

GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Returning to Our Roots

STUDY SEVEN

Mary's Little Lamb

Luke 2:1–20

Jesus is undiminished deity and true humanity forever in one body from conception throughout eternity. He is God's gift too wonderful for words.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It was a rare moment when the apostle Paul couldn't find the right words to express spiritual truth, but when he put his pen to parchment to describe God's gift of grace in Jesus, no word came to mind.

"Thank God for. . . ." Paul must have paused to contemplate what to write next. The great theologian's vocabulary could have filled a dictionary, but his mind was a dry inkwell from which to draw words to describe the wonder of Jesus. So Paul penned, "Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

What puts Jesus beyond description? Certainly, one reason is His divine nature. In Jesus, whose birth we celebrate every Christmas, "lives all the fullness of God in a human body" (Colossians 2:9). Jesus "radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God" (Hebrews 1:3).

Who can begin to describe Jesus—undiminished deity and true humanity existing together in the fragile frame of a little baby? Amazing! Jesus is the ultimate gift of grace from the supreme Giver—a gift too wonderful for words.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Mary's Little Lamb

Luke 2:1–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Sometimes a picture can communicate what words fail to express. For centuries, artists have attempted to capture the wonder of the nativity. One of the most touching paintings is *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerard van Honthorst, which is exhibited at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, Germany.

Linger over the range of emotions the faces express—delight, hope, awe, love. Notice how all the figures orient toward the baby who is the focal point of the scene.

In the space below, express to the Lord your desire to make Jesus the focal point of your life, and ask God to help you draw closer to His Son through the narrative of Jesus' birth.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

To step into *Luke 2:1–20* is to enter a world of wondrous miracles. Read the passage as if for the first time. Watch for signs of the invisible hand of God and the interplay between heaven and earth. View the contrasts between global edicts and local events, public mayhem and maternal tenderness, pastoral tranquility and explosions of celestial light and sound. Write down any phrases that stand out as central to the passage.



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Observation: Setting, Birth, Responses

The more times you read a passage, the more you see. Now that you have an overview, look at it again as if through a magnifying glass, examining the setting, who is talking, and the action. Watch for themes, contrasts and comparisons, metaphors, and repeated phrases.

The Setting—Luke 2:1–5

Having already placed His divine seed in Mary's womb, God planted an idea in Caesar's mind that would begin to turn the giant wheel of world events. What details did Luke include in [Luke 2:1–3](#)? Why did Luke lay this groundwork before describing Jesus' birth?

What key points was Luke making about Jesus' lineage and Joseph's relationship with Mary in [2:4–5](#)?

In perfect harmony with God's sovereign plan, Mary went alongside her husband to Bethlehem. Luke used the word, "engaged," to remind us that Joseph has not touched Mary sexually even though they are husband and wife. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The Birth—Luke 2:6–7

Notice how Luke narrowed the focus. He took his readers from the marble throne room of Caesar, to the teeming masses of humanity, to an unknown couple, to an unborn baby hidden in the darkness of his mother's womb.

What details did Luke give about the modest circumstances of Jesus' birth in [Luke 2:6–7](#)? What subtle implications do you think Luke was making about the purpose of Jesus' coming?

For the first time, at Jesus' birth, God breathed earth's air with human lungs and made sounds through human vocal chords. God had taken on human flesh.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Responses—Luke 2:8–20

Few on earth knew that the long-awaited King had just been born—the One who would establish an eternal reign of celestial magnitude. How did the angel of the Lord announce the royal birth in [Luke 2:8–12](#)? What important details did the messenger from heaven give the shepherds?



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What praise did the angelic host give in *Luke 2:13–14*? Step back and view the scene in your mind's eye. What contrasts do you see that heighten the impact of the moment?

Angels are timeless and ageless. The angels were there when Jesus created the earth. How appropriate that they were present at His birth. The same angels who sang at creation were there to sing at the incarnation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The news of the ages tumbled like jewels from heaven into the shepherds' calloused hands. What did the shepherds immediately do, according to *2:15–18*?

Review the passage and count the number of times “manger” is mentioned. What do you think is the significance of this repeated detail?



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In *Luke 2:19–20*, Luke concluded with what tender insight into Mary's heart and what final word about the shepherds?

The first evangelists were shepherds, garden-variety people like you and me. They told everyone they met. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Jesus' Birth

In *interpretation*, we'll examine the meaning of Jesus' birth. View Luke's account against the prophetic backdrop of *Isaiah 9:2, 6–7* and *Micah 5:2*—which Luke's readers would likely have known. In what ways did Jesus' birth fulfill these prophecies? How do we better understand Jesus' identity based on these prophecies?



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Why did the angels announce the birth of the King to shepherds? What did their lowly place in society imply about the newborn King's heart?

In addition, what are the connections between the shepherds and the prophecies of the coming King in *Isaiah 40:9–11* and *Ezekiel 34:22–23*?

Reflect on the responses of the angels, the shepherds, and Mary toward the birth of Jesus. What principles for us can you draw from their examples?

Mary's response was wonderment and silence. In the twilight hours, she pondered all the things that had taken place as she tucked Jesus in for His first night's sleep.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: The Response of Others

As we correlate Luke's nativity account, we find other ways people responded to Jesus. Read Simeon's and Anna's encounters with the Child in *Luke 2:25–38*. How do they model right responses toward Jesus?

Compare Simeon and Anna with the worship of the Magi in *Matthew 2:1–12*. What do you glean from their example?

What's your response? Now that the gift has been unwrapped and has smiled at you today, who do you say He is? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Receive His Gift

After contemplating the nativity, our hearts yearn to respond, yet how difficult it is sometimes to verbalize the full spectrum of our emotions. Like Paul, we may be at a loss for words. Simply imagine sitting by Mary as she ponders the wonder of Jesus.



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She has protected and nourished this life inside her for nine months. Finally, she gets to meet her intimate stranger face-to-face. She cups His doll fingers in her hands; she lingers over his delicate lips, His pudgy chin, His tuft of newborn hair. Then the Child's eyelids slowly part, and she gazes into pools as soft and deep as the starlit night. The angel's message, the shepherd's report . . . it all races through her mind . . . that she is cradling deity, the Lord of the universe, her own Creator.

Do you need a tangible expression of God's love? Ask Mary to let you hold her Baby. Coo at Him until He gives you a smile. Feel His tiny hand reach for your cheek. Consider how He gave up eternity to come to earth. How it must have wrenched the Father's heart to send Him to such a hostile place. That's why the gift is so unspeakably precious—because the cost was so great. Jesus is God's greatest demonstration of love for you.

Won't you receive His gift? Take a quiet moment of worship as you treasure Your Savior, Messiah, and Lord.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, others may have no room, but my heart swings open to welcome You. I only wish I could fly to the heavens to worship with the angels. Or run with the shepherds to see Your Son's face and spread Your news. Or sit quietly with Mary and ponder Your beauty. Perhaps in eternity, I will. Thank You for caring enough to come near. In Jesus' name, amen.