

A Gospel-Centered 2016 (Luke 2:1-21)

(1) In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. (2) This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. (3) And all went to be registered, each to his own town. (4) And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, (5) to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. (6) And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. (7) And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

(8) And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (9) And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. (10) And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (12) And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (13) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (15) When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." (16) And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. (17) And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. (18) And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. (19) But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. (20) And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (21) And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

(4) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4-5)

(6) For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (7) Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isa 9:6-7)

(2) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. (Mic. 5:2)

(5) Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (6) In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Prov 3:5-6)

(1) The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. (3) He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Ps 23:1-6)

(1) So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, (2) complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (3) Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. (4) Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (5) Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, (6) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (9) Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:1-11)

(20) I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20)

1. All of your days are in God's hands. Nothing happens to you by chance. God is sovereign over people, governments, the world, the universe. You can trust God, and you don't have to live a life of fear, worry, and sinful anxiety. Many say, "The sky is falling...", but the truth is that the sky will not fall until Jesus falls from it at His 2nd Coming. Then, and only then, will the sky fall, only to be remade new into a new heavens (sky) with a new earth to go along with it (Rev. 21-22). As Christians we can live optimistically hopeful lives because of Jesus. Don't forget the gospel this year...
2. Our current president, future president, nor any world leader is in control, is our savior, our peace, or our hope. This place in our hearts only belongs to Jesus, our great God and Savior. No matter who is "leading" God is shepherding us, He is our leader. Don't forget that Jesus is your Good Shepherd this year...
3. This decree of Caesar for the world to be registered was in order to count the people for taxation, possible military service, and possibly in order to boast of greater numbers in the Roman Empire. These details are placed in Luke's gospel to teach us about God's control, and to set all of these events in a historical context. The names of leaders, the time table, and the specific geography all point to the historicity,

- verifiability, and ultimately the truthfulness of what Luke is writing about. The gospel is certain. The gospel is to be applied to all our relationships, our marriage, our family, our work, our everything. Don't forget the gospel this year...
4. In God's good and perfect providence Joseph and Mary are led ultimately by God to their own hometown of Bethlehem. This would have been a 70 plus mile journey across difficult terrain, while Mary was close to 9 months pregnant. This was to fulfill the purpose of God, the prophets, and God's plan for Mary and Joseph. God's plan and purpose may not always be easy. God's providential guidance will not always lead us down easy paths. But, we can be assured of His love, presence, provision, power, protection, and providential plan. We can trust Him through it all knowing that it will ultimately be for our greatest good and His greatest glory. When things get hard don't forget the gospel...
 5. God knew Mary would have Jesus on this trip. God knows everything about your life as well. He is never surprised, and nothing catches Him off guard. Ultimately it is all about Jesus's glory, plan, and redemptive purpose. Until you realize this about your life you will at times live confused and unnecessarily discouraged. Jesus can be glorified in and through you no matter what your circumstances in life are. Live for His glory today. See all you go through this year through gospel-centered lenses...
 6. Doors may close on you in your life that appear to be negative. You may even be rejected for doing what is right and what God leads you to do. Don't let this stop you from finishing the work that God has called you to do. Trust Him to lead you every step of the way. Gospel, gospel, gospel...
 7. The greatest miracle ever, God becoming a man and entering into human life and history, occurred in the most humble of circumstances. Jesus was born to a poor, peasant, teenage virgin. Jesus' first outfit was probably made from some kind of sheep wool that He had created. Jesus was laid in a manger (animal feed trough) that was made from a tree that He designed and made. Jesus humbled Himself to do the will of God the Father. We will be called to humble ourselves in order to fulfill God's plans and purposes for our lives. Are you willing to live in humility? Are you willing to live with gospel-centered humility in 2016?...
 8. God chose shepherds to reveal the birth of His Son to. God is our shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Shepherds take care of sheep by leading them, feeding them, and protecting them from wolves. God leads us, feeds us, and protects us from wolves. The birth of Jesus is God's example to us of His loving pastoral care for us both now and forever. The gospel reminds us of God's great love. Don't forget His love for you...
 9. The birth of Jesus is good news (gospel) to those who are in the dark! The birth of Jesus is good news to the fearful! The gospel brings joy, hope, life, and love. Do you live a gospel-centered life? Do you want to be a gospel-centered church? Does the gospel characterize your life? Would people say they see the gospel in the way you live, treat others, work, talk, listen, etc.? This gospel is available to all who repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Gospel... Gospel... Gospel...
 10. Jesus is our Savior, Messiah (Anointed Prophet, Priest, and King), and Lord/Master/King. Jesus saves us from sin, satan, hell, God's wrath, and the fear of death. Jesus liberates us, frees us, blesses us forever. Don't forget the blessed good news...
 11. Only God can give us peace (shalom), and He alone deserves all glory, honor, and praise. God is pleased with us when we are in Christ, follow Christ, and grow in Christ. The gospel brings peace...
 12. Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the angels all worshiped Jesus. Do you worship Jesus? Do you realize this is what you were made for? You were made for God's glory, His praise, His worship, and your life will be meaningless apart from this purpose. The gospel gives us meaning...
 13. Jesus should bring wonder to our hearts. His birth, life, death, and resurrection should be what we ponder on the most. Ponder the gospel this year...
 14. The shepherds told others about what they were told by God, what they had experienced, and specifically about Jesus. Are you doing the same? Are you intentionally sharing the gospel with others as God leads? Make 2016 a gospel-centered year in every way...