

Why Believe In Jesus

Luke 2:1-40

After I announced that our next series was going to be a study in the book of Luke, Robyn asked me a question. Since the study comes on the heels of Christmas, would we still consider the traditional Christmas passages found in Luke 2? The simple answer in response to her question was yes, we would go through it in sequence as it appears in the text. The challenge then is to take a very familiar passage and unwrap it in a way that addresses what is well-known so that we see something new from the context.

As we take a deeper look at Luke and specifically about what he wrote concerning Jesus we go back to the thesis of his compilation to remind ourselves that he did a **“careful investigation of everything from the beginning to write an accurate account...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:3, 4)**

We could sum it up by saying that he wrote so that what we have been taught about Jesus is not only truthful it is also what we believe and hold to. In the context surrounding the passage we will consider today and indeed the context of all of Luke, we want to see a clear picture of Jesus. We need to see beyond what He did, the miracles He performed and the lessons He taught to who He is and why He came. I think that is at the core of this passage. When we peel back the layers of the Christmas story we see the evidence of who He is and why He came. Luke’s description of Jesus’ birth helps us see that.

Take your Bibles and turn to **Luke 2:1-40**. If you grew up in church, you have heard this story every year and probably multiple times each year. It is as familiar as your own backyard. I’m sure most if not all of you could relate rather accurately the details surrounding these events. So with the understanding of your own knowledge of the

Christmas story, it has been a challenge to prepare this message.

Looking independently at each of the different scenes that unfold in these 40 verses we could isolate each one as sometimes is done and talk about the sovereignty of God in bringing a pagan ruler like Caesar to make a decree that a census should be taken of all the Roman empire.

We have the advantage of looking through the lenses of history and Scripture to know that this set the stage for the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the birth and birthplace of the Messiah. Caesar didn’t know he was putting into motion the events that would bring this about. He was interested only in the money generated from taxation and the men who were of age to fill the ranks of his vast army.

I think we would all agree that even our own President is clueless to that fact about himself, that the policies he is enacting are in some way setting the stage for the second coming of Christ. He thinks these policies are for the benefit of our society and the common good of this nation, but believe it when I say that in some way they are a precursor to Christ’s return, even though we don’t know when that will be. And that is a whole other sermon. Caesar was being a politician and doing what he thought was best for his empire, but we aren’t going to talk about that.

We could talk about the praise given to God because of the birth of the Messiah by the various characters involved in this account.

There was praise offered by the angels. **vs. 14 – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”**

There was praise offered by the shepherds. **vs. 20 – “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”**

There was praise offered by Simeon, a devout follower of God. **vs. 28 – “Simeon took Him (Jesus) in his arms and praised God.”**

There was praise offered by Anna. **vs. 38 – “Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”**

Though their praise is as unique as they are from their own diverse and individual perspective, there is a common thread that runs through each one. It is about the Savior.

Vs. 10-11 “...I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”

Vs. 17 “When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”

Vs. 29-31 “Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel.”

Vs. 38 “Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

As we peel back the layers of this passage there are three things I want to discuss today in relationship to the Savior about whom this account is written.

The person of the Savior

The purpose of the Savior

The prophecy about the Savior

I. THE PERSON OF THE SAVIOR

In our text there are three names that tell us who He is and what He is to do. One will transition us into the second point about the purpose of the Savior.

A. He Has The Name Jesus – v. 21

Jesus is the sweetest name I know,
And He’s just the same as His lovely name,
And that’s the reason why I love Him so;
O Jesus is the sweetest name I know.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

There’s just something about that name!

Master, Savior, Jesus!

Like the fragrance after the rain.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

Let all heaven and earth proclaim:

Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,

But there’s something about that name!

No other name but the name of Jesus,
No other name but the name of the Lord;
No other name but the name of Jesus
Is worthy of glory,
And worthy of honor,
And worthy of power and all praise.

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Our hymnal has many songs about the name of Jesus. It is equivalent to the Old Testament name Joshua and in New Testament times it was not an uncommon name and while others were given that name there is only one named Jesus by whose name we can be saved. When Gabriel told Joseph about the circumstances surrounding Mary’s pregnancy, he announced that when the child was born He was to be given **“the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)** This name occurs over 700 times in the New Testament. There is no other name given among men whereby we can be saved.

It is a name which means God is salvation and while His name bears witness to that fact, this Jesus was also the One through whom God's salvation would come. While in some cultures naming a child Jesus is acceptable, people in many English speaking countries consider it too sacred a name to use in naming their child. For the believer, the Jesus follower, we can sing along with the hymnist "there is a name I love to hear, I love to sing its worth, it sounds like music to my ear, the sweetest name on earth."

How precious is the name of Jesus to you?

B. He Has The Name Christ – v. 11, 26

Generally Christ is considered a title of Jesus. It was used in this way when Pilate asked "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 16:15)

Pilate referred to Jesus using His title. But many use it as a proper name of Jesus. It means Anointed One. It was a term used in the Old Testament for kings and priests who were consecrated to office by the ceremony of anointing. Christ is equivalent to the title Messiah used in the Old Testament.

Prophets in the Old Testament referred to the coming Messiah as the instrument in establishing God's kingdom in Israel and in the world. As a nation and people they very much lived in the future. In spite of national tragedy and hardship they always looked forward to that future earthly kingdom. They clung with hope to the promise of a deliverer, a Messiah. Even the Prophets who spoke of the impending threat of God's wrath for national sin looked to the future restoration of the nation in keeping with God's covenant made with them. That hope was in the Messiah.

Simeon recognized that the child born to Mary was the Christ, the Messiah spoken about in the Old Testament.

"It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ." (vs. 26) He could now die in peace knowing that the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior had come, just as God promised. Christ is the fulfillment of the words spoken by God to Adam that One would come who would defeat the serpent. He is the One spoken of by Jeremiah who would be the Branch of David.

As we have on occasion dealt with the Messiah in relation to this passage, you know that the Messiah the Jews were looking for was entirely different than the Messiah who showed up in history. They were looking for that political deliverer who would establish a national kingdom uniting the Jewish people under one flag, one who would destroy all their enemies and bring peace to the nation.

It is here that we need to pause and ask ourselves what kind of Messiah are we looking for? Are we any different from Israel in the type of Messiah we hope comes to deliver us? We may not be looking for a political leader like they did, someone to establish a kingly rule on earth. The Messiah we may be looking for is one who can deliver us from financial bondage, someone who can relieve us of physical illness, someone who can provide us with a job. We want the Messiah to take care of the immediate and tangible needs that exist in our lives. To that degree we are really not much different than Israel. Oh, don't get me wrong, He can do those things, and we see in the Gospels that's why many flocked to see Him. *They were so enraptured by what He could do, they neglected to see what He came to do – that is to deliver them from their sins.* Our immediate problem isn't finances or illness or jobs, it's sin, that's the greater need for which a Messiah is necessary.

The Messiah, the Christ who came, came with the intent to deliver from sin, anointed by God for that task. This Messiah is not just for the nation of Israel, but for all mankind. There will be a day

when He will establish an earthly kingdom and deliver His people from their enemies, but that day is still in the future. Until then, as Christ, He delivers from sin. That leads us into the next point.

C. He Has The Name Savior

The audience to which Luke is writing, Gentiles, would understand that term. That was a term Caesar used of himself. Here's what one author had to say on the matter. "In secular Greek, the word "savior" was "a laudatory name that men bestow in recognition of noble actions." Performing deeds that safeguarded the people or preserved what was precious could earn a person the title of savior. The title of savior was common used for the Roman emperor, especially denoting his ability to maintain or restore peace in the empire.

Notice how the word "savior" was used in connection with Julius Caesar: "In addition to these remarkable privileges they named him father of his country, stamped this title on the coinage, voted to celebrate his birthday by public sacrifice, ordered that he should have a statue in the cities and in all the temples of Rome, and they set up two also on the rostra, one representing him as the savior of the citizens and the other as the deliverer of the city from siege, and wearing the crowns customary for such achievements" (Dio 44.4.5).

Notice the word was also used in connection to Augustus: "Whereas the Providence which has guided our whole existence and which has shown such care and liberality, has brought our life to the peak of perfection in giving to us Augustus Caesar, whom it filled with virtue for the welfare of mankind, and who, being sent to us and to our descendants as a savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order" (Priene calendar inscription; 9 B.C.). The emperor was repeatedly

called "the savior of the world" and "the savior of the inhabited earth."

That another Savior had come ran counter to the one they had called savior, but like any manmade image he would fall far short of what he could deliver. Only the Savior born to Mary can rightfully carry that name. Only He can save from sin.

But if He is a Savior, that implies there is something from which someone needs saving.

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE SAVIOR

The angel Gabriel perhaps lays it out best in terms of the purpose of the Savior.

Matthew 1:21 – "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

After hearing the confession and repentance of Zacchaeus, that wee little man, Jesus gave this announcement about Himself. It is a declaration of His purpose for coming. **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (19:10)**

When you look at a verse like **Isaiah 53:6** or **Romans 3:23**, we understand that He came to save us. We are the ones who like sheep have gone astray. We are the ones who have turned to go our own way. We have all sinned and this Savior came specifically to save us from those sins because we are lost.

That we are introduced to a Savior early in the book isn't just to reveal the main character and establish the plot of the story, but to show us that if He is a Savior, what did He come to save? Luke is laying the groundwork for us to understand that we all need a Savior and then the rest of the book unveils the kinds of people He came to save, the very same kinds of people who live today in our world, people like you and me. They are the lepers, the

prostitutes, the diseased, the doubters and the debtors, the idolaters and adulterers, the greedy and the gaudy, the rich and the poor, the working class and societies' elite. They are the factory workers and one's who sit in little cubicles or stand at a check-out line, or deliver our mail or stand behind the counter at McDonald's and even the religious. We all need a Savior. And as Simeon announced this Savior would be **"a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."** (vs. 32)

The story of Jesus' birth describes the person of the Savior, the purpose of the Savior and finally it gives us the prophecy of the Savior.

III. THE PROPHECY OF THE SAVIOR

To begin with look at the words of Simeon in **verses 25-29**.

In some way the Lord had given a promise to Simeon that he would see Christ before he died. The Lord had not only given him this promise, he also prompted him when it took place so he could get to the Temple to see the child.

Take a look at the words of Anna in **verse 38**.

They both attest to something that until that very moment had always been in the future for them. It was something they were looking forward to. The coming of the Savior had always been a future promise and that He would be born of a virgin.

As I wrap this up, this is one of those occasions where I wish we had another Sunday or two to look at this because of how important this is. Folks, if we don't get this, we don't get the rest of Luke or the reason Christ came. The virgin birth and incarnation of Jesus are foundational truths to what we believe. If we don't believe that Jesus was both God and man, then we don't have a theological leg to stand on when it comes to salvation and eternal

life. Our salvation hangs on this hook. It is the hinge that opens the door of God's forgiveness for our sin. Otherwise it becomes the great cosmic hoax and as Paul said, our faith is in vain, futile, empty. We must believe that God became flesh and dwelt among us as John writes to have any credible hope of eternal life.

When we think of the prophecy of the virgin birth and incarnation our minds must go back to **Isaiah 7:14 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel (God with us)"**

In the late 1960's Redbook magazine conducted a poll among students from Protestant seminaries. Remember this survey was done over 40 years ago. Among those students studying for ministry 56% rejected the idea of a virgin birth. That has become the breeding ground for liberalism today.

The Survey Research Center of the University of California at Berkley polled denominations to get their view of the virgin birth. Here is the percentage of those in the denomination that believe in the virgin birth.

American Baptists - 69%
Lutherans - 66%
United Presbyterians - 57%
Episcopalians - 39%
Methodists - 34%
Congregationalists - 21%

And remember that was over 40 years ago. The percentages have continued to erode.

We need to understand how very critical it is to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin. That belief begins with the need to understand and hold to the inerrancy, infallibility and authority of Scripture. If we don't begin there then our view of the virgin birth will be flawed. **If we don't trust the Bible in some of the things it teaches how can we believe the Bible in any of the things it teaches? If we don't get**

this right then everything Jesus did and everything Jesus taught can be questioned? In effect we can say that it's all false and He's like any other religious philosopher/teacher. They're nice ideas that benefit people who need an emotional or psychological crutch to hold them up or what Karl Marx called religion as the opiate of the people. You might as well believe in the flying spaghetti monster to save you. (That is a real religion.) If one Bible passage can be proven false the accuracy and trustworthiness of the Bible falls apart.

Theologian Millar Erickson writes: "If we do not hold to the virgin birth despite the fact that the Bible asserts it, then we have compromised the authority of the Bible and there is in principle no reason why we should hold to its other teachings. Thus, rejecting the virgin birth has implications reaching far beyond the doctrine itself."

What he is saying is that if we reject the doctrine of the virgin birth then it is just a matter of time before the other doctrines fall like dominoes. Pretty soon rather than believe the absolutes of the Holy Bible we embrace the relativism of humanism. The leap isn't quite so far when you have no absolutes.

I do not believe that you can rightly call yourself a Christian and not believe in the virgin birth. I don't believe you can call yourself a Christian if you don't believe that God became a man or that Jesus was both God and man – at the same time. Both the virgin birth and incarnation of Jesus are necessary if we are to believe in salvation otherwise we might as well hope for the best and follow any religion because one becomes just as possible as another.

But the fact remains because I believe in the accuracy of Scripture that Jesus was born of a virgin and that in doing so God became a man, but still remained God. The angel announced to Joseph that Mary would be the mother of the Christ and He would be called Immanuel, which means God with us. Jesus was God come in the flesh – that is the

incarnation. Never doubt that. Some of you are going to look a little puzzled when I tell you there are five ways someone can come into this world, three of which have only occurred once. I can see the wheels of the brain churning. You'll agree with me when you hear them and they are based on the authority of God's Word.

First, there is the law of natural generation. God told Adam and Eve to go out and populate the earth. They were to come together in the natural course of things through sexual intercourse for the woman to conceive and have children.

The second way is without the agency of either man or woman. That's how Adam was created. God took a handful of dirt, spoke and man was created.

The third way is man without a woman. That's how Eve came into existence. God put Adam to sleep, did a little surgical procedure to remove a rib and made Eve.

The fourth way is through divine empowerment where God works in a miraculous way in the lives of a man and woman, both past the age of having children, so that she is able to conceive. We see that in the case Abraham and Sarah and Zachariah and Elizabeth. God miraculously opened the womb and the seed and they each had a child respectively.

Now if we accept and admit that those are valid and rational means by which God worked to bring someone into the world why is it so difficult to believe there is a fifth way, that is birth through a woman without a man, begotten as it were, by the Holy Spirit so that God became a man.

John 1:1, 14

Liberal theologians and skeptics find the uniqueness of the virgin birth to be hard to swallow. They cite mythology as evidence that it's been done before and include the virgin birth of Christ in mythology. They claim that the Christian view was copied from

other religions which are counterfeits. Let me finish with these points to help us get a glimpse of why it was necessary for Jesus to be born of a virgin, why it was necessary for God to become man.

1. To reveal God to man

John 1:18 “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.”

Hebrews 1:3 “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being...”

If we want to know what God is like all we need to do is look at Jesus.

He is the same in power – **John 3:2**

He is the same in wisdom – **John 7:46**

He is the same in glory – **I Corinthians 4:6**

He reveals God’s love – **John 3:16; Romans 5:8;**

I John 3:16; 4:10

2. To be a merciful and faithful High Priest

Hebrews 2:7; 3:1; 4:14-15

Hebrews 8:3

Hebrews 10: 1-14

Under the Old Testament sacrificial system, it was the High Priest who annually went into the Holy of Holies to offer the sacrifice for the sin of the people. As the High Priest, Christ offered His own blood as the atoning sacrifice that would appease the wrath of God and pay for the penalty of sin. Whereas the High Priest had to do this annually because the blood of bulls and goats did not save but only served as a picture of the perfect sacrifice that God demanded and would come, so Christ came and became that offering to meet the demands of God’s holy and just demands. No other sacrifice would do. His blood was the price required for redemption, the price required to pay the debt of sin. **Romans 3:23** says that the wages of sin is death.

Christ could not be born through the seed of man through whom the sin nature is passed on from generation to generation. He had to be born by supernatural means. The virgin birth is hinted at in Genesis 3:15 when God said that the One to come would be born from the seed of the woman not the seed of the man. His sinless life would be the perfect sacrifice (I Peter 1:18-19; 3:18). As man, He would not sin because as God He could not sin.

According to **Hebrews 7:25** after he finished His work of atonement, He sat down at the right hand of God in order to fulfill the other responsibility of High Priest and that was to intercede on behalf of the people.

3. To destroy the works of the devil

John 12:31 “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.”

John 16:11 “...the prince of this world now stands condemned.”

Colossians 2:13-15 “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Our belief in the virgin birth and incarnation God will set the stage for the rest of Luke, not just in the miracles that will be performed or the truths He will teach. It sets the stage for why He came – to seek and save those who are lost. If we believe in the virgin birth it stands to reason we must obey what he teaches. When we believe in Jesus we will see His transforming power in us now and for eternity.