

The Humble and Heavenly Eyewitnesses of His Glory

Brandon Phillips

The Humility of the Incarnation / Nativity of Christ; Birth of Jesus / Lk 2:8–20

In Luke 2:8-20, Dr. Luke gives us a multitude of witnesses of the birth of Messiah Jesus.

Pre-Sermon Comments

[Revelation 21:2](#) (LSB) ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Passage

[Luke 2:8–20](#) (LSB) ⁸ In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people. ¹¹ For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² “And this *will be* the sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” ¹⁵ And it happened that when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, “Let us go to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. ¹⁷ And when they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it marveled at the things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary was treasuring all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the

shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as was told them.

Introduction:

4 out of 5 adults incorrectly picked the month of December over several other months as the "time of year in which the largest number of suicides occur"—even though the other months provided as potential choices typically have much higher suicide rates. ~ MSN.com

[Luke 2:10-11](#) (LSB) ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people. ¹¹ For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Discussion Questions:

What are some of your favorite memories from past Christmas seasons?

Why do you think many people associate Christmas with happiness, but others experience sadness during this time?

Before hearing this introduction, did you believe that suicide rates are higher during the holidays? Why do you think this myth is so widespread?

How does focusing on the worldly aspects of Christmas (shopping, decorations, parties) distract from the true source of joy during this season?

How can we, as Christians, shift our focus during this season to experience the true joy that comes from celebrating Christ’s birth?

Why do you think gratitude is described as the "antidote for depression" in this sermon introduction? What role does thankfulness play in our spiritual lives?

When the angel appeared to the shepherds in [Luke 2:10-11](#), he said, “I bring you good news of great joy.” What is the significance of this message for us today? How does this “good news” offer a solution to the sadness and loneliness many feel?

How can we share the “good news of great joy” with others who may be struggling during the holidays? What are some practical ways to reach out to those who feel isolated or sad?

Review

[Luke 1:1-4](#) (LSB) ¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as those, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, handed *them* down to us,

³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty about the things you have been taught.

A Historic Birth

[Luke 2:1-3](#) (LSB) ¹ Now it happened that in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus for a census to be taken of all the inhabited earth. ² This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And everyone was going to be registered for the census, each to his own city.

A Humble Birth

[Luke 2:4-5](#) (LSB) ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, ⁵ in order to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, *and* was with child.

A Human Birth

[Luke 2:6-7](#) (LSB) ⁶ Now it happened that while they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guest room.

[Philippians 2:7-8](#) (LSB) ⁷ but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a slave, by being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Discussion Questions:

Why is it significant that Luke, a doctor known for his attention to detail, wrote his gospel with such precision ([Luke 1:1-4](#))? How does his thoroughness help build your confidence in the account of Jesus's life?

What does Luke's intent for Theophilus to have certainty about the things he had been taught ([Luke 1:4](#)) teach us about the importance of understanding the truths of our faith?

In what ways does the historical context of Jesus's birth (e.g., the census ordered by Caesar Augustus and Quirinius) demonstrate that God's redemptive plan unfolded in real-world events ([Luke 2:1-3](#))?

How does seeing the birth of Jesus rooted in actual history deepen your trust in God's sovereignty over time and events?

What stands out to you about the humble circumstances of Jesus's birth, especially considering Joseph and Mary's journey and the conditions in which He was born ([Luke 2:4-7](#))? How does this contrast with what we might expect for the birth of the King of Heaven and Earth?

How do the humble beginnings of Jesus shape your understanding of His mission and His identification with humanity?

How does the fact that Jesus was born in a manner similar to all human births, yet under such lowly circumstances, emphasize both His humanity and His deity ([Luke 2:6-7](#))?

In what ways does [Philippians 2:7-8](#), where Paul speaks of Jesus "emptying Himself," add to your understanding of the humility displayed in His birth and life?

Reflect on the significance of heaven coming to earth in the birth of Christ. How does the fact that the King of Heaven entered history in such a humble and ordinary way impact the way we approach God?

What does this say about how God values humility over human pride? How should this truth shape our own lives and attitudes?

How does the authenticity of the birth narrative, in contrast to what human imagination might expect (a royal birth with great fanfare), point to the divine nature of the Gospel?

Why do you think God chose to reveal His Son in such a humble way? How can we reflect this humility in our own lives?

Proposition and Outline

In [Luke 2:8-20](#), Dr. Luke gives us a multitude of witnesses of the birth of Messiah Jesus. He provides the account of the:

Humble Shepherds ([Luke 2:8-20](#))

Heavenly Angel ([Luke 2:9-12](#))

Heavenly Host ([Luke 2:13-14](#))

Humble Mary and Joseph ([Luke 2:15-19](#))

The Account of the Humble Shepherds ([Luke 2:8-20](#))

[Luke 2:8](#) (LSB) ⁸ In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

The Humble Shepherds

[Luke 1:52](#) (LSB) ⁵² “He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.

[Luke 19:10](#) (LSB) ¹⁰ “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”

[1 Corinthians 1:28](#) (LSB) ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may abolish the things that are,

It is to the shepherds, watching and keeping the night watches over their flocks, that the joy of the new light is announced. To them it is revealed that the Savior is born. Yes, to the poor, to the hardworking, not to the rich, who have their consolation here below. It is to the poor that the light of a glorious day has shone forth amid their vigils, and the night shall be light as the day—indeed, it is converted into day. “This day,” says the angel, not this night, “is born to you a Savior.” The night is truly past, the day is at hand—a day of days, the day of the salvation of our God, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is God blessed above all forever more ~ Charles Spurgeon

Jesus, the Perfect Sacrifice

[John 1:29](#) (LSB) ²⁹ On the next day, he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Discussion Questions:

The sermon describes shepherds as lowly, despised members of society. Why do you think God chose to announce Jesus’ birth to them rather than to the elite? How does this reflect God's character and His mission?

In [Luke 1:52](#), Mary says, “He has brought down rulers from their thrones and has exalted those who were humble.” How does the announcement of Jesus’ birth to the shepherds illustrate this truth?

Pastor Brandon mentioned that we shouldn’t elevate the shepherds themselves, as they were men of the flesh. How does this reinforce the concept of God's grace being extended to the humble and unworthy?

[Luke 19:10](#) says, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.” What does Jesus’ ministry to the lowly and the despised tell us about the kind of people He came to save? How does this challenge societal views of status and importance?

Charles Spurgeon highlights the joy that came to the shepherds through the announcement of Jesus' birth. How does this joy contrast with their humble and difficult life circumstances? What lesson can we learn about finding joy in Christ amidst our own trials?

Pastor Brandon draws a connection between the shepherds watching over sacrificial lambs and Jesus as the Lamb of God. How does this imagery deepen your understanding of Jesus' role as the ultimate sacrifice for sin?

John the Baptist declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ([John 1:29](#)). How does knowing that Jesus, the baby born in Bethlehem, would become the perfect sacrifice affect your appreciation of the Christmas story?

The Account of the Heavenly Angel ([Luke 2:9-12](#))

[Luke 2:9](#) (LSB) ⁹ And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

An Angel from Heaven

[Luke 1:19](#) (LSB) ¹⁹ And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands before God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

[Luke 1:11](#) (LSB) ¹¹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

[Luke 1:12](#) (LSB) ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw *the angel*, and fear fell upon him.

[Luke 1:29-30](#) (LSB) ²⁹ But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and was pondering what kind of greeting this was. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

[Revelation 22:8-9](#) (LSB) ⁸ I, John, am the one who was hearing and seeing these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹ But he said to me, "[Do not do that!](#) I

am a fellow slave with you and your brothers the prophets and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”

The Lord’s Glory

[Luke 2:9](#) (LSB) ⁹ And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

[Exodus 33:20](#) (LSB) ²⁰ But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”

[Exodus 24:17](#) (LSB) ¹⁷ And the appearance of the glory of Yahweh was like a consuming fire on the mountain top, in the eyes of the sons of Israel.

[Matthew 17:2](#) (LSB) ² And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

[Acts 9:3–5](#) (LSB) ³ And as he was traveling, it happened that when he was approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴ and falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He *said*, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,

[Acts 26:13](#) (LSB) ¹³ at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.

[1 Timothy 6:14–16](#) (LSB) ¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal might! Amen.

When God manifests His presence amidst His people, that manifestation is what we know as His shekinah glory. It’s the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, the smoke that fills the Tabernacle, and so on. Well that very glory belongs to Jesus from all eternity ~ Mike Riccardi

[John 1:14](#) (LSB) ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[John 17:5](#) (LSB) ⁵ “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

[Isaiah 6:3](#) (LSB) ³ And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is Yahweh of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory.”

[John 12:41](#) (LSB) ⁴¹ These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke about Him.

Jesus Christ is not merely a man. He’s not just a good teacher, or a great prophet! He’s not merely god-like, or a god among many gods! He is not the first created being, or the highest class of angel. He is God Himself! God of very God! Before the world was, He was eternally existing in the very nature of God, in the very essence of God, and in the very glory of God! ~ Mike Riccardi

[Luke 2:9](#) (LSB) ⁹ And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

There are two advents of Christ: that which has been, and that which is to be. And the two are not for the same purpose; the first came to pass not that He might search into our actions, but that He might pardon; the object of the second will be not to pardon, but to judge. ~ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (347–407)*

[Isaiah 6:5](#) (NASB95) ⁵ Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

The Angel’s Heavenly and Humble Message

[Luke 2:10–11](#) (LSB) ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people. ¹¹ For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

[Genesis 3:15](#) (LSB) ⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

[2 Samuel 7:12](#) (LSB) ¹² “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up *one of your seed* after you, who will come forth from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.

[Isaiah 9:6](#) (LSB) ⁶ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

[Micah 5:2](#) (LSB) ² “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from everlasting, From the ancient days.*”

John 1:26–27 NASB95

²⁶ John answered them saying, “I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know. ²⁷ “*It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

[Luke 2:10](#) (NASB95)

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

Jesus of Nazareth is God; He who was conceived in the womb of the virgin and born in Bethlehem’s manger is now, and always was, God over all, blessed forever. There is no gospel if he be not God. It is no news to me to tell me that a great prophet is born. There have been great prophets before; but the world has never been redeemed from evil by mere testimony to the truth, and never will be. Tell me that God is born, that God Himself has espoused our nature, and taken it into union with Himself, then the bells of my heart ring merry peals, for now may I come to God since God has come to me ~ Charles Spurgeon

Conclusion:

The one thoroughly laid down and safe way to avoid all going wide of the truth is the doctrine of the Incarnation—that one and the same person is God and man; as God, the end of our going; as man, the way we are to go.~ **Saint Augustine of Hippo**

The atonement is the real reason for the Incarnation. ~ **James Montgomery Boice**

[2 Corinthians 5:21](#) (LSB) ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

[Matthew 11:28–30](#) (LSB) ²⁸ “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰ “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Discussion Questions:

Why do you think the appearance of the angel caused such great fear among the shepherds?

Consider the biblical pattern of angelic appearances in [Luke 1](#) (Zacharias and Mary) and [Revelation 22:8-9](#). How might the shepherds' reaction relate to these encounters?

The sermon emphasizes that the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds. How is this concept of God's glory consistent with other biblical accounts (e.g., [Exodus 24:17](#), [Matthew 17:2](#))?

How would you respond if you were in the shepherds' place, experiencing God's glory firsthand?

In the sermon, Pastor Brandon draws attention to God's glory being "unapproachable" as described in [1 Timothy 6:16](#). How does this view of God's holiness deepen your appreciation for Jesus' incarnation?

Why is the juxtaposition of heaven and earth, particularly in the context of the humble shepherds, so profound in this passage?

What is the significance of the angel's message in [Luke 2:10-11](#), that a Savior has been born?

Why do you think the angel's announcement to the shepherds focuses on "great joy for all people"?

The term "Christ the Lord" is packed with theological meaning, as Pastor Brandon pointed out. How does this title confirm the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah?

How does the angel's declaration resonate with the broader redemptive history laid out from Genesis to the prophets?

Pastor Brandon quotes John Chrysostom, distinguishing Christ's first advent (to pardon) from His second (to judge). How does this understanding affect the way we should live today in anticipation of Christ's return?

The humility of the Incarnation is emphasized in this sermon. How can we apply the humility Christ displayed, even in His birth, to our daily lives?

What practical steps can we take to imitate the humility of Christ as we approach Christmas?

Reflect on the shepherds' response to the angelic announcement. How can we, as believers, respond with similar faith and obedience to the message of salvation in our everyday lives?

Additional Quotes about the Incarnation:

The one thoroughly laid down and safe way to avoid all going wide of the truth is the doctrine of the Incarnation—that one and the same person is God and man; as God, the end of our going; as man, the way we are to go. ~ **Saint Augustine of Hippo**

The cross is the centre of the world's history. The incarnation of Christ and the crucifixion of our Lord are the pivot round which all the events of the ages revolve. ~ **Alexander Maclaren (Preacher and Expositor)**

On the seventh day was the consummation of nature, in Christ's incarnation the consummation of grace, and at the end of the world will be the consummation of glory. ~ **Saint Thomas Aquinas**

The ultimate manifestation of special revelation is the incarnation of the Son. ~ **John F. MacArthur; Richard Mayhue**

Through union with Christ all that is his by incarnation becomes ours through faith. ~ **Sinclair Buchanan Ferguson**

The suggestion that the incarnation of God in Jesus is paralleled in the teachings of other religions cannot be sustained. ~ **Millard J. Erickson**

The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man, but a true God-man—one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is: one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal. ~ **Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield**

The Incarnation required no compromise of deity. When the "Word was made flesh," His deity did not suffer. Before His Incarnation, Christ was absolute deity; after His Incarnation, He was just as much deity as before. His deity suffered nothing when He became flesh. ~ **A. W. Tozer**

There never has been a man who could understand the doctrine of the incarnation. I think of the incarnation and I take up my stand on the side of the Apostle Paul who said, 'Great is the mystery of godliness' ([1 Tim. 3:16](#)). My mind is too small to understand it, my intellect cannot span the infinities and the immensities and the eternities. My little pigmy reason and logic are not big enough to see or to take in such a conception as the self-emptying and the humiliation of the Son of God. I do not claim to understand it; who could understand an idea like that of the virgin birth? It is beyond understanding, it is beyond reason. Who can understand the doctrine of the two natures, unmixed,

remaining separate, unmingled and yet both there, but still only one person? I cannot understand the doctrine of the Trinity, Father Son and Holy Spirit. I cannot and we should never try to do so. ~ **David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Welsh Preacher and Writer)**

The incarnation is the second greatest truth in the Bible. The greatest is that this God who became man could also love us enough to go to the cross and die for us personally. ~ **James Montgomery Boice**

When God manifested His power in the works of His hands, the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy; but when God manifests *Himself*, what music shall suffice for the grand psalm of adoring wonder? When wisdom and power are seen, these are but attributes; but in the incarnation it is the divine person which is revealed wrapped in a veil of our inferior clay. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

If, for the first time, you had heard of the visit of the incarnate God to this world, you would be struck with a wonder which would last throughout all eternity, that God Himself should really condescend to such a deed as this. This is the heart of the gospel, the incomparable fact of the incarnation of the Son of God, His dwelling upon the earth, and His presentation of Himself as a sacrifice unto God. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

In his incarnation, Christ voluntarily yielded the independent exercise of his divine attributes to the will of his heavenly Father. ~ **John F. MacArthur; Richard Mayhue**

The achievements of the Savior through His incarnation are so astounding and so numerous that any one wishing to describe them in detail would be like one who gazes at the expanse of the sea and attempts to count its waves. ~ **Anonymous**

Next Time!

The Account of the Heavenly Host ([Luke 2:13-14](#))

The Account of the Humble Mary and Joseph ([Luke 2:15-19](#))