



What Child is This

2 – Why the Manger Matters

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Today, we're continuing our Christmas series, *What Child is This*. Today, we're moving on in the Book of Luke. We're covering all of the Book of Luke in this series. We're moving on to Verses 2 through 21 as we talk about The Angels and The Shepherds.

It's interesting when you look at the entire scenario so far, the Christmas story from the outside looking in. Not those that were directly involved like Mary and Joseph and Zechariah and Elizabeth, but those who were on the outside looking in. This can look like a really bad run of really bad luck and circumstances, and you could even say consequences for decisions, as you are on the outside looking in. For instance, Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married and she comes up pregnant. And then, oh by the way, it's not Joseph's child that she's pregnant with. So, from the outside looking in, it can look really suspicious and have a lot of consequences.

And then, as she's nearing a time to give birth, they are told they have to travel 80 to 100 miles away... Go on a road trip that you didn't want to go on because a decree has been given by Cesar Augustus. So, they head out on this road trip, and we don't know for sure how they got there. We always see pictures of Mary on a donkey. We're not sure that part of it may have just been on foot.

Then they get there and there is nowhere for them to stay. And then she goes into labor and then gives birth in some stables with nowhere to lay the baby except in a manger. From the outside looking in, that can look really rotten, can't it? Not knowing what was going on.

When you hear all the consequences, it reminds me of a beloved family that we see this time of year that certainly has had problems with road trips in their past. There they are the Griswolds. You knew, right? We don't need a picture. Cousin Eddy is the only one missing. But the Griswolds, right. Road trip and everything built in and everything that they were doing.

But then there was a select group that knew what was going on, that was on the inside of these happenings, looking out and understanding what God was doing. We don't know for sure how big that group was. We don't hear details about everybody that knew and specifically what they knew, but we do know a few of them. For instance, Mary and Joseph – of course they knew. Zechariah and Elizabeth knew. But then there's this John the Baptist that knew who was yet unborn even. We get evidence that he knew when we read in Luke 1: 41 –***When Elizabeth*** (who was pregnant with John) ***heard Mary's greeting*** (who was pregnant with Jesus), ***the baby*** (John) ***leaped in her womb...***

There's this term called *quickenings*, which is a term to describe when the mother can start to feel the baby move inside of her. Some of you ladies have experienced that. As that baby gets bigger, those movements can get more uncomfortable. I'm not speaking from experience here, just a disclaimer. I've been told it can get kind of uncomfortable, like a head and a shoulder pushing up against the lungs where you can't get a good breath. Or like a foot stepping down on a bladder when you're not near a restroom. But we hear this movement that took place with John and Elizabeth, he leaped in her womb. I wonder what a leap inside of the womb is like. I don't know but I'm guessing it was like a jump with limbs everywhere. It had to be pretty uncomfortable for Elizabeth and I'm going to say she might have even peed a little because this was a leap inside the womb.

What's really cool here is the word that's used in the Gospel of Luke to talk about this baby John is the word *brephos*. In the Greek, the word *brephos* does not distinguish between born and unborn. This word *brephos* is used to describe an embryo up to a fetus up to a month-old baby and beyond. *Brephos*... How cool is that and affirming in that we believe that life begins on conception. And God used this *Brephos*, John, yet unborn to be on the inside looking out, knowing what was going on. By the way, remember the author of this gospel is Luke. What was Luke's profession? He was a physician. Luke knew what he was saying, this *brephos* that he was writing about, this unborn child, life inside the womb that was on the inside looking out.

Now, we have this small group of people that know, and as we move on today into Verse 8 and beyond and the angels and the shepherds, we're going to see this small group is going to expand. And we are going to see the proverbial cat out of the bag as far as this knowledge of Jesus goes.

A couple of weeks ago, Alex Himaya talked about the conception of Christ. And last week, Ted talked about the birth of Christ up into laying him in the manger wrapped in swaddling cloths.

We're going to pick up in Verse 8 today in Luke 2. You can read it along on the screen or you can open your Bible. **8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.** So, we are going to pause with the shepherds here. These people that God is using in this story. We know some things about the shepherds. Some things we know for sure know and some things are a little less certain that are speculated. The thing we know for sure is that they were lowly and humble. They had to be for the profession that they were in, for their vocation. They were lowly and humble. They had to humble themselves to carry out this task because it was thought of as a lowly task. Now, some would say that they were even cast out of society, that they were considered unclean, couldn't participate in religious traditions. They were even regarded as lowly thieves. We don't know that specifically. What we know for certain is that they were lowly and humble.

The other thing we know is they were godly men that knew the word of God, that knew the prophecies of God. How do we know that? Well, we will see here in a little bit in the passage when they were told about the Christ, about the Savior, they knew what the angel was talking about. They didn't say, "What do you mean a Savior Christ the Lord? Who is that?" They knew the prophecies that God had given them. They knew very well what was written about this child that was to be born.

So, what can we learn from the shepherds. Right off the bat in this passage, it's that if we want to prepare ourselves to be used by God for great things in his kingdom, we should do two things. One is to humble ourselves before God and before men and know the scripture so that we can be ready for God to use us in mighty ways.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid..." So, we see this occurrence where an angel appears to them, and their first response is fear. The angel says right away, "Fear not. Don't be afraid." This is a pattern leading up to this moment that we've seen several times. First when the angel appeared to Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, saying that she was going to bear a child, and that would be John that would cause the people to repent. And when the angel appeared to Zechariah the temple, fear fell upon him and the angel's response was, "Do not be afraid."

And then in Luke 1: 30, we read about the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, telling her what we know he tells her. When he greeted her, she was troubled and what did the angel say to her? "Do not be afraid."

And then in Matthew 1: 20, we read about the angel appearing to Joseph in a dream, telling him that he should go ahead and marry Mary. What did he say when the angel appeared to Joseph in the dream? He said, "Do not fear. Take Mary as your wife."

And Now we hear the angel telling the shepherds, when fear fell upon them, "Fear not." So, we see the angel to Zechariah, "Do not be afraid." To Mary, "Do not be afraid." To Joseph, "Do not fear." Now to the Shepherds, "Fear not."

So, what's the pattern we're getting. God is appearing to someone and he's telling them, "I'm going to use you for something big. There is something big that's going to go down and you're going to be central to it, but first I need to you to chill out." That's my paraphrase, by the way. "I need you to not have any fear."

And you may be walking with the Lord and the Lord might be calling you to something that's a big deal. Usually when he's calling you to something that's a big deal, it's going to be a little bit out of your comfort zone. Something you're not used to. What's the first response? The natural response is fear, a little bit afraid of what's going to happen, of what might happen, or what might not happen. And what's God's response to people that he approaches with something that he's going to do and they experience fear? He says, "Fear not."

So, we should not be afraid when we feel the Lord calling us to something great. Why? Because God won't give you anything you can't handle. Good! That's not true. No amens there. That's good. You passed, okay. God will constantly give you things you cannot handle, but why should we not fear? "I will fear no evil." Why? "Because you are with me." God will call you to great things and he is with you. He does not want you to fear. He will not allow you to face any temptation that there is no escape from, but I promise, he will give you things you can't handle. I also promise he won't give you anything that he can't handle. That's why we draw near to the Lord in the things that he is calling us to. And he tells us, "Do not be afraid. Do not have fear."

It says, ***“Fear not, I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*** Again, the shepherds knew exactly what the angel was talking about. Talking about the good news, which Ted talked about at length last week. About the good news and what the gospel means. It means the good news that will be of great joy for who? For all the people. Who does that mean? All the people. This is for all the people. A Savior who is Christ the Lord. This is it. This is the big, proverbial cat out of the bag. God, through the angels, is telling the shepherds, who we will see later on, “Spread the news that this is the Christ, this is the Savior.” ***12 “This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*** This is a very heavy, thick, rich verse right here, that there is a lot to do.

I want to unpack it, but first, I want to share something with you that is a little personal, that I talked to my wife and said, “Is this really something we should share with church?” And she said, “Yes, I think it would probably be okay.”

The rest of my family takes my fingernail clippers from my drawer. Here’s why that’s a big deal. When I need nail clippers, I like to know that I can go to my drawer where I leave my nail clippers and get my nail clippers. Because after I use my nail clippers, what do I do so that I know that they are there every time? I put them right back there. Well, for whatever reason, the rest of the family doesn’t put their nail clippers back in a place that they know they will find them. When they can’t find their nail clippers, guess where they know they can go find a pair of nail clippers. In my drawer. Top right drawer, front right part. They can go right to it and find them every time. So, when they can’t find theirs, they take mine. And guess what? The next time I need them, do you think they put my nail clippers back where they belong? No. They end up somewhere in the pit that is the abyss where nail clippers go in our house. There must be hundreds of them there because when I can’t find mine right where they belong, I’m not going looking for them. I’m going and buying more and putting them in my drawer so I can have them there.

This happened again not too long ago. I go to use my nail clippers, they are not there. I pick up my phone and I immediately ordered 20 pairs of nail clippers. I wanted to go more, but something inside me said this was a little excessive. My wife walks in the bathroom. I said I fixed the nail clipper problem. She asked what I did. I said, “I bought 20 pair. She said, “How much did that cost?” I said, “I don’t care.” I got them, I put them in a Tupperware bowl in a drawer in the middle of the kitchen and I told everyone in the house, “This is where you can find nail clippers. Please do not take mine.” Problem solved. And thank you Woodland Hills for letting me get that off my chest. I feel better.

Back to the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. Did you know baby and swaddling cloths has to do with fingernail clippers. You see, my whole family knew exactly where they could go to find fingernail clippers. That is the detail that the angel gave the shepherds about where they could find Christ. That specificity wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger in the City of David. They go to this small town, find these stables with a baby lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths. That’s important for two reasons. The specificity in this swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. One is because the shepherds knew exactly that they had found Jesus. Number two is that the shepherds would know about the swaddling cloths and the manger. Why? Because they are shepherds.

First of all, the manger is a feeding trough. We talked about that last week. It's this filthy, dirty feeding trough that you feed livestock in. So, they knew exactly what a manger was. But even more important is these swaddling cloths. Let's look at that. In Leviticus 17: 11, in the Old Testament Leviticus law that was given to God's people about sacrifice, about atonement, it says, ***For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls. For it is the blood that makes atonement for the life.*** You see, in this Leviticus law, a spotless lamb was required for sacrifice for atonement. The blood of that lamb was required for the atonement of God's people. In fact, for these shepherds, part of their job in shepherding the flock would have been to watch out as lambs were born that they watched for the spotless lamb, literally a perfect coat.

Not only that, but that lamb then needed to be without blemish, without injury, without defect that could have happened after the birth of it. So, the shepherds would take these specific cloths called swaddling cloths when the spotless lamb was born, and they would wrap that spotless lamb in swaddling cloths to protect it from defect so that it would be adequate for the sacrifice, adequate for the atonement for their souls. I'm guessing Mary and Joseph didn't bring swaddling cloths for livestock along with them. They probably found them somewhere in the stables. I don't know for sure, but here Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

The shepherds knew what swaddling cloths were. And we know that Christ was to be the atonement for our souls, that the atonement was to be in his blood. And as we celebrate Christmas and this time of year and remembering the miracle birth of Christ, it's of utmost importance that we remember that He was born in order to die, to be an atonement for us.

Now is when we are going to pause and take the Lord's Supper together. I would ask you to get those elements out and prepare them. Before we take the elements together, we are going to take a time for a moment of reflection where you can go to the Lord privately, where you can express gratitude for the spotless lamb that he gave us in Christ, to Christ for his sacrifice of his blood and his subsequent resurrection following his death. Confess of any unrepentant sin so that you can come to the Lord in a worthy manner as we take the bread and the cup together.

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way also, he took the cup after supper saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Amen

We remember his miracle birth. We remember his death, his burial, his resurrection. And something that God really desires of his children – we are his children – is that we remember.

I've been following this guy recently in some of the things he's been doing. Some of y'all may have heard of him. His name is Patrick Mahomes. Okay, you've heard of him... Good. Something about Patrick Mahomes and his wife, Brittany, is that they recently had a child, a little boy. They have a daughter also. But they have a little boy and Patrick plays football. So, I'm guessing there is going to be

this great anticipation as this little boy grows up, right? Because we've got Patrick Mahomes that is arguably one of the best football players in the world. If he continues in what he's doing, it's going to become legend and Hall of Fame bound and everything else. Therefore, we're going to watch this child that was born to him, this son, as he grows up and plays little league football, junior high, high school and on into college and possibly professional. We're going to watch him, and we know who this kid is and we are going to watch him. We've seen this with other athlete families like the Mannings. Serena Williams has a daughter. I guarantee the whole tennis world is going to be watching closely. Labron James. So, all these athletes and their kids we are going to be watching closely.

What's interesting though is the shepherds come and proclaim and they understand who this Christ is and that he is the Messiah. This word was spread through Bethlehem and who knows how far else. But then 30 years later, we get Jesus who launches his minister and is performing miracles, causing people to repent and gathering all of these followers. It's as if they've heard of him for the first time. It kind of baffles me a little bit. How does that take place? But then it makes sense, doesn't it? Because God's people are forgetful people, aren't we? We see that when the nation of Israel was let out of Egypt the angel of death passed over their homes and spared their first born. It was quick that they forgot.

You can read the Book of Judges and see this pattern of forgetfulness and regression and redemption by God. And how often do we, as followers of Jesus, forget one of the things that God desires most from his children and that is that we remember.

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Peace is a word we see a lot this time of year on cards, lit up in lights, decorations. And we wonder why the world is not at peace. Because we all get along, right? Politically, religiously, and military, and everything. We all get along perfectly, right? No. Because this peace is not speaking of a horizontal peace Between mankind, but a vertical peace that we read about in Romans 5: 1 **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** That's the peace that the host of the heavens is singing about. How do we know that we are not going to have peace among one another because Christ has come? Because we look at Matthew 10: 34-35 which says, **34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law..."**

Now ladies, on this last one. It is Christmastime and God is not calling you to intentionally fulfill this prophecy, okay? But God is calling you to stand firm in your convictions. That's why there won't be peace among all mankind. Because, followers of Jesus, we are called to stand firm in our convictions and if that breaks relationships, so be it. As far as it is up to you, be at peace with everyone. But not so far that you give in on your convictions and what the Lord has called to you to know to be true and to follow through on. The peace in Verse 14 here is the peace between God and man. There was enmity between God and man because of the separation of sin. And as we read in Romans, that enmity has been broken and we now have peace with God through Christ.

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

I've got a pop quiz for you. When you are in the house and you walk up to a door, particularly a bathroom door, before just opening that door, what should you do? Knock on the door, okay? If you have kids, you know this requires some training. Then even after you train them to knock, you know that the training is not quite done. We got our kids to learn that they are supposed to knock on the door, particularly the bathroom door, maybe like right after I've gotten out of the shower. Then they knock on the door and I would say, "Who is it?" And, somehow, those words leaving my mouth as they went through the air and into their ears and to their brain were translated to "Come on in." The door flies open and there is an awkward moment. So, I have changed my approach. I now provide information. When there is a knock on the bathroom door when I've gotten out of the shower, I simply provide information. "I'm naked." No door is flying open. I just here a shudder. Which is a bit discouraging when it's my wife. I say, "What do you need?" "I need to borrow your nail clippers." I say, "NO. You know where you can find some. You cannot borrow my nail clippers." I provide information. What did the angel do for the shepherds? That angel provided information.

Did you notice in this that the angel didn't say, "Go to Bethlehem?" The angel didn't say, "Go find this baby." Let's rewind so we can read that specifically. Luke 2: 11 says, **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.** There is a baby that has been born and he's the Savior. Information. **12 "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."** What we're getting here really is an if/then from the angel. Look, a Savior has been born and if you go look here, you are going to find the Savior, you're going to find the Christ. What if those shepherds had not followed through on that information that they had been given. We think, *Well of course, they've just been told that Christ has been born; they are going to go find him.*

But we need to ask ourselves, how often do we pass up on information that God has given us? How many if/thens does God give us that we let go? How many blessing do we miss out on? How many times could God have used us that we missed out on to bless others or whatever? He says, "If you ask it will be given to you, if you seek, you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you." Jesus says, "If anyone is weary, you can come to me, and you will find rest for your souls. If/then. If anyone is lacking wisdom, let them ask and God will give it abundantly. If/then. How many of these do we pass up on? Maybe even daily?

And then the ultimate if/then. If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. The ultimate if/then. That maybe some of you this morning, online, in the Castle, Chapel, wherever you are. You have all the information that you need. You know that you are sinful by nature. You know that you need atonement for your soul. You know that Christ was born as the spotless lamb for mankind. You now that he died, he rose again. All you need is to believe in your heart and confess. If that's you, would you meet with a prayer team member and no longer pass up that if/then that God has offered to all the people, including each and every person in here and everyone that you know. Don't pass up on the if/then. Don't pass up on the information that God has given us.

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, So, here we have it where they start evangelizing, if you will. They've gotten the good news and they start telling the good news that had been told them concerning this child. **18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.** Then we get this Verse 19, which is a little bit buried in here, but I think it's pretty neat. Sometimes we can kind of glaze over it, but let's stop here for a moment. **19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.** So, you've got Mary that was one of the central figures that knew what was going on, knew who this baby was, but, again, from the outside looking in, was a mess. It was like the stereotypical Griswold with all the consequences and all the circumstances. And here she is now. The child is born, the shepherds have shown up and she gets this affirmation from them.

I'm guessing she thought back to that moment when the angel visited her and she was fearful and he said, "Don't be afraid." And he told her what was going to happen. She ponders that and then she ponders the road trip that was required. Maybe the moment that Joseph said, "Hey, there's this thing we're going to have to do about 100 miles away" and how that conversation might have gone. And then the trip there. And then the circumstances around getting there. And then the birth of the child. She ponders all of these things. And what does she do? She stops and takes a moment to remember.

What does God desire of his children? He wants them to remember. We have so many things to remember and to be grateful for. This is why it's important in our daily prayer life that we approach God with an attitude of thankfulness, that we express gratitude for the things that he's done for us, the things that he's given us. You may say, "I don't have much to be thankful for." You have the breath in your lungs, and you have the grace given to you because of the spotless lamb. And I would say that's very few of us that would say that's all we have to be thankful for. Look at Mary and the circumstances that she was in. She has just gone through all of this. She is just hours after giving birth and she's pondering these things and remembering them in her heart.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. I like this. This is neat. I like all of it, but this one is pretty neat for a specific reason. We read that the shepherds returned. The shepherds were just visited by an angel, given this big information, they go find the Messiah, and they tell everybody about it. And the shepherds that were these lowly people that had this lowly job, this humble and lowly vocation... Do you know what they didn't do? They didn't say, "I'm special now. I'm going to start this ministry. I'm going to change jobs. I don't need to do this job. Look what's just happened through me, what the Lord has used me for." What did they do. The shepherds returned to watch over their flocks. What did they do as they went, though? They glorified and praised God.

No matter what you do, no matter your vocation, no matter where you get your paycheck from, even if you don't get a paycheck for your work. I know a lot of fulltime moms that don't get a paycheck. They work hard every day. No matter what you do on a day to day basis, you can return after God has called you to something, giving you great news and he desires for you, wherever you are, whatever you're doing... If you are a teacher, if you are a builder, if you're a server, if you're an entertainer, if you're a

fulltime mom, if you are a nurse, a banker, and the list goes on and on. You don't have to change what you're doing. You can return. You've got news that God has given you. You've got things that God wants you to do. You've got if/thens that God has placed in your life that you can do right where you are today.

Every member is a minister. You hear that a lot here and we believe it. Followers of Jesus, you are called to be ministers of the Gospel of Christ.

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

This name Jesus in the Hebrew is Yeshua, which is an abbreviation for Yahweh saves, meaning that God saves. The spotless lamb that was wrapped in swaddling cloths who was to be the atonement for our souls. Yahweh saves, God saves. I believe that he has that name to help us remember. When we say the name Jesus, we remember that God saves. He sent us atonement for our souls. He sent us peace that we can have with him, no longer at odds with God because of our sin condition, our sin nature.

So, church, we remember if we want to prepare ourselves to be in a place where God can use us for big things and even little things for his kingdom, we need to humble ourselves and know his scripture. Be ready. And then when God calls you to something and it's a bit uncomfortable because it's outside of your comfort zone, what does he say? "Don't be afraid." "I will fear no evil for you are with me." He has given you a lot of information. He doesn't even have to send an angel to call you to something, to give you more information. He has given you his Word and a lot of if/thens. What will you do with that information? You are in fulltime ministry regardless of your vocation. And in everything that we do, we remember. We remember his miracle birth, we remember that he was and is the spotless lamb, we remember his death, burial, and resurrection. And for that we are grateful.

Father, we love you and we are grateful. We remember the death on the cross that shed the blood that represented the life that is atonement, Lord, for our souls. We thank you for this Christmas season and, father, I pray specifically for those who have lost loved ones in the last year or particularly around Christmastime where this may be a tough season for them. We pray a blessing of peace upon them and for their friends and family around them to understand and help them walk through this time together as we know it can be a tough time because of the memories, because of the past and the pain that it can bring. We pray that, as a church, we can come around and help bring peace to those through you and your son, Christ.

It's in his name that we pray, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.