LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

Luke 2 (Part 1) :1-40

The Birth of a Savior

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

It says, in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Let's pray at this point. Father, thank you. Thank you for your word. Thank you for your Holy Spirit, who enlightens our hearts from the word, and opens us, Lord, to what you are saying to us. Help us, Lord, we pray, to be able to really lay hold of what's here, because these words are very, very familiar.

And we pray that, rather than glossing over them, we would really stop to consider today, what you are saying, and why you moved upon Luke to write these things down. We desire to hear your voice today. Lead us in Jesus' name. Amen. I would imagine these are probably, these and the verses that are to come, are probably some of the most familiar in the whole Bible, just because even people who don't read the Bible regularly, will usually pop into church once in a while on Christmas, and they'll hear the Christmas story, and often these are read, and you know.

So, you know, we're familiar with them. Only Luke and Matthew, of the Gospel writers, cover the events of Jesus' birth, and Luke goes into far more detail than Matthew does. He begins by speaking of a census that was commanded by the Roman Empire, during this time, just before Jesus was born. And the Romans would take a census for basically two reasons. One, for obvious taxation purposes, find out how much money they ought to be making.

And the other reason was for readiness for military service, which was compulsory in Rome, except for the Jews. They exempted the Jews from having to participate in the military, probably realizing that

they wouldn't do it anyway. They would probably rather die. And so, you know, there were a few things that the Jews were actually exempted from. So when a census time came around, the Jews knew for them, it was all about paying taxes.

And although it may sound strange to you and I, the Roman Empire required their citizens to return to the place of their family origin. We don't know why, honestly. We're not really sure why. I've heard guesses, but that was what they did. And that was a big deal back then, traveling by foot or camel or whatever, or donkey.

But since Joseph was a descendant of King David, that meant making for him what was about an 80-mile journey from Galilee in the north to Judea and to Bethlehem in Judea. Today, if you're to take a highway in Israel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, it would be about 97 miles because there's no such thing as a straight path for a highway, except through Nevada, I think. I tell you, it's crazy. I've driven through Nevada a few times. You don't turn.

You just go straight, anyway. But, and if you were to take that trip today from Nazareth to Bethlehem, isn't that crazy? Those places still exist. But it would take you a little over two hours in your car. Not so quick for Joseph and Mary.

I actually got onto Google Maps and I calculated the trip because, you know, on Google Maps, you can say, how long would this take if I were walking? And so, according to Google Maps, if Joseph and Mary traveled eight hours a day, it would have taken them just over four days to go from Nazareth down to Bethlehem. Keep in mind, Mary was very pregnant. And that had to play into just how many hours a day that they could potentially travel. And suffice it to say, it was a daunting trip.

I mean, there were things along the way that could be dangerous. There were robbers. There, you know, the thing would have been fraught with various dangers. But in verse 6, if you look with me again in your Bible, it says, And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.

Again, how many times have you heard those words, those two verses? I mean, good grief. It's possible for us to become so familiar with a passage that we stop paying attention or we stop considering the implications of exactly what we're reading. For starters, we got to remind ourselves we're reading about the birth of God's son. Not my son, God's son.

That's a big deal. What that means is the God who created all things, who is over all things in the universe, and who knows no limitations, shockingly allows the woman who is carrying his son to come to a city. And instead of having the usual comforts of the day for a woman who was giving birth, this woman had none of that because, as it says, there was no place for them. And I read that and I'm kind of like, are you joking? There was no place for them?

I mean, again, we've heard it so many times, but just imagine for a moment if you heard of someone who owned, for example, a chain of hotels, maybe even luxury hotels around the world. And while he was traveling, he went into one of his hotels and wanted to stay there. And they told him, sorry, there's no room. Would you expect that to happen? I don't think any of us would.

We would, you know, and if you were the owner of all those hotels, you would say, excuse me, I own this. I own all these hotels. I own you, you know. Open up a room, you know. See, that's the point.

God owns everything. I mean, what is it that he doesn't have? And yet, there's no room. There's no room for God. It really is unthinkable.

Imagine if you owned a chain of restaurants and you walked into your restaurant and they said, I'm sorry, we can't give you a reservation. Everything's all full. Sorry. You'll have to go down to McDonald's. I mean, it's just, it's a ridiculous idea, you know.

But that's what Jesus experienced. That's what Mary and Joseph experienced. And then we read that once the baby was born, we're told that he was laid in a manger. And again, you know, we're so accustomed to the usual wooden manger at Christmas and the picture and it's become, we look at it today and we kind of go, oh, that's cute. It's nice.

Oh, it's a manger. Where can I get one of those for my baby? It was a feeding trough. And even though we think about the typical wooden trough, archaeology has shown us something else. Let me show you a picture of what troughs back that time looked like.

It's very possible that it was a stone trough. It was a cold, dirty, probably stone trough. Now, there's also a possibility, by the way, that instead of the typical warmly lit stable that we're all kind of accustomed to at Christmastime, it's very possible because we know of the geography around Bethlehem that Jesus was actually born in a cave, in which case the stone trough might have been substituted with just a hole in the wall. I mean, they would literally carve an area in the cave wall where they would put feed and let the animals just tuck their heads in there and eat. And it's very possible that that was the manger where they laid Jesus.

So, you kind of have to wonder, don't you, when you kind of hear about all this stuff and you think about it, you have to ask yourself the question, what is God saying to us in allowing all of this kind of stuff to take place as it relates to His Son and His birth and the kind of conditions that they were in? Well, you know, that's been the consideration of Bible students, children of God, for many, many years as they've thought through the birth of Jesus and how it actually went down. And men have long considered that all of these experiences that they had were kind of a picture. if you will, with a message to you and I. Because you know, God doesn't do anything by accident.

And in the sense that there were no accommodations in Bethlehem for the Christ child, there are many people who believe that's a picture of our own hearts, often too crowded to have any room for Jesus or his word because we're just so busy. We got other things going on. We got other people to entertain. We got other circumstances to deal with. And we just don't have room.

And you know, the terrible conditions into which Jesus was born are also for you and I a glimpse for us to understand the purpose for which Jesus came. Jesus did not come in his first advent to rule and reign on an ivory throne overlaid in gold and to have people at his beck and call to serve and wait upon him. He came to serve, didn't he? But more than that, I think that the circumstances or the conditions into which he was born are also communicating to you and I in no uncertain terms that the Messiah came to suffer. He didn't come to be pampered.

He didn't come into a pampered situation, you know? He came into a difficult situation. And that was on purpose for you and I to see and to understand that this Messiah is the one who came to suffer. Look at how 700 years before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah said this. He was despised and rejected by men.

Look at this, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, well acquainted. Grief was not a stranger to Jesus. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. So pretty interesting, huh? And so the message, the story of Jesus is so different than what we try to convey pretty much every Christmas.

And I'll be honest with you, I think by romanticizing it, we do a disservice to the message of what God was trying to convey through the birth of Jesus. It wasn't romantic, it wasn't warm, it wasn't friendly, it wasn't nice. It wasn't cozy, it was filthy. And it was rough and certainly nothing you would want for the birth of your own child. I wouldn't want any of my kids born in a cave or a barn and placed into a feeding trough where the animals ate from.

That's not what I'd want for my kids. All my kids were born in a hospital. One of them almost was born in the car, but we got her there on time. But you know, even so, I would have preferred the inside of a car to a barn. Wow.

So that's kind of the message, you know? God's preaching before Jesus even starts to preach. There's a message, there's a message coming through. And the message is God knows our suffering and he came to walk in it. He came to share it.

And he ultimately came to bear it on the cross. Let's read on, verse eight. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, fear not for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is Christ the Lord. Can you hear Linus talking? And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

And when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. Stop there please for just a moment. I find it amazing and even a little gratifying to read this passage and learn that the very first announcement that is made concerning the birth of the Messiah was made to shepherds. And the reason I find that kind of gratifying is because shepherds were considered by the religious elite to kind of be on the outskirts of everything for the most part. Because you see, for a shepherd to do their job on a daily basis, there was just no way they could keep up with all the ceremonial requirements of the law.

They were constantly unclean. I mean, they're constantly helping sheep give birth and they're doing this and doing that. And then you got a dead sheep, you got to pick it up and move it somewhere. Or you got a sheep that got mauled by a wild animal, you got to go take care of it. And you know, you're doing this and doing that and you're always, you're dirty.

A shepherd's life was a fairly dirty, filthy kind of a life. And so they were considered to be, I mean, think about the Pharisees. The shepherds were pretty much the opposite end of Jewish society from that standpoint of ceremonial cleanness and righteousness. And these guys are the salt of the earth, more like the dirt of the earth, people who just kind of lived and worked and got their fingers, you know, hands dirty on a daily basis. And that's who God chose to make the first announcement to.

I like that because I relate myself more to a shepherd than to a Pharisee and I hope you do too. But even so, there's reason to believe that these shepherds actually had maybe a possible special relationship. Let me kind of explain. Special not just because the angels appeared to them, but special because of the actual flocks that they took care of. We're told that they were near Bethlehem and they were keeping watch over their flocks.

And you have to understand that every morning and every evening in the temple in Jerusalem, which is about five miles away, they sacrificed a spotless lamb. Every morning and every evening. And so in order to keep up with that kind of a demand for animals, the temple authorities actually raised their own flocks. And we know, we know from what we've unearthed and other things, that they raised them near Bethlehem. So that's kind of interesting, isn't it, about it?

And you think about what it means. It's very likely that these shepherds to whom the angels appeared and declared the birth of the Messiah, the promised one, are the shepherds. It's possible that these are the shepherds who were keeping watch over the flocks that were kept for the temple services in order to raise up spotless, unblemished lambs for the daily and evening sacrifice. You know what that means? That basically means that the ones who looked after the unblemished lambs were the very first ones not only to hear, but then to go see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Isn't that amazing? And that sounds like God to me. That sounds like something He would do. Because once again, He doesn't do anything just because of happenstance. It's like, oh, there's some guys out in the field.

Let's just appear to them, you know. No, I think there was a connection. They are raising the unblemished lamb. For the temple sacrifice, let's let them go see, be the first ones to go see the spotless Lamb of God. Wow.

Verse 21. And in the end of eight days, or at the end of eight days, rather, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus. You'll remember when we talked about John the Baptist, we said that the circumcision of a male Jewish child also became their naming ceremony. And it says here that it was the

name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord as it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who first opens the womb should be called holy to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

All right, other than the naming ceremony, this passage talks about three separate ceremonies other than the naming ceremony. which was kind of added on later. First, we have the rite of circumcision, which it begins to talk about right there, and we know that, you know, when a baby was eight days old, they would bring the child in, and the child at that time would be circumcised, and we talked about the meaning of that ceremony in the last chapter. I covered it as it related to the birth of John the Baptist, and we're not gonna, you know, go through all of that again, but that's the first ceremony going on here. But the second ceremony is in verse 22.

Look with me there again. It says, when the time for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they, look at this, they brought him up to present him to the Lord. Now, that doesn't tell you everything that they did related to that, that presenting the child to the Lord. This was something that was required back in the Old Testament. It's actually given to us in the book of Numbers, and I'll read it to you.

We'll put it up on the screen so you can see it together. Everything in Israel, it says, that is devoted to the Lord is given to the priest. The first offspring of every womb, both man and animal, that is offered to the Lord is given to the priest, but you must redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. When they're a month old, you must redeem them at the redemption price set at five shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs 20 geras. So let me explain what's going on here.

Every firstborn clean male animal is offered in sacrifice, is given to the priest to offer in sacrifice, and then the meat that is left over is then given to the priest and his family. Those are for clean animals, the firstborn clean animal. But obviously, they weren't to sacrifice unclean animals. They were never to do that. An animal was unclean, and that meant unclean for sacrifice as well.

So what are you gonna do with an unclean animal, the firstborn? God says, in that case, you have to redeem it back. You present it to the Lord, and then you buy it back. Same thing with a male child. You would present the baby to the Lord.

It was kind of a way of God saying, all the firstborn belong to me, okay? Now, clean animals, you're gonna sacrifice the firstborn. Unclean animals, you don't, and obviously people, you don't. That goes without saying. But they still belong to me.

So God says, come and present them to me, because they're mine, and say, Lord, here's what you gave me, this is yours. But see, then you get to buy it back. So for those five silver things, you literally buy it back. So they came to present Jesus at the temple and say, he is yours, but then they would purchase him back, redeem him back, if you will. And of course, that money went to the priest as well, that five shekels of silver.

And that's kind of where we get our baby dedication today, where we present children before the Lord as something that the Lord has given. Although, I have to say that our tradition today is really just tradition. I mean, there's really nothing scripturally that covers the whole thing. I still think it's kind of a cool thing that we do. I don't think it's necessarily required in the word at all, but I think it's a good idea for parents to dedicate their children publicly, because it is a very cool recognition that this is the child the Lord has given, and we're making a promise to raise this child in the fear of the Lord.

And I think that that's a good thing for parents to do in front of witnesses, just like when they got married, they confessed in front of witnesses, I'm gonna love, honor, and cherish you till we part in death. In the same way, I promise to raise this child. Anyway, then in verse 24, we have the final ceremony that is given for us here, and that was for the mother who had given birth. According to the law of Moses, you see, when a woman gave birth to a baby boy, she was considered ceremonially unclean for 40 days, and that meant she was unable to go into the temple or participate in any of the temple services. That's what unclean essentially meant in a practical sense.

At the end of that 40 days, she would come to the temple and she would offer a sacrifice to the Lord, and after that period, she would be declared clean and able to enter into the temple services. Now, what's interesting is that the requirement that God originally gave for a woman who had given birth to a baby boy was to come to the temple and bring a year-old lamb and a pigeon, and they were actually two kind of separate offerings, but they would happen at the same time. However, some people, being very poor, could not afford to give a lamb. You know, it's a big deal. So there was an allowance made in the law for women to substitute the lamb with a second pigeon, or just to bring two turtle doves, okay?

In fact, the offering of two birds instead of the bird and the lamb was considered or referred to as the offering of the poor. Here's what's cool. That's what Mary offered. She offered the offering of the poor. It says, look with me again in verse 24.

And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Well, actually, the law said bring a lamb and a pigeon, but they don't mention it because that's not what Mary was able to bring, okay? So we know that, you know, and by the way, this is way before the Magi showed up. The Magi showed up when Jesus was probably around two, three years old, something like that, and brought them gold and frankincense and myrrh, which would have given them some resources, but this is way before that. This is like 40 days after his birth when she would come to do this purification.

So, verse 25. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit, into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God, and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel. And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

By the way, have you noticed how much detail Luke is giving here, and how much information he has about these intimate sort of events and ceremonies that could only really come from a parent's standpoint? By the way, that's why we believe, we think, that Luke even interviewed Mary in his investigation of all of these things, because he says things about Mary, like she treasured all these things up in her heart. How would you know that unless you talked to her? So anyway, Luke is giving us here now what we call, this is the third song that is associated with Jesus's birth. You'll remember that first we had Mary's song, the Magnificat, as it's called in Latin, when she entered Elizabeth's home.

And then we had the song of Zechariah at the ceremony of the circumcision of his son, John the Baptist, which we call the Benedictus. And now we come to a song sung by, and it's not, he didn't sing it. We call it a song because it's more like a psalm, but it was uttered eight days after, or excuse me, about 40 days after the birth of Christ by Simeon, a man that we really know nothing about other than what Luke tells us here. And that is, he was righteous and devout. That's pretty much all we know.

Well, he was an old man. Oh, and we know this, that he longed for the consolation of Israel. In other words, he was looking toward the Messiah. And he had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw with his own eyes the Redeemer of Israel. And he was very passionate about waiting for that time.

And it says that when Mary and Joseph arrived and began to do for Jesus what was required and so forth, Simeon knew that this baby, this was the one. And he just walked over and took the baby. I don't know how many, you moms, I've talked to moms before, and they'll talk about coming to church. Sometimes moms are even afraid to come to church because strangers will just pick your baby right out of your arms. It happens sometimes.

I would encourage you to ask a mom before you do that. Just ask her, do you mind if I hold the baby? Because it happens. They'll just walk up and go, oh, what a cute baby, and walk away. It's like, we're in church, we're safe.

Yeah, kinda. Now, can you imagine an old, crusty guy walking up to you, and you know that this is the. Christ child, and he walks up and he goes, thank you, you know, but he begins to speak over this child in such incredible words. A man who is so connected to God in a special way, you know, that God had communicated to him, Simeon, you're not going to die before you see the one. You'll see him with your own eyes.

Maybe he even told him he'd hold him with his own hands. And I think about guys like Simeon, and I think, you know, someone who's so connected, so in tune with the Holy Spirit, even to the point where he's just hanging out. And, you know, there's got to be a lot of parents coming in with babies and doing their purification thing and doing this and doing that, and there's got to be couples coming and going in the temple all the time. So what is it now, Simeon, just like he knows, this is the one. How does Simeon know that?

Well, he's prompted by the Holy Spirit. And I think about, you know, the closeness that someone has to the Holy Spirit to the point where they become, they're prompted that that's the one. Of all these parents and children, that's the one right there. Go there. Go look, and I'm going to keep my promise to you, Simeon, you'll be able to see this one.

And I think about that, and I think, you know, there's a passage in the Psalms that describes people like Simeon. Let me put it on the screen for you. It's very, very short. It just simply says, the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him. And look at this, and he makes known to them his covenant.

He makes known to them his covenant. You know what else that verse is really interesting to consider about is that age-old question. Well, what about all the people who have never heard the gospel? What's God going to do with them? Hey, listen, if they feared the Lord, God's going to make known his covenant to them one way or another.

That's not your responsibility or mine. It's God's ultimately. And that's what that passage says. Those who fear the Lord, he will make known his covenant to them. Verse 34 says, that Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel.

And for a sign that is opposed. And literally that means a target that people will shoot at. That's what he's destined for. So we know that not only is he a man of sorrows and familiar with grief and suffering, but he's a target that people are going to shoot at. And no surprise there.

Jesus today remains one of the most popular targets of those who like to mock and ridicule, even to the point where people use his name as a curse word. How would you like your name to be used as a curse word? And then Simeon went on in verse 35 to say, and a sword will pierce through your own soul also so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. And this is a somewhat enigmatic statement, but Simeon revealed here that Mary being the mother of the Messiah would be a painful experience for her. We know that Mary was present at the crucifixion because we're told.

Jesus spoke to her from the cross. I can't even imagine the pain that that caused her. And then finally this morning we read about a woman named Anna who was known to be a prophetess. It says in verse 36, and there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, which is really no great special tribe, but she was advanced in years having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin and then as a widow until she was 84. And I know the ESV makes it pretty clear that that's, she was now 84 years old, but there's, in the Greek, translators aren't positive whether she was lived until the age of 84 or whether she lived 84 years after her husband died, which would make her very aged.

Either way, she's an old woman, and it says she did not depart from the temple worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour, in other words, the hour when Simeon approached and began to say his words, she began to give thanks to God and speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. Stop there for a moment. You know, I think about Anna. This is another interesting individual.

She was a pretty remarkable woman. We're told here that she lost her husband after just seven years of marriage. So she was obviously still a very young woman. Girls got married very young back then. But instead of becoming bitter, she devoted herself to the Lord with prayer and fasting, never leaving the temple.

And that doesn't mean necessarily that she lived there. It just means every time there was a temple service, she was there, night or day. And even as an elderly woman, she obviously never lost hope in the

promises that God had made to send a deliverer because, you know, we're told that that was her heart. And it says in verse 38 that at the sight of Jesus, she began to just give thanks to God. Isn't that incredible?

She just looked at him and she just began to give thanks. She just started praising the Lord. Think about this, aged woman walking up to this couple, holding this little baby, and she just starts just bursting forth in praise. Oh, I praise you, Lord God of heaven and earth, you know, and on and on. And you kind of wonder, don't you, why Luke recorded these events for us because nobody else did.

I think Luke is doing this to confirm that the coming of the Messiah was revealed by others who stepped forth and made statements. And there probably were a whole lot more than this. And then Luke ends by saying in verse 39, and when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own town of Nazareth, and the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him. That's where we're gonna stop for this morning. Let's go ahead and stand.

And we're gonna close together in prayer. I hope that this very familiar story, these stories, you know, take on a new meaning and emphasis, I guess, in your heart as we kind of think about God becoming a man. John didn't even cover the birth at all. All John said was, and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us. That covered it all right there in one verse.

Luke goes into all this detail. But don't you love the varying ways that they did cover these sorts of things and the beauty of the story and the purpose of God that is played out in these passages. We're gonna have some people down front to pray with you. If you need prayer this morning, we encourage you to take advantage of that. Let's pray.

Father, thank you so much for giving us time together today in the word. And we pray for your Holy Spirit to continue to speak to us as the day moves on about the things that we've read here and the importance of them. And Lord, how Jesus came to share our suffering, to walk in it, and then to suffer for us on the cross, bearing our sin. Thank you, Father, for your incredible goodness. Teach us continually to serve you with a whole heart and guide us that our hearts might long for you more than any else.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.