

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Luke 2:1-20

INTRODUCTION:

A. Lesson Text: **Luke 2:1-20**

B. Atheists and agnostics have incredible faith . . . blind faith. You and I have a living faith in a living God and our living Lord.

1. I do not know what day of our calendar year Jesus was born . . . But I am glad that He was.
2. We do know what day of our calendar year Jesus died . . . And we are glad that he did in that He died for us . . . for our benefit.
3. We do know what day of our calendar year Jesus was resurrected from the dead . . . And we are thankful He was the first-fruits for us in this regard.

C. Consider with me in this study, information about “The Birth of Christ.”

THE YEAR JESUS WAS BORN

A. Evidence of the fact that Jesus lived among mankind is not just limited to the testimony of the New

Testament . . . as irrefutable as that may be . . . But the very enemies of Christianity claimed that He lived and that He performed miracles.

1. Early Jewish documents such as the Mishna and even Josephus testify that the one called Jesus lived in Palestine and died during the time of Pontius Pilate.
2. First-century Gentile historians such as Thallus, Serapion, and Tacitus all testify to the same.
3. British scholar, F. F. Bruce tells us that “The historicity of Christ is as” certain “as the historicity of Julius Caesar.”

B. Now it logically follows that if Jesus Christ lived, He must have been born.

1. The gospel record as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, indicates that Jesus’ birth was shortly before Herod the Great died . . . And Herod’s death can be fixed with certainty.
 - a. Josephus records an eclipse of the moon just before Herod died. That eclipse occurred on March 12th or 13th in 4 B.C.
 - b. Josephus also tells us that Herod died just before Passover. The Passover took place on April 11th, in the same year, 4 B.C.
 - c. From other details supplied by Josephus, we can pinpoint the death of Herod the Great as having taken place between March 29th and April 4th in 4 B.C.

2. It might sound strange to suggest that Jesus was born no later than 4 B.C. since B.C. means “Before Christ.”
 - a. Our modern calendar which split time between B.C. and A.D. was not invented until A.D. 525.
 - b. At that time Pope John the First asked a monk named Dionysius Exiguus to prepare a standardized calendar to supercede the Roman calendar for the western Church.
 - c. Unfortunately, Dionysius missed the real B.C./A.D. division by at least four years.
 - d. Long after the Christian Calendar had replaced the Roman calendar, it was discovered that Dionysius had made a mistake in placing the birth of Christ in 753 from the founding of Rome. It should have been about 749, or a year or two earlier. Thus, the present 4 B.C. birth date of Christ.
3. Matthew tells us that Herod killed Bethlehem’s male children two years old and under.
 - a. The earliest Jesus could have been born, therefore, is 5 B.C.
 - b. Through a variety of other time indicators, we can be relatively confident that the one called The Messiah was born either late in 5 B.C. or early in 4 B.C.

THE DAY JESUS WAS BORN

- A. Vast segments of the religious world celebrate December 25 as the day of the birth of Christ and has done so for some 18 centuries.
 1. A through examination of the subject also reveals that virtually every month on the calendar has been proposed by biblical scholars as housing the birth of Christ.
 2. The early church did not celebrate the birth of Jesus at all. They celebrated His death, burial, and resurrection.
 3. When the Catholic church divided into its eastern and western parts . . .
 - a. The eastern part, ruled from Constantinople, celebrated January 6th as the day of Christ’s birth.
 - b. The tradition for December 25 is actually quite ancient. Hippolytus, in the second century, argued that this was Christ’s birthday.
 - c. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom argued that December 25th was the correct date and from that date until now, the church in the East, as well as the West, has observed the 25th of December as the official date of Christ’s birth.
- B. In modern times, the traditional December 25th date has been challenged.
 1. Modern scholars pointed out that when Jesus was born, shepherds were watching their sheep in the hills around Bethlehem.

2. Luke tells us in **Luke 2:8** – “Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.”
 3. Some writers feel that the sheep were usually brought under shelter from November to March . . . and certainly would not be outside at night.
 4. Jewish sources suggest that the sheep around Bethlehem were outside year-round.
 - a. Admittedly, the sheep around Bethlehem were the exception and not the rule.
 - b. These were no ordinary sheep . . . They were sacrificial lambs. In the Spring they would be slaughtered at the Passover.
 5. A note of interest . . . God announced the birth of the “Lamb of God” who would eventually die for all the sins of the world, to the shepherds who watched over sacrificial lambs that would soon die on behalf of sinful men.
- C. The December 25th date has been the forerunner for some eighteen centuries.
1. Certainly the early church did not celebrate the birth of Christ at all
 2. Had they done so, they would have been in a better position to know for sure on what day our Savior was born.
 3. To them it was insignificant. They were far more concerned with His death and resurrection.
 4. As commanded by our Lord, we do remember His death and resurrection every Lord’s Day . . . Every Sunday.

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN . . . THE MAGI

- A. **Matthew 2:1** – “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem.”
- B. Little is known about these wise men. Who were these wise men from the east?
1. Matthew tells us next to nothing about them.
 - a. He does not mention their names.
 - b. He does not tell us how many there were.
 - c. He does not tell us from which country or countries they came from.
 2. As mysteriously as they come on the scene . . . They disappear.
 3. Though Matthew doesn’t tell us much, some over-zealous individuals have endeavored to fill in the blanks.
 - a. By the 6th century A.D. these strangers were given thrones and names.
 1. Gaspar
 2. Melichor
 3. Balthazar
 - b. We really have no idea what their names were nor even their number. There could have been 3 . . . 30 . . . Or 300 as far as we know.
 - c. But this we do know . . . Ancient magi were religious and political

advisors to eastern kings.

C. The wise men brought gifts.

1. **Gold.** This would finance trip into Egypt that Joseph, Mary, and Joseph would have to take, as well as sustain them while they were there as well as for the return trip.
2. **Frankincense.** A perfume used for sacrificial fumigation. According to Isaiah 60:6 and Jeremiah 6:20, the Hebrew people imported their frankincense from Arabia. Jesus would be our Passover, (1 Corinthians 5:7) our sacrificial Lamb.
4. **Myrrh.** A perfume. Often used in death for preparing the body for burial. It was used for embalming. Even at the birth of our Savior, the shadow of the cross is already falling over His face.

D. While there is a lot that we do not know . . . This we do know:

1. These wise men were providentially guided to God’s providential gift men.
2. Wise men still worship Him today.

THE BABY BOYS KILLED IN BETHLEHEM

A. A heinous deed is recorded in **Matthew 2:16** – “Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.”

B. How many babies did Herod murder?

1. Some scholars have suggested as many as 200.
2. Some have suggested a number as low as 6 or 8.
3. Bear in mind that Bethlehem was a small village community . . . almost a suburb of Jerusalem some five miles away.
 - a. Therefore, most scholars place the number between 20 and 30.
 - b. Either way, even one or two would have been a tragedy.
 - c. These precious little ones died in place of the One Who had come to die for them.
 - d. I am thankful that the souls of infants are safe . . . Aren’t you?

C. How old was Jesus when Herod killed the babies in Bethlehem?

1. According to the best chronological evidence, He could not have been more than three or four months old since Jesus was more than likely born in the winter of 5 or 4 B.C., and since Herod died in early spring of 4 B.C.
2. Whenever it was . . . It actually happened.

D. Killing or having people killed was not new to Herod the Great.

1. He murdered his “favorite” wife’s father.
2. He drowned her brother.
3. He even killed her.
4. He executed one of his most trusted friends.

5. He executed his barber.
 6. He executed 300 military men
By the way . . . Did I tell you that he did all of this in one day’s work?
 7. Later he slew three of his sons, allegedly suspecting them of treason.
 8. Just before Herod died he locked up 3,000 of the nations leading citizens and gave orders that they were to be executed at the hour of his death. He wanted to make sure there would be mourning when he died.
 9. It is said that it would better to be Herod’s donkey than Herod’s son.
Therefore, killing babies would not be out of character for Herod.
- E. Isn’t it interesting that Herod thought he had gained a victory over the King of the Jews, that perhaps it was a foreshadowing of the victory Satan thought he had when Jesus lay dead on a Roman cross. Nonetheless, the empty tomb became Satan’s worst defeat.

CONCLUSION:

- A. Bethlehem, which means “the house of bread,” became the birthplace of the “Bread of life. (John 6:35, 48)
- B. Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes placed in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. No formal crib for Him then, and no place for the Son of man to lay His head later. (Matthew 8:20)
- C. The wise men came from the east to an earthly king in order to see the heavenly king.
- D. The theologians in Herod’s court knew the Scriptures well . . . “In Bethlehem” they recited. Ironically, though they knew the Scriptures, they did not believe them . . . Not even enough to travel the five or six miles to Bethlehem to see for themselves their promised Messiah.
- E. A baby lying in a manger seems harmless . . . Non-threatening. But a man dying on a cross . . . A man who claims to be God . . . A man that demands our allegiance . . . Cannot be ignored.
 1. We must either accept Him . . .
 2. Or . . . We must reject Him . . . There is no middle ground!
- F. Three major things are seen in those involved in the story of the birth of Christ . . . three things that we see in people today.
 1. Acceptance . . . By the Shepherds.
 2. Worship . . . By the Wise Men
 3. Rejection . . . By Herod
- G. Jesus was born to die in order that we may die in order to live!
- H. No room for Him in the inn then . . . And no room for Him in the hearts and lives of many today. Is there room for Jesus in your heart and life?
- I. **God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation**