in [chapter 2](#). There are four key issues:

1. Did Augustus order an empire-wide census during the time that Luke reports?
2. Why did Joseph go to Bethlehem since a Roman census did not require people to go to their hometowns?
3. Why did Mary have to go with Joseph?
4. How do we date this particular census with the birth of Jesus because there is no record of a census during the days of Quirinius until A.D. 6?

The questions will be answered in order. First, did Augustus order an empire-wide census during the time that Luke reports? There is no record of a single empire-wide census by Augustus (who ruled from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14). However, there was an empire-wide policy for periodic census-taking and the resultant taxation. Luke was probably reflecting Augustus's policy as it was acted out regionally.

Second, why did Joseph go to Bethlehem since a Roman census did not require people to go to their hometowns? The normal Roman procedure only required subjects to register where they were living. However, Roman policy

often allowed exceptions for local practices. Traditional Jewish practice required registering in one's place of birth. So Joseph went to Bethlehem.

Third, why did Mary have to go with Joseph? Normally the Romans did not require women to be part of the poll tax as was the policy in Egypt, but they probably required women to be accounted for in the Syrian region. It could also be possible that Mary and Joseph desired to be together since they both knew the special significance of this baby's birth.

Finally, how do we date this particular census with the birth of Jesus because there is no record of a census during the days of Quirinius until A.D. 6? In A.D. 6, when Quirinius became governor, Syria annexed Judea to itself as part of the Roman province. A very unpopular census was taken as recorded by Josephus and mentioned in [Acts 5:37](#). Quirinius is nowhere listed as governor during the time of Herod, who died in 4 B.C. It may be possible, however, that Quirinius was the administrator of this census before he officially became governor. Censuses took time to complete, and the actual taxation could have come much later.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

2. Why do you think Luke gives us this information on the other rulers?

***Luke wants us to know that the birth of Jesus was an actual event in human history and not just some mythology surrounding the life of Jesus. We also know that when Jesus was born there was a lot of turmoil in the world at the time. We should notice that Luke does not try to give us the of the birth of Jesus. No where in the bible does it say that Jesus was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>. The date of Jesus' birth is not important. What is important is that he was actually born on a specific day in human history.***

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in

cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

## COMMENTARY

[2:4](#) 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.<sup>NRSV</sup> Certainly Joseph would not have chosen to travel either with or without his pregnant wife just as she was ready to deliver, but he had no choice. Rome was far too powerful for anyone to resist. Most Jews hated taking part in a census because they viewed it as sacrilegious.

God alone was to number his people. When David attempted to number Israel, he brought great calamity on the nation because of his rash decision ([2 Samuel 24](#); [1 Chronicles 21](#)). So Joseph had two reasons to be angry about the census. Joseph *also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem*, a journey of about seventy or eighty miles (see map). In the Old Testament, the "city of David" generally referred to Jerusalem ([2 Samuel 5:7, 9](#)), but Bethlehem was where David grew up ([1 Samuel 16](#); [17:12](#); [20:6](#)).



### *The Journey To Bethlehem*

*Caesar's decree for a census of the entire Roman Empire made it necessary for Joseph and Mary to leave their hometown, Nazareth, and journey the 70 or 80 miles to the Judean village of Bethlehem. This village was about 5 miles from Jerusalem.*



God controls all history. By the decree of Emperor Augustus, Jesus was born in the very town prophesied for his birth ([Micah 5:2](#)), even though his parents did not live there. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem because Joseph was *descended from the house and family of David*. In fact, both Joseph and Mary were descendants of David. Old Testament prophets predicted often that the Messiah would be born in David's royal line (see, for example, [Isaiah 11:1](#); [Jeremiah 33:15](#); [Ezekiel 37:24](#); [Hosea 3:5](#)).

[2:5](#) He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.<sup>NRSV</sup> Luke does not explain why Mary made this difficult trip with Joseph. Some suggest that she was needed for the census—unlike the policy in Egypt, women in Syria were subject to the poll tax. Certainly Joseph did not want to leave Mary alone. She probably had already faced painful gossip because of her premarriage pregnancy and preferred to stay with Joseph. Or perhaps they simply both saw the outworkings of God's plan and traveled to Bethlehem where the promised child was to be born ([Micah 5:2](#)). At this point, Joseph and Mary were *engaged*. The two were living together, but they abstained from sexual relations. [Matthew 1:24-25](#) explains that an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream about Mary's condition: "When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus" (NRSV).

---

[2:6-7](#) So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 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.<sup>NKJV</sup> In simple, direct language, Luke presented the Christmas story: no trees or lights, just a *manger* and animals and a too-crowded inn. It isn't surprising that there was *no room for them in the inn* considering the number of travelers flocking to various cities during the time of this census.

At some time during their visit in Bethlehem, *the days were completed* and the promised child was born.

Of course, he was *her firstborn Son*—Mary had had no previous children (indeed, she was a virgin), and the angel had promised that the child would be "Son of the Most High" ([1:32](#)). Mary wrapped the baby in *swaddling cloths*, bands of cloth that were used to keep a baby warm and give it a sense of security. These cloths were believed to protect its internal organs. This custom of wrapping infants is still practiced in many Mideastern countries. Apparently Mary and Joseph

The twist in the story is, of course, that it is the very pagan authorities who are responsible for bringing Jesus to Bethlehem. Caesar, like Cyrus before him, unknowingly becomes the servant of God's purpose. The promise is fulfilled through the actions of the unlikeliest of people. For God is Lord of all the earth and there is no power not under his authority, no

accomplished the delivery themselves; otherwise, a midwife would have wrapped the child.

poverty to which he turns a blind eye of indifference.

*June Osborne*

After the birth and after the child had been cleaned and wrapped, Mary *laid Him in a manger*, an animal's feeding trough. She may have filled the manger with hay to make a soft bed. This mention of the manger is the basis for the traditional belief that Jesus was born in a stable. Stables were often caves with feeding troughs (mangers) carved into the rock walls. Despite popular Christmas card pictures, the surroundings were dark and dirty. Everything pointed to obscurity, poverty, and even rejection. Luke showed the King of kings born into poor and humble circumstances—born as a human, born to serve.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

3. Why does God not make better provisions for Mary and Joseph in the above Scripture passage since he knew they would be going to Bethlehem?

The government forced Joseph to make a long trip just to pay his taxes. His fiancée, who had to go with him, was going to have a baby any moment. But when they arrived in Bethlehem, they couldn't even find a place to stay. Doing God's will often takes people out of their comfort zones. Jesus' life began in poverty. Later, Jesus would stress to his disciples what it meant to have no place to lay one's head ([9:58](#)). Those who do God's will are not guaranteed comfortable lives. But they are promised that everything, even their discomfort, has meaning in God's plan.

4. Why does God not always provide a small miracle when we get into a jam? Is it always God's will for us to have the very best as His children?

***We have to move beyond the simplistic belief that God exists in order for me to be happy. Even people with great faith will know suffering in their lives. In***

**Hebrews 11 included in the hall of faith is a group of people who may have not obtained the answer they had hoped to obtain. Hebrews 11:35 -40 There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were put to death by stoning,<sup>[e]</sup> they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— <sup>38</sup> the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup> These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. <sup>40</sup> God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.**

**The best for us from God's perspective is to remain faithful to Him regardless of the circumstances around us. God creates all the days of our lives regardless of what comes into our lives in a particular day. Faith is not demanding God do something specific for us. Faith is knowing that God is at work in our lives even when it looks as though everything is falling to pieces.**

5. God bypasses the important people listed in verse 1 and 2 and sends the angels to talk to the shepherds. Why does the Lord bypass the important people and go to the shepherds who were the despised members of the society?

**God is always free to choose whom he wants to make a difference in this world. From the beginning Jesus does not know any thing for help from the rich and the powerful. They had nothing to do with the announcement of his birth or the preservation of his life. From the dirty manger, Luke moved to *the fields nearby*, outside the village. It was *night*. *Shepherds* were there, *keeping watch over their flocks*. Among the occupations, shepherding had a lowly place. They were outcasts, not allowed in the city and not trusted by the general public, for often they were thieves. Luke gave this story about the shepherds for a reason. Jesus would come, not to the proud and powerful, but to the outcasts, the humble, those considered "last" on the social lists. To these men God brought the first news of his Son's arrival.**Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

6. Why is it hard to predict who God is going to choose for a certain task?

***God does not look at people in the way that we look at them. We see people as they are. God sees their hearts, and whether or not their hearts would respond to the leading of God's Spirit. We also do not know what all is going to be needed to get a job done, but God does. Who would have thought that a persecutor of Christians like Saul could become the great and humble apostle Paul. Only God could foresee something like that taking place. We also cannot see all the hidden gifts that God has buried inside a person's heart.***

**<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." <sup>15</sup> 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."**

### **Commentary**

**Shepherds also have other implications in this story of the Messiah's birth. King David, from whom this new king is descended, had been a shepherd most of his life. God had called him from that occupation to become a "shepherd"**

over the nation of Israel ([2 Samuel 7:8](#)). Scripture often uses shepherds to symbolize all who care for God's people, including God himself ([Psalm 23:1](#); [Isaiah 40:11](#); [Jeremiah 23:1-4](#); [Ezekiel 34:23](#); [Hebrews 13:20](#); [1 Peter 2:25](#); [5:2](#)).

[2:9-10](#) And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."<sup>NKJV</sup> As these shepherds were living in the fields under the sky, suddenly a bright light broke through the darkness. *An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.* They recognized that this was a supernatural being because of the dazzling light, "the glory of the Lord" that was shining all around them. "Glory" refers to the majesty and splendor accompanying God's presence (see also [Exodus 16:7](#); [24:17](#); [Psalm 63:2](#); [Isaiah 40:5](#)).

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### JUST AS YOU ARE

The greatest event in history had just occurred! The Messiah had been born! For ages the Jews had waited for this, and when it finally happened, the announcement came to humble shepherds. The good news about Jesus is that he comes to all types of people, including the plain, the ordinary, and the outcasts of society. He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept him. Whoever you are, whatever you do, you can have Jesus in your life. Don't think that you need extraordinary qualifications—Jesus accepts you as you are.

---

The stunning display of God's glory and the appearance of the angel naturally terrified these shepherds. This may have been Gabriel, who had also appeared to Zechariah ([1:19](#)) and to Mary ([1:26](#)). Both Zechariah and Mary were encouraged when Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid" ([1:13](#); [1:30](#)); the angel here also encouraged the shepherds, *Do not be afraid*. He had come with *good tidings of great joy for all people*. "Good tidings" or "good news" became another way of describing the gospel message itself; Luke used this phrase as the name for the gospel throughout the book of Acts (for a sampling of verses, see [Acts 5:42](#); [8:12](#); [10:36](#); [14:15](#)). At the very hour of Jesus' birth, the good news was already being spread supernaturally by an angel. This good news would bring *great joy*, for it comprised everything for which the Jews had been hoping and waiting—

the Savior had come. The "all people" to whom this news came was first the people of Israel (the Greek word used here, *laos*, referred to Israelites, not to people in general). While the "good tidings" would one day bring great joy to people of every land across the globe, it came first of all to God's covenant people.

The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable.

*Ralph W. Sockman*

Some of the Jews were waiting for a savior to deliver them from Roman rule; others hoped that the Christ (Messiah) would deliver them from physical ailments. But Jesus, while healing their illnesses and establishing a spiritual kingdom, delivered them from sin. His work is more far-reaching than anyone could imagine. Christ paid the price for sin and opened the way to peace with God. He offers us more than temporary political or physical changes—he offers us new hearts that will last for eternity.

**[2:11](#)** "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."<sup>NKJV</sup> The angel explained the substance of the "good news" that he brought: *There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* A child had just been born. The site of his birth was the "city of David," Bethlehem (see commentary on **[2:4](#)**).

The child is the *Savior*. The word "Savior" is used to refer to Jesus only two times in the Gospels: here as the angels proclaimed his birth, and in **[John 4:42](#)** by the Samaritans who came to believe in Jesus as "the Savior of the world." In the Old Testament, the same word (sometimes translated "deliverer" in some versions) is used for certain individuals, as well as for God (**[Judges 3:9, 15](#)**; **[1 Samuel 10:19](#)**; **[2 Samuel 22:2-3](#)**; **[2 Kings 13:5](#)**; **[Isaiah 19:20](#)**). For the Greeks and Romans, the word "savior" could be applied to their gods as well as to great military or political leaders. Julius Caesar was called a "savior." The basic meaning of the word was readily understood by Jews as well as Gentiles.

The title *Christ the Lord* is found only here in the New Testament, although the understanding of Christ as the Lord appears elsewhere (**[Acts 2:36](#)**; **[2 Corinthians 4:5](#)**; **[Philippians 2:11](#)**). The word "Christ" is Greek for "Anointed One"; the word "Messiah" comes from the Hebrew term with the same meaning. To be anointed meant to be set apart for some special purpose. Moses anointed Aaron and his sons as the first priests of Israel (**[Exodus 28:41](#)**); the prophet Samuel anointed both Saul and David as kings of Israel (**[1 Samuel 10:1](#)**; **[16:3](#)**). The title was applied to that future one whom God would raise up. The Jews were awaiting this special deliverer, one who would be the Anointed One of God, the Messiah, the Christ.

The word "Lord" refers here to deity. That this tiny baby was the "Lord" means that God had arrived in human form. Thus the angel gave no doubt as to the identity of this child. He was the one for whom all Israel had been waiting.

**2:12** "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."<sup>NKJV</sup> The shepherds did not ask for a *sign* (as had Zechariah, **1:18**), but they received one. The angel apparently expected the shepherds to immediately go looking for this child, so he told them what to look for. The baby would be *wrapped in swaddling cloths* and *lying in a manger*.

Not only would this sign help the shepherds find the right baby, it would also attest to the truth of the angel's words to the last detail. While there might be other newborn babies in Bethlehem wrapped in strips of cloth, there would be only one "lying in a manger."

A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling "darkness" on the walls of his cell.

C. S. Lewis

The shepherds were not told to look in a palace or in a wealthy home—indeed, they would not have gotten past the gates if they had. But they could go to the poor stable, receive acceptance from a poor couple, and discover the miracle baby.

**2:13-14** Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors."<sup>NLT</sup> After the angel gave the great news of God's arrival on earth, *suddenly* all heaven broke into praise, for *the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven*. John's vision of heaven recorded in Revelation reveals that there are innumerable angels in heaven: "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand" (**Revelation 5:11** NIV). One of the angels' key roles is to offer continuous praise to God. The arrival of God's Son on earth caused the "armies of heaven" to join in an anthem of praise to God. Rarely did more than one angel come; at this great event, however, all the angels joined together, praising God. The "armies of heaven" or "heavenly host" refers to a select group of angels that serve God (see **1 Kings 22:19**; **Daniel 7:10**). The story of Jesus' birth resounds with music that has inspired composers for two thousand years. The angels' song is an all-time favorite. Often called the "Gloria" after its first word in the Latin translation, it is the basis of modern choral works, traditional Christmas carols, and ancient liturgical chants. "Glory to God" focuses the praise on the one who set these events in motion, the one who controls all events on earth. He is "in the highest heaven" and is sending *peace on earth to all whom [he] favors*. The peace referred to is the peace that only the

**Messiah can bring—not peace after war or conflict, but peace between sinful humanity and the holy God. Those whom God favors are those to whom he will graciously reveal his truth. The emphasis is on God—he is to be glorified, and he will bring peace to those whom he chooses. The entire "good news," brought to humanity through the birth of Jesus, came by God's decision and grace alone.**

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

7. What can we learn about angels from this passage of Scripture above?

***We can see that angels are powerful and frightening because the shepherds were afraid. We see that angels can be surrounded by light. We see that angels come with a message from God. We see that angels can know things that we do not know. We see that there are a great many hosts of angels. We see that angels offer praise to God. We see angels are messengers from God. We see that angels are spiritual beings.***

8. What is the good news for the world as far as the first Christmas is concerned from the angel's announcement?

***The Good news is that Jesus will save the people from their sins. The long awaited Messiah has finally come.***

**<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and**



pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

9. Do you think the people believed the shepherds, and what they told them about the angels? Why or Why not.

***I think the only people who were willing to believe the shepherds would have been those with the same reputation as the shepherds. Most religious people would have thought that God would have sent angels to them long before God would have sent angels to the shepherds. That would be like a man who had been cursing and drinking outside before service coming into the church, grabbing a microphone and saying, "I just got word from an angel that said, "The Lord says....." Most of us would be very skeptical that the angel spoke to him on the front lawn, and not to those of us in the church.***

10. Would you believe a group of homeless people and dope dealers if they had told you angels from God had come to give them a message for the rest of the world? Why or why not?

***It would be hard to believe them for the same reasons stated in the answer in question 9. We have a misconception that some of us are more worthy for God to come and speak to than others. We forget that only God can read hearts, and that God is always free to choose whom God wants to choose for a task.***

11. If you had been Mary, what would the shepherds words have done for you?

***The words from the shepherd would have been a confirmation and encouragement to me. Finally someone has experienced a visit from an angel concerning the child other than the two of them. Not only that, the angels appeared to more than just one person at a time which made the testimony even stronger. Mary may have been thinking, that finally all the pieces are coming together. She has no idea of the trial that is just around the corner with the soldiers coming to kill Jesus.***

12. How do you think this experience changed the shepherd's view of God?

***The shepherds probably saw God as very angry and upset with them, who was ready to unleash His punishment at any moment. God was only concerned with speaking to the righteous people. But now they know that God can choose anyone God wants to choose to send angels to. They see God as a source of grace and forgiveness who appears even to the least of these in society. God even knew where they were and entrusted them with the good news of the birth of Jesus.***

13. How does God calling you, change your view of God?

***God is much more patient than I thought God would be. God is not nearly in as big a hurry as I thought He was.***