**Monday Evening Bible Study**

**December 19, 2022 – Luke 2:1-20**

**Immediate Context**

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| Luke 1:1-4 Dedication to Theophilus | **Luke 2:8-20 The Shepherds and the Angels** |
| Luke 1:5-25 The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold | Luke 2:21 Jesus Is Named |
| Luke 1:26-38 The Birth of Jesus Foretold | Luke 2:22-38 Jesus is Presented in the Temple |
| Luke 1:30-45 Mary Visits Elizabeth | Luke 2:39-40 The Return to Nazareth |
| Luke 1:46-56 A Song of Praise | Luke 2:41-52 The Boy Jesus in the Temple |
| Luke 1:57-66 The Birth of John the Baptist | Luke 3:1-20 The Proclamation of John the Baptist |
| Luke 1:67-80 Zechariah’s Prophecy | Luke 3:21-22 The Baptism |
| **Luke 2:1-7 The Birth of Jesus** | Luke 3:23-38 The Ancestors of Jesus (Genealogy) |

**Helpful Scriptures**

**Genesis 35:16–26 (NRSV) – The Burial of Rachel in Bethlehem**

16 Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. 17 When she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her, “Do not be afraid; for now you will have another son.” 18 As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), 20 and Jacob set up a pillar at her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel’s tomb, which is there to this day. 21 Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. 22 While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine; and Israel heard of it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. 23 The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob’s firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. 24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 25 The sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s maid: Dan and Naphtali. 26 The sons of Zilpah, Leah’s maid: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

**Genesis 48:1–7 (NRSV) – Jacob Blesses Joseph’s Sons – Rachel Buried at Bethlehem**

**Judges 17 (NRSV) – Micah and the Levite**

**Judges 19–21 (NRSV) – The Levite’s Concubine, Gibeah’s Crime, and the Other Tribes Attack Benjamin**

**Ruth 1-4 (NRSV) – Ruth and Boaz from Bethlehem**

**1 Samuel 9:27–10:8 (NRSV) – Samuel Anoints Saul**

**1 Samuel 16:1–13 (NRSV) – David Anointed as King**

**1 Samuel 17:1–16 (NRSV) – David and Goliath**

**2 Chronicles 11:1–12 (NRSV) – Judah and Benjamin Fortified**

**Jeremiah 31 (NRSV) – The Joyful Return of the Exiles**

**Ezekiel 16 (NRSV) – God’s Faithless Bride and An Everlasting Covenant**

**Micah 5:2–6 (NRSV) – The Ruler from Bethlehem**

2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; 5 and he shall be the one of peace. If the Assyrians come into our land and tread upon our soil, we will raise against them seven shepherds and eight installed as rulers. 6 They shall rule the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod with the drawn sword; they shall rescue us from the Assyrians if they come into our land or tread within our border.

**Luke 10:25-37 – The Parable of the Good Samaritan and the Inn**

**Luke 22:7-13 – The Preparation of the Passover Meal**

**Key Words/Phrases**

**Emperor Augustus** – Luke’s Jesus is very “kingly” right from the start. A heavenly announcement at Jesus’s birth, which is “good news” and brings “peace,” echoes how Romans talked about the birth of Caesar Augustus, the Caesar at Jesus’s birth. Luke’s birth story is portraying Jesus, not Caesar, as king of the world.

If we turn back a bit in the gospel of Luke, the language that Gabriel uses to Mary and the language we see in the angelic announcement to the shepherds, has been compared to something called the Priene Calendar Inscription—which is from 9 BC, it’s before Jesus’s birth—celebrating the birth of the god Augustus who brings peace to the world, and whose birth is the beginning of the good news (which is how Mark’s gospel starts: The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ). So, the suggestion is that Jesus’s birth truly gives good news and Jesus is better than Caesar.

The Priene Calendar Inscription (IK Priene 14) is an inscription in stone recovered at Priene (an ancient Greek city, in Western Turkey) that records an edict by Paullus Favius Maximus, proconsul of the Roman province of Asia and a decree of the conventus of the province accepting the edict from 9 BC. The documents align the provincial calendar with the Roman calendar, honouring Augustus by making the provincial year begin on his birthday. It refers to Augustus' birth using the term "gospel." It is known as the Priene text because it was found on two stones in the marketplace of the ancient town of Priene. Other copies are known from Apamea and Eumeneia.

The inscription features the Greek term εὐαγγέλιον, evangelion, meaning "good news," which is the term translated into English as "gospel". The reference occurs in a section of the text recording a speech by the high priest of the conventus, Apollonius of Azania in Caria:

It seemed good to the Greeks of Asia, in the opinion of the high priest Apollonius of Menophilus Azanitus: *“Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (excelled even our anticipations), surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings [εὐαγγέλιον] for the world that came by reason of him,”* which Asia resolved in Smyrna.

**Quirinius** – Quirinius (kwi-rin´ee-uhs), P. Sulpicius (suhl-pi´shuhs), the Roman consul who held the position of governor (legate) of Syria for several years, beginning in 6 CE. He is the Quirinius of Luke 2:2, which reports that an “enrollment” took place during his administration, requiring Joseph to travel to Bethlehem with his pregnant wife, Mary, at which point Jesus was born. The historian Josephus also tells of a census carried out under Quirinius’s authority in 6 or 7 CE, after the banishment of Archelaus, the ethnarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. There is a historical problem, however, because Jesus is also said to have been born during the reign of Herod the Great (Matt. 2:1–22; Luke 1:5), who died in 4 BCE. A second problem concerns Luke’s reference to “all the world” being enrolled (by edict of Caesar Augustus); Josephus limits the census under Quirinius to the former territory of Archelaus. Various possible solutions to these problems have been proposed, but none has received general acceptance.

**The City of David called Bethlehem** – A small town of over twenty thousand inhabitants, about three miles southwest of Jerusalem. At an elevation of 2,460 feet above sea level, Bethlehem sits along the north-south ridge road of the central highlands. It looks westward to the fertile cultivated slopes around Beit Jala and eastward to the desolate wilderness of Judah. In the Bible, Bethlehem is first mentioned as the burial site for Rachel (Gen. 35:19; 48:7; but cf. 1 Sam. 10:2, which locates that burial site north of Jerusalem near Ramah). During the period of the judges, Bethlehem was the home of the Levite who went to act as priest for a man named Micah in Ephraim (Judg. 17:7–13). It was also the home of the family of the concubine whose brutal rape and murder led to a massacre of the people of Gibeah and a war against the tribe of Benjamin (Judg. 19–20). Bethlehem also figures prominently in the story of Ruth, the great-grandmother of David (Ruth 1; 2:4; 4:11). The city is the family home of David (1 Sam. 16:1; 17:12) and the place where he is anointed king (1 Sam. 16:4–13). After the division of the kingdom into Israel (north) and Judah (south) following Solomon’s death, Bethlehem became one of the fifteen cities in Benjamin and Judah fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11:5–12). By the time of Micah in the eighth century BCE, however, Bethlehem was only a small, insignificant village (Mic. 5:2). Following the murder of Gedaliah, the governor of Judah, under the Babylonians in 582 BCE, some of the Judean refugees stayed near Bethlehem on their way to Egypt. Subsequently, over a hundred Bethlehemites were among those who returned from the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:21; Neh. 7:26).

**The Inn** – κατάλυμα – Greek word with the prefix kata meaning “down, away, off, into, against” and the root word luw meaning “to loose.” Putting the two together, you get something like “to break off” in the sense of a journey, which makes its meaning “to spend the night.” In this sense, it means “guest room,” the place where guests spend the night. It was so–called because of the ancient travelers who on arrival loosened their own belts or girdles, sandals, and the saddles or harnesses of their animals.

The fact that the *kataluma* is better translated as “guest room” is seen in Luke 22:7-13 where Jesus disciples are told to make preparations for the Passover meal. Jesus instructed the disciples to follow a man carrying a jar of water who would meet them and when he arrived at the house, they were to say to the houseowner, “The teachers asks you, ‘Where is the guest room (*kataluma*) where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’” The text then says, “And he will show you a large ‘room upstairs’ (ἀνάγαιον), already furnished.”

There is another word for “inn” – πανδοχεῖον – which used by Luke in talking about the story of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:34). The injured man was taken to an “inn” (*pandocheion*); to what we would consider a public or commercial house where travelers are welcomed.

Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem. They find shelter with a family whose separate guest room is full, and are accommodated among the family in acceptable village style. The birth takes place there on the raised terrace of the family home, and the baby is laid in a manger.

**Wrapped in bands of cloth** –The Palestinians had a custom of wrapping a newborn child in bands of cloth (see Ezekiel 16:4 where God is equating Israel to a newborn child).

**Manger** – φάτνῃ – a box or trough, usually carved from stone, used for the feeding of animals. Traditional one room homes were split-level. There is a small, lower level for the animals at one end. And then there was a raised terrace on which the family would cook, eat, and live. The two levels were connected by a short set of stairs. Into the lower level, the family’s animals would be brought each night. In the morning, these animals would be taken out into the courtyard, and the area cleaned, and the house made ready for the day. Untying the animals and taking them out of the house was a daily chore. This is what is assumed in the question Jesus asks of the head of the synagogue in Luke 13:15. He says, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?” The animal trough could have been found on the lower portion of the house, or on the upper portion carved out of the floor where animals could reach for food when they were hungry.

**Shepherds living in the fields** – Shepherds in first century Palestine were considered unclean. It's very peculiar to find this because shepherds in the Old Testament are a symbol of God.Think of all the major Old Testament figures who were shepherds. But by the first century, the rabbis had taken the law and they had defined it in very precise terms, and they came up with lists of what are called prescribed trades (trades that you won't teach to your son if you're a good Jew) because if you have one of these trades you probably can't keep the law in a precise fashion. So, the Shepherds were on the bottom of the totem pole when it came to hierarchy.

**Sign** – σημεῖον – a significant event, act, or other manifestation that signifies God’s presence or intention. Signs may be miraculous and spectacular, as in the case of those performed by Moses before the people of Israel to demonstrate that God had sent him to them (Exod. 4:1–9, 17, 30) or before Pharaoh for the same purpose (7–11). On the other hand, a natural phenomenon such as a rainbow or a sunset may be called a sign (Gen. 9:13; Ps. 65:8), as may an identifying mark such as circumcision (Gen. 17:11) or even a prophet and his children (Isa. 8:18). In the New Testament, signs tend to be apocalyptic or miraculous, but the shepherds are told that the infant Jesus “wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12) will be a sign of God’s salvation. When Jesus is asked about a sign indicating the coming destruction of the temple (Mark 13:4), he responds by predicting natural, if catastrophic, events (13:5–13). Still, these phenomena are described in apocalyptic terms and merge with more distinctly supernatural events predicted later on in the same discourse (13:24–27).

**Heavenly Host** – The term “host” refers to a multitude or army, but in the Bible it is used almost exclusively for heavenly beings. The title “LORD of hosts” is given the God of Israel (1 Sam. 1:3, 11; 4:4; 15:2; 17:45; 2 Sam. 6:2, 18; 7:8, 26–27; 1 Kings 18:15); a slight variation is “the LORD, the God of hosts” (2 Sam. 5:10; 1 Kings 19:10, 14; 2 Kings 3:14; 19:31). This nomenclature is found throughout Psalms (e.g., Pss. 24:10; 46:7, 11) and was especially popular with Isaiah (e.g., 1:24; 3:1; 5:16), Jeremiah (e.g., 7:1; 9:16), and Zechariah (e.g., 1:4; 3:7). The title implies that God is the leader of a multitude or an army, which could in some instances be the military troops of Israel, but more often appears to be the “hosts of heaven,” angels and other beings depicted as part of God’s entourage, attendants, or court (Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 33:2; 1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:1–5). The “hosts of heaven” are sometimes associated celestial phenomena, such as stars or planets, which may have been regarded as supernatural beings (Deut. 4:19; 2 Kings 23:5; cf. Judg. 5:20). Sometimes, “the hosts of heaven” are worshiped in lieu of God by those who reject God’s commandments or worship Baal (2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 5; cf. 23:4–5; Acts 7:42). But Ezra says the hosts of heaven were made by God and worship God (Neh. 9:6; cf. Ps. 33:6; Luke 2:13). In the New Testament, the expression “Lord of hosts” is used only in Rom. 9:29 (which quotes Isa. 1:9) and in James 5:4 (the cries of defrauded harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts).

**Highest Heaven/Gone into Heaven** – In the worldview of the ancient Hebrews, heaven was a massive transparent dome that covered the earth, the firmament. The blue color of the sky was attributed to the chaotic waters that the firmament separated from the earth (Gen. 1:7). The earth was thus surrounded by waters above and below (Deut. 5:8). The firmament was thought to be substantial; it had pillars (Job 26:11) and foundations (2 Sam. 22:8). When the windows of the firmament were opened, rain fell (Gen. 7:11–12). Heaven was the place of the stars, sun, and moon (Gen. 1:14–16) and of the birds (Gen. 1:20; Deut. 4:17). It was also the abode of God (1 Kings 8:30) and where God was enthroned (Isa. 66:1; Exod. 24:9–11). Heaven and earth are sometimes included in lists of divine witnesses. Heaven was apparently called upon to witness the covenant between God and the Israelites (Deut. 32:1). When the covenant was broken, God accused Israel before heaven (Isa. 2:1; Jer. 2:12). In biblical Hebrew the word for heaven (shamayim) is always plural. Under that influence, the Greek word for heaven in the New Testament (ouranos) also frequently appears in the plural. The use of the plural probably does not mean that the ancient Hebrews conceived of more than one heaven (different heavens located in different places). By the Second Temple period, however, it was common to conceive of heaven as having multiple levels or layers. The Pseudepigrapha in particular contains many references to multiple heavens, seven being the most common notion (2 Enoch, Ascension of Isaiah). In the NT, Paul says that he knows someone (though many scholars suspect he is speaking of himself) who was “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2). Such writings also reflect interest in eyewitness accounts of what transpired in heaven. The earliest prophets of Israel had claimed some degree of access to the heavenly court (1 Kings 22:19–23), but Ezek. 1–3 and Dan. 7–12 report numerous dreams and visions of the heavenly realm. In the NT book of Revelation, an open door appears in heaven, so that the early Christian prophet John may see heavenly secrets (4:1). Christians are urged to view heaven, not only as the abode of God (Matt. 6:9) and angels (Mark 12:25; Luke 2:15), but also as the realm from which Jesus came (John 6:38), to which he has gone (Acts 1:2), in which he now dwells (1 Pet. 3:22), and from which he will return (Acts 1:11).

**Pseudepigrapha** –The Pseudepigrapha is a collection of some sixty-five documents connected with, but not part of, the Jewish Bible (Christian OT) and written ca. 300 BCE–200 CE. They are ostensibly Jewish writings, but some exist only in versions edited by later Christians, and others were actually composed by Christians who wrote from an assumed perspective of ancient Israelites or Jews.

**A Portion From Peter Enns Book: The Bible Tells Me So**

In the story of Jesus’s birth, the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear a son. He will be “Son of the Most High,” will be given “the throne of his ancestor David,” and his kingdom will have “no end.” To Christian ears, the meaning of these words gets lost in how the story of Jesus will end—with his resurrection. So Christians tend to hear a clear echo of Jesus being the divine Son of God who will rise, ascend to his heavenly throne, and reign in heaven forever. But Luke hasn’t gotten there yet.

In Israel’s ancient world, kings ruled as divine stand-ins and so were called “sons” of a deity. One of the psalms (Psalm 2) also describes the anointing of a king of Israel (probably David) that way: “You are my son; today I have begotten you.” To become a king of Israel means to be “begotten” (to be fathered) as a “son of God” in a symbolic sense. Referring to Jesus as “Son of the Most High” is Israelite king language.

Next, to sit on David’s throne in a kingdom with no end echoes the promise to David from 2 Samuel. God told David that his line of descendants, beginning with Solomon, would rule perpetually in Jerusalem. But that perpetual line was broken during the exile in Babylon, which is just one reason why the exile was so tragic to Israelite consciousness. Things had gotten so bad that God actually broke his earlier promise. Now many Jews were looking for a time when God would renew that promise: a king in the line of David to come along and pick up right where they left off. No harm, no foul.

So, if you never heard of Jesus or Christianity and read Luke talking about the birth of a son of God, who will sit on David’s throne and resume the unbroken royal line, you would draw a perfectly Jewish conclusion: Luke thinks Jesus is the long-awaited king of Israel who will deliver his people from the enemy and reestablish the kingdom of Israel in Jerusalem.

That’s certainly what Mary got out of it. While visiting her pregnant relative Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist), Mary bursts into prayer about how God has blessed her with a child, and how God is going to raise up the lowly and cut the powerful down to size, feed the hungry and make the rich go away empty. At the end of her prayer, Mary gets very specific.

*He [God] has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*

Mary’s prayer, like Gabriel’s announcement, is Israel centered. She expects that God is about to fulfill his promise to Abraham and the ancestors in the form of a liberator to deliver Israel—which at the moment means from under Roman oppression.

It helps to know that Mary’s prayer looks oh so similar to the prayer in the Old Testament of another happy mother, Hannah. Like Mary, Hannah received a son by God’s intervention. Her son Samuel would grow up to be the powerful prophet who would later anoint (guess who) David as Israel’s king. Hannah offers a long prayer of thanks to God about how God is going to come to Israel’s rescue and shatter its enemies through this anointed king.

The overlap between the prayers of these two special mothers is easy to see if you lay them side by side, and it isn’t a coincidence. Luke fashions Mary’s prayer to mimic the prayer of Hannah. Mary’s son is going to embody the ancient hope of a powerful and godly David-like ruler in Jerusalem who will restore the kingdom, deliver the people, and bring peace.

Next in Luke’s story we meet Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. At the birth of his son, Zechariah praises God for how Israel’s oppressors (the Romans) are about to face the music. A “mighty savior” from David’s line is on his way. Through him, God will have “mercy” on the Israelites by delivering them from “our enemies,” from “all who hate us.” Then Jews will be able to worship God once again in their temple, on their land, “without fear.” Short version: Zechariah expects that it’s payback time for the Romans.

Next, old man Simeon sees the baby Jesus and is thankful to God that he let him live long enough to see the “Lord’s messiah.” Simeon expects that this messiah would bring the “consolation of Israel”—which is straight-down-the-middle Old Testament talk for restoring Israel after the exile. Simeon also borrows words from the prophet Isaiah: all the world, all the Gentiles, will see this “salvation” of Israel by God’s hand. Israel will once again hold top spot on the list of nations.

Finally, we meet old Anna, a widowed prophet, who fasted at the temple day and night. On seeing the baby Jesus, she praises God and declares that the child would bring about the “redemption of Jerusalem”—meaning, the deliverance of Jerusalem from foreign rule.

Gabriel, Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna, in the first two chapters of Luke’s Gospel, all talk about Jesus as delivering on God’s ancient promises—the final end of the exile.

Luke plays on this expectation, and the echoes are clear as a church bell on a midwinter’s night. But soon Luke’s Jesus begins to say and do very un-messiah-like things.

We already see a preview of this when Gabriel tells Mary that God’s spirit will “overshadow” her, thus causing her to get pregnant. This little bit of information is an early sign in Luke’s Gospel that this messiah isn’t going to be confined to old categories—he is God’s “son” on a different level.

Luke also seems to be throwing a hard right uppercut at the idea of Roman kingship. Official Roman policy held that Caesar Augustus (the Caesar at Jesus’s birth) was begotten of the gods, sent to the people as a gift to restore “peace,” to “save” the people, and to bring “good news.” Luke uses these same words to describe Jesus’s birth. Jesus not only breaks the mold of Jewish political ideas, but Roman as well. Jesus is super-Caesar.

As Luke’s story unfolds, Jesus continues to undermine expectations involving political power and Jewish identity. In his first public appearance, in a synagogue service, he claims to be the messiah, which creates quite a buzz of support—until he tells them that he will bless Gentiles and be rejected by his own kinsmen. The crowd responds by trying to throw Jesus off a cliff. Israel’s messiah isn’t supposed to say things like this.

Then later, in one of Jesus’s more unmessianic moments, he forgives people’s sins, which is only something God can do. Jesus was immediately charged with blasphemy—not something a would-be messiah wants on his résumé. The more familiar you are with Jewish expectations at the time, the more your head explodes by the time you get to the end of Luke’s Gospel. Israel’s messiah doesn’t regroup and follow through with the plan. He suffers defeat on a Roman cross, and then—as if things couldn’t get any weirder—he walks out of his tomb three days later.

In part two of Luke’s story, the book of Acts, the return from exile has become a universal story—much like how Matthew ends his Gospel with messengers going out into all the world to make disciples of Jesus from every nation. The book of Acts relays how the gospel spread from a few frightened disciples to Asia Minor, Greece, and then the nerve center of the empire, Rome itself, in about thirty years. The idea of Israel’s full “return” to the land was transformed by the Gospel writers to speak about Jesus and God’s unexpected move—a crucified and risen messiah. The Gospel writers used the language of Israel’s script but infused that language with a whole new meaning.