

Sun., Dec. 19 - 4th Sunday of Advent

Memory Verse: "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors." -Luke 2:14

Lighting of the Advent Wreath & Reading of Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

Message: "The Coming: Details of the Drama"

Text: Luke 2:1 "In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists."

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

Blurb: We know the Christmas story, right? Just look at any nativity and we can tell the story. Yet when we look at it closely in Luke 2, we realize that we skip over many of the details that Luke was careful to include. This Sunday, we'll see how the details are crucial for celebrating—and understanding—Christmas. Bring your Bibles!

Bulletin listing of the reading for next week: Luke 2:21-40

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor Andrew

"Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors." -Luke 2:14

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Sing We the Song of Emmanuel

What Child Is This?

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *Humble* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor David

"Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors." -Luke 2:14

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Sing We the Song of Emmanuel

What Child Is This?

Is He Worthy?

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]

ADVENT WREATH & READING OF SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-7

Our Scripture reading this Sunday is the traditional Christmas story from Luke. This time as you hear it, listen for the details, both historical and location, as we generally gloss over them when we hear this story. Luke 2:1-7,

“1 In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. 2 This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. 3 Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. 4 Since Joseph belonged to David’s house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David’s city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. 5 He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. 6 While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped Him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.”

SERVE MOMENT - Christmas Offering & Christmas Camp -Pastor David

Local relief: 1. Food Pantry items (collection)
2. Community Helping Hands (Christmas Offering)
3. Christmas Camp (come and help)

National relief: UMCOR US tornado relief

International relief: Send a Christmas Card to our missionaries (provide email address or mailing address)

PRAYERS: Prayers for Peace on Earth -Pastor David

David: Responsive prayers for peace on earth.

All: “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors.”

D: Lord God, when you sent Jesus that first Christmas, your world was struggling in darkness. It needed your light. And you sent Jesus as the Light. Over 2,000 years later, your world is still struggling. You have come, O Light, and you have made such a difference for so many. But the darkness is stubborn. Evil is persistent. We need you as our Light. So, we pray with the angels...

All: “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors.”

D: We pray for your Light to shine against the violence and hatred in our world. We know it starts in our hearts. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you, Jesus. May the celebration of your birth transform hardened hearts, embittered by anger, turned by selfishness, hearts darkened by hopelessness, despair, seeing no future, shallow hearts treating life flippantly and cheaply, using others disposably, seeing others as less important and valuable. Bring your peace right into all of our hearts. We pray with the angels...

All: “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors.”

D: We pray for peace for those whose lives have been ravaged by natural disaster and destruction the world over. We lift of those victims of the tornados last week, whose lives will never be the same. Only you can bring comfort to this despair. Only you can bring life again to those in shock. Only you can bring peace again. We pray with the angels...

All: “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors.”

D: We pray for your people who want to follow you to make a difference in your name, to be your peace and to reflect your light. We pray for our local food shelves and our collection for them this Christmas. We pray for Community Helping Hand and the help they bring to our neighbors. We pray for the women of Adult-Teen Challenge as they depend on you to change their lives. We pray for our church's Christmas Camp next week, that your next generation in our community would come to know you. We pray for our church's UMCOR tornado response: may it bring light. We pray for our church's missionaries in central Asia: may they be your faithful witness. We pray with the angels...

All: "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors."

D: There are so many more struggles, for our world is filled with your people bent low by burdens too great to bear. We do not understand why our world is not better than it was when you first came, but we still believe that you are our only hope. We know that some day you will come back and finish your work and bring final peace on earth. Until then, we pray for your peace in our hearts and in our world. We join with the angels....

All: "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors."

D: Amen.

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: "Gaius, 4" (Video) -Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: The Coming: Details of the Drama

PP#1: The Coming: Details of the Drama

"In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists." -Luke 2:1

The Coming: Details of the Drama. Luke 2:1, "In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists."

PP#2: The Christmas Story in

Matthew - 1:18-2:23 (Joseph, magi)

Mark - N/A (Starts with Jesus as an adult)

Luke - 1:5-2:52 (Mary, shepherds)

John - N/A (Pre-birth, then Jesus as an adult)

This is now the week of Christmas. All our planning and preparation is coming together, ready or not! Details, details, details. Are all the details *becoming a concern?*

Here at church we've been in Advent, which means "the coming." We've been looking at the details in the coming of the One promised long ago. Now, the Christmas story is only told in two of the Gospels: in Matthew and in Luke. Matthew focuses on Joseph and the magi (he might have been a bit chauvinist...but more likely as a Jew he was focused on the head of the household), whereas Luke focuses on Mary and the shepherds. But we've committed to read Luke this year.

[Show flip chart:

Luke:

Spiritual biography of Jesus

Researched

Historical

Explains Jewish stuff

Salvation also for non-Jews

Biology]

So, the past three weeks we've been in the long first chapter of Luke, hearing about the preparations for the coming, with Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary. We've heard how the Jewish prophets foretold of it long ago, and we've seen the angel Gabriel appear and the Holy Spirit doing all sorts of miracles. Something is up. Something's about to happen. Luke is telling the story beginning with all this setup so that Theophilus—that's us!—so that *we* can see this is a big deal. Luke is going to all this detail so that we can know for sure that this is the culmination of God's plan of salvation for the world.

PP#3: *Image of the Roman Empire under Caesar August, including Palestine, perhaps from*
<https://www.worldhistory.org/uploads/images/4334.jpg?v=1636642803>

The actual story happens so quietly, so simply, so in the margins that most people missed it. It made no headlines! So Luke carefully goes back to show how such a non-event is actually the real event. And that's kind of Luke's point. God does not show up in Rome with fanfare and pageantry in the capital of the vast empire. He doesn't even show up in Jerusalem, the capital of the region. God's salvation for the world doesn't happen on the world's stage. Don't miss this juxtaposition in the story. The most important event in history doesn't register in the spotlight.

The reason, you see, is that salvation history is not world history. World history is about who is in charge, when, where and how. It's about power: military power, political power, lines on maps, the power of influence. All of this is happening, for sure, and Luke includes all of this when he lays out the setting. But Luke takes his cell-phone flashlight and shines on a missed event that happens way off in the margins, and says, "You see this? This, right here? This is what is most important. Center stage is bright and loud and colorful, yes, but this, over here, this is what really matters."

And throughout the rest of his letter, Luke points out the juxtaposition between the political powers and God's power. This Jesus is King, for sure, but not the kind of king that shows up in Rome, or even on Jerusalem's throne. Remember when Jesus was crucified? He was brought to the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate on charges of sedition and treason. But Pilate found no political grounds against Him. Even so, the sign above Him on the cross wrote the charge, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." It was true, but He wasn't a *political* king.

PP#4: "During the rule of King Herod of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron." -Luke 1:5

Back in Luke 1:5, Luke sets the story of John the Baptist's birth in the time of King Herod of Judea. Researcher Luke documents the location and time of the drama: In the Jewish kingdom during the reign of the Jewish King. They didn't have a shared calendar yet in those days, so the custom was to record the kingdom and reigning king at that time of events. We know that King Herod ruled from 37 to 4 B.C. in our time line.

PP#5: *Image of the nativity as we usually think: in a wooden stable, with animals, shepherds, etc.*

Well, Luke chapter 2 is the famous Christmas story that we've all heard so often. And if I asked you to summarize the drama, you would likely talk about Mary and Joseph riding on a donkey from some town you can't recall, to Bethlehem. There they tried to get a room in the inn, but it was too full—there was a census going on—and so they instead stayed in the stable out back with the animals. There Jesus was born, and put on the hay in the manger. Angels appeared to some shepherds nearby and so they came to see Jesus, too. That's the Christmas story.

PP#6: Luke 2:1-20

1 In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. 2 This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. 3 Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. 4 Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea.

But when you heard the first part earlier, did you notice how differently Luke tells the story? Luke fills his story with details...details we often gloss over! Just like back in 1:5, Luke starts in 2:1 placing the drama in world history. Caesar Augustus was the first Roman Emperor and established the golden age of Rome. He was emperor from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14. As emperor he wanted to do a census of his empire, so he could determine the taxes his empire should pay. Typical stuff happening on the world stage, right? Who's in charge? Where? When? And follow the money. Sounds familiar!

PP#7: *Image of the eastern part of Caesar Augustus' Empire, showing Syria and Judea, perhaps blown up from <https://www.worldhistory.org/uploads/images/4334.jpg?v=1636642803>*

Well, Luke takes his flashlight and shines it away from Rome, way over on the far eastern margins of the Empire. The Roman province there—we would call it a “state”—was called Syria. And the governor at the time was a man named what? Kwy-REN-ih-us! In his province was the small kingdom of Judah, with Herod, its king. Now, this is a bit confusing, because Rome developed a system where there could be small kingdoms within the Roman Empire. Rome appointed the kings, however, and they were subject to both the emperor and the Roman governors. That's why in Jesus' story, there is always the tension between the Jewish rulers and the Romans authorities.

But Luke, being a Gentile and a researcher, is the only author who relates his narrative to dates of world history. Don't miss this! All the other accounts of Jesus don't reference the wider world stage. Luke, who is likely writing after both Mark and Matthew, wants to make sure that the story of Jesus is told—although not on the world's stage—it is told in world history.

PP#8: Luke 2:1-20

1 In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. 2 This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. 3 Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. 4 Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea.

Remember, Luke is not a Jew. His reader is not Jewish. We can see that in how he provides the name for David's town in verse 4, which every Jew, of course, would already know. Jesus is a Jew, who is born in Judea, and Mark and Matthew have already told how He is for sure the promised Jewish Messiah. But Luke, when we pay attention to the details, tells us that this Jesus is also *our* messiah, too! He God *with us*, too. After spending chapter 1 showing that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish prophecies—and therefore credible and the Savior from the One True God—in chapter 2 Luke shows in the details of the drama that Jesus' birth occurs in world history because His coming is not just for the Jews, but *for all people of the world, throughout all history!*

PP#9: The Coming: Details of the Drama

- Jesus is the Savior for all people
- Jesus is YOUR Savior!

Luke is telling Theophilus—and us!—that the message of Christmas is not just that, off in the far corner of the world somewhere, God did an amazing miracle. It's not that God sent Jesus to be the promised savior of Israel. It's that God Himself showed up as Savior in the world to be the Savior of the world, to be your Savior, and my Savior. So the gospel message that Luke has been tracing all along—remember those 19 repeats of the gospel in the previous chapter...that God has heard you, that God has come to save, that nothing is impossible for God, that He comes to give light and life to those in darkness—*that* very gospel message is not just for them: it's also for you!

PP#10: The Coming: Details of the Drama

- Jesus is the Savior for all people
- Jesus is YOUR Savior!
- Christmas: Jesus is born to you!

Does this change Christmas for you? Listening to Luke tell this divine drama brings Christmas right into your life! So, when we hear the angels speak to the shepherds, we hear that the angels' message is also for us! "*For you* is born this baby in Bethlehem! Peace *on you*, God's people, God's favor rests on you!" Because of Luke, we hear clearly that Jesus is born *to you!*

So, when you read the Christmas story and you come to that weird and annoying name, "Kwy-REN-ih-us"—just remember it starts out "kwy" like "quiet"...think Christmas, quiet night... so "Kwy-REN-ih-us," say it with me, "Kwy-REN-ih-us," good! (Draw a line to that name in your Bibles and in the margin write, "Pronounce like 'quiet'")—when you come to that dreaded name, first of all, think "quiet," and secondly, remind yourself that in that detail is the opening of the story of Jesus: *to you!* Merry Christmas! Don't ever skip over those details of the drama!

PP#11: Luke 2:1-20

1 In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. 2 This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. 3 Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. 4 Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea.

So, we need to go back and make a few more notes about these details. We're writing in our Bibles, or making notes in our digital Bibles. Verse 3: the way they did the census was each person

had to go back to their family's ancestral town. I'm grateful that our census is simply a paper form we mail in, right? Verse 4, Joseph was from King David's ancestry, so he traveled from Nazareth, his village up in the northern district (or county) of Galilee. In the margin draw a line to verse 4 and write "4 day trip." Next, draw a line from Bethlehem and write "see Micah 5:2." This is the prophecy that Herod's advisors point to when the magi ask where the new king was born in Matthew 2:6.

PP#12: Luke 2:1-20

5 He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. 6 While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped Him snugly, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.

Now, verse 5, notice that Mary and Joseph are not yet fully married! Draw a note to verse 5, "Not yet married." But Mary also has to go to Bethlehem. What does this mean? It means that Mary was also a descendant of King David. See the detail here? Luke tracks biology! Joseph, who now knows what's going on with Mary, thanks to the angel Gabriel's visit recorded in Matthew 1:20, travels with Mary not as her husband but as her care giver and helper. Draw a line to Mary's name and write, "Also David's descendant." So, this clears up all those who ask how Jesus can be in the royal line of David if Joseph is not the biological father. Not that it mattered in the 1st century. Adopted kids in the Roman system were considered like biological kids, and could take over as king from their fathers. But Luke is tracking God's biological consistency and seeing how God ties up all loose ends!

A couple of other details: notice, there is no mention of a donkey...that's added in our imagination (just like the camels in the magi story!). Also notice, no stable. The only indication is the manger in verse 7. It's a feeding trough for animals. It is conceivable and likely that they were allowed to go bunk in with the animals, where there was shelter and it was warm. Jewish hospitality was that the inn keeper likely tried his hardest to give the best lodging possible. In Bethlehem wood is scarce, and there are lots of caves. The earliest tradition suggests that a large cave served as the stable, and today you can still go down into a cave in Bethlehem that has been remembered as the birth cave since the 4th century.

So, dramatic event told very simply. "She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, and wrapped Him up snugly and laid Him in a manger." Can you see Doctor Luke's attention to the care of the newborn? He knows how moms treated newborns. Wrapped Him up snugly!

PP#13: Luke 2:1-20

8 Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. 9 The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. 11 Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. 12 This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, 14 "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors."

Now, Luke takes his little flashlight and shifts the story away from the holy family to shine on the hills outside the village. Verse 8, "Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night." It's no coincidence in God's drama that shepherds enter this story. In the margin,

draw a line to “shepherds” and write, “God is Good Shepherd, see Psalm 23.” Then, draw a line to “fields” in verse 8 and write, “King David was a shepherd here, see 1 Samuel 17:34.” They are in King David’s ancestral village. Jesus is born as the new King in the line of David. David was a shepherd boy on these fields, and so, when He comes as King of Kings, God invites the shepherds into the story of salvation. Shepherds, who stayed out in the fields with the sheep and therefore couldn’t participate in the ritual washings of the Jewish Law, were considered the lowest class of society. Yet they are the only people God specifically invites to the birth of His Savior. No nobles, no rulers, no important people. Shepherds. Here Luke is making another point. Luke is intentionally sharing how Jesus is the Savior for all people, regardless of nationality or ethnicity. Draw a line of the shepherds and write “We are shepherds.” Now Luke picks up the salvation story as God coming as Savior for all people regardless of importance, influence, or wealth.

[Turn flip chart to:

Jesus Savior for the unimportant:

1. Gentiles (Luke 2:1)
2. Edge of empire (Luke 2:2)
3. Mary/women (Luke 2:5)
4. Poor/shepherds (Luke 2:8)]

If you have room to make a list somewhere, write “Jesus is Savior for the unimportant.” Below that write “1. Gentiles, 2. Edges of empire, 3. Mary/women, 4. Poor/shepherds

Again, Gabriel shows up. Verse 9, “The Lord’s angel stood before them, the Lord’s glory shone around them, and they were terrified. [As usual!] 10 The angel said, ‘Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people.’” Underline “joyous” in verse 10.

[Flip chart to:

“Joy” in Luke 1

- 14 “Joy”
- 14 “Rejoice”
- 28 “Rejoice”
- 44 “Joy”
- 47 “Rejoice”
- 58 “Rejoiced” (“Celebrated”)
- 2:10 “Joyous”]

And see, we are included into this story, we who are poor and unimportant: “Good news to you!” Verse 11, “Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord.” Luke records how the angel explains the meaning of what had just happened. Jesus is King of Kings, the Savior, and also God Himself. Verse 12, “This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.” Then tons of angles fill the sky! Verse 13, “Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, 14 “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors.”

Write “song” by verse 14. Music again at Christmas!

Peace is key to the Christmas story. Peace is key to the salvation story. We first see it in creation, when God brings peace and order to the chaos of the elements. We see it in Psalm 23, with God’s promise to each of His sheep. We see it here in the Savior’s birth. He will speak of it again and again when He preaches. And we see it at the End Times, when only peace will remain. Draw a box around “peace” for we’ll be coming back to that in the chapters ahead.

PP#14: Luke 2:1-20

15 When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." 16 They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. 18 Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. 20 The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.

We are like the shepherds, right? So, pay attention to verse 15, "When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, 'Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us.'" This is what we do at Christmas. We go and enter the Christmas story and worship Jesus. Luke wants our faith confirmed, right? Well, the best confirmation, he shows us in the shepherds, is to go find the Jesus for yourself. This is the most reliable proof of Jesus we can have. Go worship! That's what shepherd-disciples do at Christmas.

Verse 16 "They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child." So, here is part of the source for this story: the shepherds shared what had happened. Again, we are to be like the shepherds, go and tell others of our personal encounter with Jesus. After all, it is hope and joy to others! Verse 18, "Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. [The blessing spreads around to others.] 19 Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully." Luke is tracking Mary...it just might be that she was one of his sources! "20 The shepherds returned [it doesn't actually say "home" in the original], glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." Here again, we are to be like the shepherds. "Everything happened just as they had been told." Ah, once again, orderly confirmation. Verified. Reliable. Trustworthy.

PP#15: The Coming: Details of the Drama

- Jesus is the Savior for all people
- Jesus is YOUR Savior!
- Christmas: Jesus is born to you!
- Be like the shepherds
- See the drama in the details

There are lots of details for Christmas in the week ahead, right? Are they starting to become a problem? Are they threatening to keep you away from the real movement of Christmas? Remember, we are included in Christmas: Jesus is born to you and me! We are to be like the shepherds and go find Him personally, worship Him, tell others about Him, to rejoice and praise God, and be changed.

The Christmas drama does that, we've discovered. The Christmas drama changes our drama. Our forgotten corner of the world is made new. Our dramas are transformed. Peace, and joy and music erupt. And when we look closely, the drama on the world stage also changes because of Jesus. Even if we can't see it in the current scene, we see it coming at the end, when the peace of Jesus takes over, and only peace will remain.

For now, for us, this week, as the details of Christmas start to become a problem, look to the details of the Christmas story in Luke, and remember, this Jesus, this joy, this music, this peace, is for you!

Merry Christmas!

CLOSING SONG: *Angels from the Realms of Glory* -Sanctify

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in, drop it off or, most conveniently, you can make an electronic transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Wednesday night: Meal and Groups

Next Sunday's message: Forth Sunday of Advent: The Christmas Story

Read ahead the Christmas Story: Luke 2:1-20

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favors." -Luke 2:14

BENEDICTION -Pastor David