



THE CAVE BENEATH THE NAVE OF THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY IN BETHLEHEM. IT DOES NOT LOOK LIKE A CAVE TODAY BECAUSE OF ALL THE TRAPPINGS: MARBLE FLOOR, HANGING LANTERNS, AND COVERINGS OVER THE ROCK WALLS. ON THE LEFT SIDE IS THE PLACE WHERE IT IS TRADITIONALLY BELIEVED JESUS WAS BORN. TO THE RIGHT, THE SITE OF THE MANGER WHERE JESUS WAS PLACED BY HIS MOTHER MARY.

The CHRISTMAS STORY

Another Teaching Series By
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The Christmas Story

Part One / Wednesday, November 17, 2009

Luke 2

THE NIGHT THE ANGELS SANG

1 Luke 2:1-52

2 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the
3 world should be taxed. [2] (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) [3]
4 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. [4] And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of
5 the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of
6 the house and lineage of David:) [5] To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. [6]
7 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. [7]
8 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a
9 manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. [8] And there were in the same country
10 shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And, lo, the angel of the Lord
11 came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. [10] And
12 the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all
13 people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. [12]
14 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a
15 manger. [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and
16 saying, [14] Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. [15] And it came to
17 pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now
18 go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto
19 us. [16] And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. [17]
20 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this
21 child. [18] And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.
22 [19] But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned,
23 glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. [21]
24 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus,
25 which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. [22] And when the days of her
26 purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present
27 him to the Lord; [23] (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be
28 called holy to the Lord;) [24] And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the
29 Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. [25] And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem,
30 whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel:
31 and the Holy Ghost was upon him. [26] And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should
32 not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. [27] And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and
33 when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, [28] Then took he
34 him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, [29] Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
35 according to thy word: [30] For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, [31] Which thou hast prepared before
36 the face of all people; [32] A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. [33] And
37 Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. [34] And Simeon blessed
38 them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in
39 Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; [35] (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul
40 also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. [36] And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the
41 daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven

1 years from her virginity; [37] And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed
2 not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. [38] And she coming in that
3 instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in
4 Jerusalem. [39] And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned
5 into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. [40] And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with
6 wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. [41] Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the
7 feast of the passover. [42] And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom
8 of the feast. [43] And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in
9 Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. [44] But they, supposing him to have been in the
10 company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. [45] And
11 when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. [46] And it came to pass,
12 that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them,
13 and asking them questions. [47] And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and
14 answers. [48] And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast
15 thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. [49] And he said unto them,
16 How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? [50] And they
17 understood not the saying which he spake unto them. [51] And he went down with them, and came to
18 Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. [52] And Jesus
19 increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.
20

21 BETHLEHEM

22
23 The name *Bethlehem* means "house of bread." Once a tiny village where a farmer
24 named Boaz found a beautiful maiden, whose name was Ruth in his fields, and later
25 where young David roamed the hills, our Lord Jesus Christ was born. Today multitudes
26 of people flock into the town, some five miles south of Jerusalem, to view in wonder that
27 holy place where "...*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth*"
28 (John 1: 14).
29

30 Some of us were in Bethlehem about three weeks ago. The town was packed with
31 pilgrims from all over the world. The waiting time in the Church of the Nativity to visit
32 the cave where Jesus was born was nearly two hours.
33

34 Bethlehem today is inhabited primarily by Arabs. Sadly, most of them now are Muslims.
35 Most of the Christian Arabs have fled to other parts of the nation or world.
36

37 In the Old Testament times, Bethlehem was the scene of the book of *Ruth* and the home
38 of David. The tomb of Rachel, the favorite wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph, is
39 nearby. When David became the king in Hebron and later in Jerusalem, Bethlehem
40 became a neglected town, obscure to almost everyone else except those wise students of
41 Scripture who looked for the Messiah. One Old Testament prophet, Micah, made it
42 clear to anyone who would read his prophecy that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem:
43

1 Micah 5:2

2 *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah,*
3 *yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings*
4 *forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

5
6 Years after Jesus was born, the Roman Emperor Hadrian desecrated Bethlehem in 135
7 A.D. by erecting a worship grove dedicated to Adonis. In 315, Emperor Constantine
8 destroyed the heathen grove and constructed instead the Church of the Nativity
9 (completed in 333 A.D.) The church was later enlarged by Justinian I in the 6th century.
10 Today the building is shared by the Greek Orthodox, the Armenians, and Roman
11 Catholics.

12
13 The great saint Jerome lived in the court of the church (386-420 A.D.) and there produced
14 the Vulgate text of the Bible (the original Greek and Hebrew were translated into the
15 common language of his day - Latin). A fabulous statue of Jerome stands in the
16 courtyard of the church to this day.

17
18 From 1099 to 1187 B.C., Crusaders controlled Bethlehem. In 1571 the city was annexed
19 by the Ottoman Empire (the Turks). Then the town was part of the British-administrated
20 Palestine Mandate from 1922 until 1948 when it joined Jordan. After the Six-Day War
21 in 1967, Bethlehem became part of the Israeli-occupied territories, administered militarily
22 by Israeli troops. In 1995, Israeli troops withdrew from Bethlehem as part of the process
23 of establishing Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank, but the city was the scene of
24 Palestinian-Israeli fighting in the renewed conflict that began in 2000. The town is now
25 surrounded by an Israeli-constructed security wall. However, when our group visited
26 Bethlehem several weeks ago, all was peaceful and calm.

27
28 **CAESAR AUGUSTUS AND THE TAX**

29
30 It was not unusual for the Caesar to declare a periodic census throughout the empire. It
31 was done for two reasons: 1) taxation and 2) find out who was liable for compulsory
32 military service. The Jews were exempt from being in the army. Normally, such a
33 census was done every fourteen years.

34
35 Historians have a number of the actual decrees from Roman officials for such a census,
36 one that required people to return to their birthplace provinces for the action. Such as:

37
38 *“Gaius Vibius Maximus, Prefect of Egypt orders: Seeing that the time has come for the*
39 *house-to-house census, it is necessary to compel all those who for any cause whatsoever*
40 *are residing outside their districts to return to their own homes, that they may both carry*

1 *out the regular order of the census, and may also diligently attend to the cultivation of*
2 *their allotments.”*

3 THE GOSPEL OF LUKE / WILLIAM BARCLAY / WESTMINSTER PRESS / PAGE 21
4

5 It is only 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a trip we take today very quickly in
6 modern and powerful tour busses. But in the days of Joseph and Mary, such a trip was
7 very rigorous. *“Accommodations were most primitive. Travelers brought their own*
8 *food; all that the innkeeper provided was fodder for the animals and a fire to cook. The*
9 *town was crowded and there was no room for Joseph and Mary.”*

10 [Ibid]
11

12 Augustus was born with the given name Gaius Octavius on September 23, 63 B.C. He
13 took the name Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (Octavian) in 44 B.C. after the murder of
14 his great uncle, Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar had adopted Octavian and declared him his
15 official heir.

16
17 Octavian was a shrewd and bright politician. Upon the death of his great uncle, he
18 marched on Rome and forced the Senate to name him “consul” and was then established
19 as a power to be reckoned with. His chief rival was Marc Antony; however, when
20 Antony deserted Octavian’s sister (Octavia) to marry Cleopatra, the tide turned against
21 him. Octavian declared official war on his rival and in 31 B.C. his Roman Navy
22 defeated the combined fleets of Antony and Cleopatra and within a year both had
23 committed suicide.

24
25 In 27 B.C., the Roman Senate granted Octavian the name Augustus (meaning “exalted”).
26 He effectively became Emperor of Rome. His feats are historic: he maintained an
27 honest government and a sound currency system; he extended the highway system
28 connecting his capital in Rome with its far-flung empire; he developed an efficient postal
29 service, built many bridges, water aqueducts and buildings. Literature flourished under
30 his leadership with such writers as Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Livy. The empire
31 expanded under Augustus to Spain, France, parts of today’s Hungary and Croatia. He
32 also annexed Egypt and most of southwestern Europe to the Danube River.

33
34 Luke 2:1

35 *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar*
36 *Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.*

37 38 **The Shepherds**

39
40 (Video of the Shepherds’ Fields just outside Bethlehem)
41

1 One of my favorite writers has offered a reason why the angels appeared to these
2 particular shepherds.

3
4 “But these were in all likelihood very special shepherds. We have already seen how in
5 the Temple, morning and evening, an unblemished lamb was offered as a sacrifice to
6 God. To see that the supply of perfect offerings was always available the Temple
7 authorities had their own private sheep flocks; and we know that these flocks were
8 pastured near Bethlehem. It is most likely that these shepherds were in charge of the
9 flocks from which the Temple offers were chosen. It is a lovely thought that the
10 shepherds who looked after the Temple lambs were the first to see the Lamb of God who
11 takes away the sin of the world.”

12 [IBID PAGES 22-23]

13
14 That opinion, of course, is very speculative. But it well could have happened that way.
15 But it is fascinating to every child of God, I think, that the announcement of Christ’s birth
16 was given to shepherds, not monarchs in palaces and mansions.

17
18 While in Jordan last month, a local told me that Jordanian King Abdullah has, on
19 occasion, donned normal clothing and a disguise and walked among the people in
20 Amman, incognito. He has listened to what the people say and observed their reactions
21 to current situations and adapted his policies accordingly. In effect, this is what Christ
22 did. John wrote it best, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us....full of grace
23 and truth.”

18 THE REACTION OF THE SHEPHERDS

19
20 Luke 2:17

21 **Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about**
22 **this child.**

23
24 Luke 2:20

25 **The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for**
26 **everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!**

27
28 They were “witnesses” of what they had seen. That is all God has ever called us to do -
29 witness what we have seen and experienced. Acts 1:8 **What you'll get is the Holy**
30 **Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses**
31 **in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world."**

1 THE STRANGE AND WONDERFUL STORY OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE AT 12

2
3 Luke 2:41-52 tells the story.

- 4
- 5 • It was the law that every adult male Jew who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem had
6 to attend the Passover. However, it was the deep desire in every Jew in all the world
7 to attend the Passover in Jerusalem at least once in life.
 - 8
 - 9 • A Jewish boy became a man at age 12. It is probable that Jesus had his bar mitzvah
10 in Jerusalem at the Temple. I still love to go to the Western Wall on Thursdays, the
11 day most bar mitzvahs are conducted. It is a scene of joy and love.
 - 12
 - 13 • When Joseph and Mary began the trip back to Nazareth, Jesus lingered at the Temple.
 - 14

15 It was not until the small caravan stopped for the night (probably in the Ramallah area)
16 that Jesus was missed. Apparently Mary thought Jesus was with Joseph and the men
17 and Joseph thought Jesus was with Mary and the women. They immediately returned to
18 Jerusalem to find him. After three days they found him in the Temple, sitting among the
19 religious leaders listening to them - and even volunteering information that left the elders
20 amazed.

21
22 Mary went up to Him and said, "You father and I have been looking for you and have
23 been very worried." Jesus immediately responded: "Did you not know that I must be in
24 my Father's house?"

25
26 Jesus already knew at His young age of 12 that He was on a divine mission and He was
27 the Son of God. But note this: the discovery did not make him haughty or
28 condescending to Joseph and Mary. He went with them back to Nazareth and was
29 obedient to them.

30
31 I like what one writer observed: *"The real man of God does not despise earthly ties; just
32 because he is God's man he discharges human duties with supreme fidelity."*

33
34
35 ***Next Wednesday evening, November 25, 2009: THE WISE MEN AND KING***
36 ***HEROD THE GREAT***