

Behold



Behold *

*A look at the Christmas story as told by Luke through the words of
Mary, Zechariah, the Angels, and Simeon.*

AUTHORED BY RIVERVIEW CHURCH

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GET IN THE WORD A LITTLE EACH WEEKDAY.

Behold *

* JESUS

LUKE 1-2

The Christmas story is such a familiar one that sometimes its meaning gets overlooked. That's a shame, because the story of the arrival of Jesus is one of the most transformational in the history of mankind. Think about it. The humble birth of Christ was God becoming flesh so that ultimately he could die for the world. The magnitude of this event in history cannot be overstated. Christ's birth has eternal ramifications on our lives and because of that it demands our attention. So often when Christmas approaches we sort of shrug our shoulders with a "been there, done that" attitude. Thankfully, the Gospel writer Luke knew the significance of Christ's birth, and carefully recorded the historical event. Luke's gospel is the account of what he discovered through eyewitness testimony and then wrote down for his friend Theophilus. The first few chapters of Luke focus on several of those eyewitness accounts, and these will be our points of study throughout this series.

INSIGHTS

Luke writes to Theophilus, whose name means "Lover of God," but the Bible doesn't tell us much more about him. Some scholars have theorized that he was high priest, others believe he was a government official. It seems clear that Theophilus was highly educated, had a friendship with Luke, and looked at life through a factual lens. As such, Luke's writing contains great detail, and focuses on the discernible and credible accounts of people who lived life with Christ. As a result, Luke's letter to Theophilus has become a reliable and historical presentation of God becoming man.

According to church tradition Luke was a gentile doctor, not Jewish like many others who wrote Biblical accounts. For this reason Luke's perspective on the life of Christ is unique and credible. Luke combines a highly educated perspective with an upbringing from outside the church to provide a balanced and specific look into the early life of Jesus. The Apostle Paul thought very highly of Luke (as seen in Colossians 4:14), and Luke appears to have been well respected person in his profession.

Behold *

WHAT PROCLAMATIONS DO WE SEE IN THIS STORY? ABOUT JESUS? ABOUT THE GOSPEL?

In Luke 1:4 we see Luke's over arching proclamation to Theophilus that his aim is to offer "certainty" about Jesus. It seems likely that Theophilus had heard about Jesus, but was looking for some assurance that what he had been taught is sensible and reliable.

Luke lays out his case for Theophilus by telling the story of Jesus' birth through the eyes of a diverse and unlikely procession of eyewitnesses. In the first two chapters of Luke we see Jesus proclaimed through a middle aged woman, an army of angels, a young middle school girl, and a very, very old man. Each brings a different perspective and set of experiences, and yet each proclaims the same message of the coming Messiah Jesus.

OTHER SCRIPTURE

Genesis 12:3

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 53:10-11

Micah 5:2

Hosea 11:1

Matthew 1

Acts 2:25-32

Acts 8:26-40

Acts 9

Hebrews 1:3

CONVERSATION

What stuck with you from this week's message?

JESUS

When Christmas arrives do you tend to “skip past” the Jesus part, or do you find that you tend to stop and reflect on the significance of the birth of Jesus? What are some specific ways you have chosen to break free of the “sameness” of Christmas and intentionally choose to view Jesus with fresh eyes?

Think about the first time you were told about Jesus. Did you hear about Him from a man or a woman? Young or old? Someone you knew really well, or a complete stranger? What does it tell you about Jesus that so many different people from all over the map are proclaiming such a consistent message about Jesus?

Luke takes the time to organize his thoughts so he can present an accurate picture of Jesus to his friend Theophilus. Consider your own experience with Jesus – how have you related your story to others? Who did God bring into your life to help you come to know Jesus? What have been the key milestones? Take a few moments with your Life Group, your family, or a friend to share the highlights with one another.

YOUR NOTES

* THE SAVIOR

LUKE 1:46-55

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

WHO SAID THIS?

It all began with a visit from the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26) to a young virgin named Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph. When chosen to be the mother of the Messiah, Mary’s response was, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Her humble words indicate a willingness to take on the shame that would wrongly be assumed of her. In addition, the pressure of caring for the Savior was met with a servant’s heart, a heart that belied her age and lot in life. After being told Elizabeth was six months pregnant, Mary makes the journey to her. Upon her arrival, the child in Elizabeth’s womb (John the Baptist) leapt for joy. This confirmation of Mary’s calling to carry the Messiah pushes Mary to praise God and His abundant grace (Luke 1:46-55).

THE SAVIOR

INSIGHTS

Place yourself in Mary's shoes. Humanly speaking, she had every reason to reject this challenge. Joseph would surely reject her, her family would disown her, she would likely never be able to marry and would forever be in need. Yet, Mary responds in humility and obedience, ready to be used by God to bring forth the Messiah.

God chose to bring Jesus into the world through a middle school girl! This brings to mind Jesus' words in Matthew 18:3-4: "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

God choosing Mary is one example (of many) on how God often chooses unlikely vessels to accomplish His sovereign will. Some other examples:

- David versus Goliath (1 Samuel 17)
- Joseph (Genesis 37 through 50)
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3)

BEHOLD!

By giving God the worship, or which He alone is worthy, Mary recognized both His power and the impact His love had on her (Luke 1:46-49). Her thankful spirit transcends the reality of the challenges that she was facing.

Also, Mary recognized the enduring nature of God. He has a plan which is not limited by the finite nature of our lives. He is steadfast and His authority in our world is constant. Our world may change, but our recognition of the true ruler of this world never should.

In Luke 1:54-55 God's patient mercy is on display. God promised Abraham he would care for his offspring, even though they would often turn away from Him and test His love for them. However, God's mercy and promises are holy and true. Ultimately Jesus fulfilled the promise, once and for all time, by becoming the ultimate sacrifice.

OTHER SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Proverbs 11:2, Proverbs 22:4

Mark 9:30-37

John 13

Ephesians 4:1-6

Philippians 2:1-18

Colossians 3:1-17

CONVERSATION

What stuck with you from this week's message?

Mary experiences humility as she focuses on the strength, character and trustworthiness of God. Where have you observed God's power in your life, or in the lives of others? How has He proven trustworthy? Spend some time reflecting on God in a similar way Mary demonstrated in Luke 1.

Fueled by thankfulness and trust for God, Mary risks her reputation and her future in order to obey God and introduce the world to Jesus. How can you follow her sacrificial example in your own life?

Do you doubt that God can use you to introduce others to Jesus? In your mind, what makes you an unlikely candidate to be used by God? Be reassured by the story of Mary, a very unimpressive girl who God used to accomplish the impressive work of Jesus.

THE SAVIOR

YOUR NOTES

* THE REDEEMER

LUKE 1:68-79

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

WHO SAID THIS?

Zechariah was widely known as a man of knowledge and righteousness (Luke 1:6-7). He was rendered mute throughout his wife Elizabeth’s pregnancy because he doubted God’s promise that he and Elizabeth would be given a son (Luke 1:20-22). In spite of this, Zechariah remains righteous by naming his son “John,” forgoing the honor of naming His only son after himself. He is then given his voice back and his first words are empowered by the Holy Spirit, the prophecy found in Luke 1.

THE REDEEMER

INSIGHTS

Zechariah is regarded as one of the most righteous men to ever have lived. In spite of God's promise of a child, He momentarily doubted he and his wife could have a child at their extremely advanced age. As a result, he couldn't talk until his child was born, and even when his child was born he still couldn't talk. He may have been thinking, "wait, God, I thought we had a deal?" A week passed, and it was time to name his son, a day Zechariah has likely anticipated for a long time. Everyone expected the son to carry the same name as his father. But Zechariah, still unable to talk, wrote the name "John," just as God had told him to do through the angel. Zechariah showed tremendous humility in sacrificing his personal legacy in order obey God and point people to Jesus.

Consider the individuals God has used so far to accomplish His work. First Mary, a proper middle school girl, and then John the Baptist, a hunter-gatherer living off the land in the wilderness. Now we see Zechariah, a dignified temple priest, playing an integral role in God presenting His son to the world!

In addition to her husband becoming mute (possibly deaf), Elizabeth took on the care of a disgraced young teenage Mary. All the while she herself is pregnant. Sometimes the impact we make for the Gospel is not obvious. Sometimes it is behind the scenes, and yet we're still able to bring glory to God.

BEHOLD!

The Jews expected a "King." The Messiah Jesus offers that and so much more. The fulfillment of this prophecy doesn't necessarily bring prosperity in this life, but the better gift of forgiveness for sins.

John the Baptist was given a clear and simple mission: Go before Jesus and point others to Him. We should do no less!

We live in a world of need, full of sin and hurt. We contribute to that reality, each of us being guilty of sin. And yet God is merciful!

OTHER SCRIPTURE

Matthew 3

Matthew 28:19-20

Luke 3

Luke 6:27-36

John 1:1-23

Romans 12

Ephesians 2:1-10

Titus 3

Hebrews 4:9-16

1 Peter 1:3-25

CONVERSATION

What stuck with you from this weeks' message?

John the Baptist is given the responsibility to “go before the Lord to prepare His ways” and “to give knowledge of salvation to His people.” Do you see your role in a similar way? How so?

God is described as having “tender mercy” in the midst of darkness. How has God displayed “tender mercy” in your life? How have you been able to display that same tenderness and mercy toward others?

Do you view the darkness as something to run from or something to illuminate? What are some steps that you can take this week to be light in the dark world around you?

THE REDEEMER

YOUR NOTES

* THE CHRIST

LUKE 2:14

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

WHO SAID THIS?

The “person” speaking here is actually a bunch of people, a multitude of very specific angels. (Picture the Navy Seals of the Universe). It was a concert of independent beings working in perfect unison to deliver a simple yet powerful message to a few nameless shepherds in the middle of nowhere.

INSIGHTS

How many angels comprise a “multitude?” The Greek word for “angels” here is *plethos*, a military term that means “a great number” or “a throng”. In short, there were probably too many angels to count, and the shepherds were likely too overwhelmed to try. It’s safe to assume there were a whole lot of angels!

In Davidic times shepherding was a profession of honor. However, during the time of Christ, they didn’t get the same respect. Shepherds were lower class citizens, the antithesis of the wise men (Matthew 2). Yet, while the wise men were given a lone star in the sky, the shepherds received a personal invite from a multitude of angels (Luke 2:9-14). God chose a choir of angels to communicate an extraordinary message to an ordinary group of men.

Often this scene is depicted using song, which is a viable possibility. At the same time, is it possible that the angels actually communicated this message in the form of a chant? How cool would that be?

THE CHRIST

BEHOLD!

God is worthy of our praise! (Luke 2:14) We should never fall into the misconception that Jesus is merely a buddy. There is a hierarchy to the universe, and God is the “highest.” While Jesus did humbly take on the form of man, at the same time He was worthy of a throng of angels announcing His arrival.

There is blessing of “peace” when we put our trust in Him. God loved us enough to step into our confined reality. He was born and ultimately died for the express purpose of delivering peace to our lives and to the world.

OTHER SCRIPTURE

Psalm 29:11, Psalm 37:37

Isaiah 9:6

Matthew 2

Matthew 11:28-30

John 14:1-14

Romans 14:17-19

Philippians 4:1-9

CONVERSATION

What stuck with you from this week’s message?

Have you ever been to a concert or sporting event where the sheer volume of people generated a sound that was overpowering? Can you imagine angels showing up with that kind of presence? How would you respond at first? Would you take their message seriously?

Behold *

This passage of Scripture affirms the truth that God is “highest.” Do you find that you live as though this is true? What (or who) competes with God for the position of “highest” in your life?

Is your life characterized by the “peace” described in today’s study? If not, is there an area of your life, perhaps a consistent pattern of sin, that is not pleasing to God? Pray for one another, to trust God and experience peace in our lives (Philippians 4:6-7).

YOUR NOTES

* THE LIGHT

LUKE 2:29-32

“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.”

WHO IS THIS PERSON?

Simeon was recognized as a righteous man (Luke 2:25), and was told ahead of time by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. As Joseph and Mary entered the temple to go through the mandated (by Jewish law) cleansing for both Mary and Jesus, they were stopped by Simeon. Simeon, with baby Jesus in hand, added the final prophecy and proclamation that we will study during this series.

INSIGHTS

How old was Simeon? The Bible does not say, so we don't know for certain. According to Eastern Orthodox tradition Simeon was a translator of a chapter in Isaiah. If true, he would have been over 200 years old when he encountered Jesus! If Simeon indeed was much older than a typical lifespan, it makes sense that he would say, “now you are letting your servant depart in peace,”.

Joseph and Mary understood that Jesus was the Messiah. That reality had been confirmed over and over again through the testimony of multitudes of angels, shepherds and wise men, even John the Baptist before he was born. Yet they still “marveled” when Simeon refers to Jesus as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” (Luke 2:33) For the first time they realize Jesus is not just the Savior of Israel, but of the entire world.

BEHOLD!

What Jesus brought to the world in the first century has the same impact today as it did when He first arrived.

Jesus was “The Light” for the Gentiles, the people who did not yet know about the glory of God. Jesus provided the only viable source of direction and understanding for someone who had did not know the way to God. He provides the same today.

Jesus brought “Glory” for the Jews, the people who already knew about God. For those who maintained faith in the coming Savior, Jesus was flesh and blood fulfillment of that promise. He remains the fulfillment of that promise today.

OTHER SCRIPTURE

Psalm 96:1-9

Habakkuk 2:14

Matthew 2:25-35

Matthew 5:13-20

John 8

John 17

Romans 15:8-9

Revelation 4

CONVERSATION

What stuck with you from this week’s message?

Do you need “The Light” that is Jesus? Have you been living in darkness, living a life without Christ and the forgiveness that He offers? If so, what prevents you from placing your trust in Christ?

THE LIGHT

Do you live your life according to the “Glory” that is Jesus? Have you previously placed your faith in Christ alone for your salvation, but aren’t yet trusting in the Biblical promises that God already fulfilled through Jesus?

Once Simeon became a witness to Jesus, he was able to “depart in peace.” How can you apply Simeon’s example in your life? Are you willing to show Jesus to others in order help bring them peace?

YOUR NOTES

READING PLAN

Here's a reading plan to get you in the Bible a little each weekday as we go through this series. There's a little in the Old Testament and a little in the New Testament that goes along with what passage we looked at the previous weekend.

WEEK 1

- Day 1 - Luke 1
- Day 2 - Luke 2
- Day 3 - Matthew 1
- Day 4 - Luke 1
- Day 5 - Luke 2

WEEK 2

- Day 1 - Luke 1
- Day 2 - 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Proverbs 11:2, Proverbs 22:4
- Day 3 - Mark 9:30-37, Ephesians 4:1-6
- Day 4 - John 13
- Day 5 - Philippians 2:1-18, Colossians 3:1-17

WEEK 3

- Day 1 - Matthew 3, Matthew 28:19-20
- Day 2 - Luke 3, Luke 6:27-36
- Day 3 - John 1:1-23, Ephesians 2:1-10
- Day 4 - Titus 3, Hebrews 4:9-16
- Day 5 - Romans 12, 1 Peter 1:3-25

WEEK 4

Day 1 - Luke 2, Isaiah 9:6

Day 2 - Matthew 2, Psalm 29:11

Day 3 - John 14:1-4, Psalm 37:37

Day 4 - Romans 14:17-19, Philippians 4:1-9

Day 5 - Luke 2, Matthew 11:28-30

WEEK 5

Day 1 - Luke 2

Day 2 - Matthew 5:13-20, Habakkuk 2:14

Day 3 - John 8, John 17

Day 4 - Romans 15:8-9, Revelation 4

Day 5 - Matthew 2:25-35, Psalm 96:1-9

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