

# LUKE

WESLEY BIBLE STUDIES



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Cover image © iStockphoto LP 2013. All rights reserved. Engraving by Gustave Dore (1832–1883). The Annunciation is the Christian celebration of the announcement by the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she would become the mother of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Notes from the Doctor*

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Doctors write notes for their patients (prescriptions) and about each patient visit—the nature of any ailments, a summary of the examination, any treatment given, and follow-up recommendations. Referrals to other doctors also involve written correspondence.

Luke, the person God used to write the inspired gospel that bears his name, was a doctor. We might say his gospel is an authoritative, accurate collection of his notes. But Dr. Luke's notes were not about a patient; they were all about another doctor, Jesus, the Great Physician. Luke's primary audience was the Greeks, who believed their culture could produce wise, perfect individuals. Undoubtedly, Luke wanted them to understand that Jesus was all-wise and perfect. But first and foremost, Luke wrote to present Jesus as the perfect Son of Man, who came to save us (see Luke 19:10).

## BIRTH RECORDS

Luke wrote first about two miraculous births. The first involved a very old couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was a Jewish priest, and Elizabeth was barren. Both were godly members of a remnant that was looking for the arrival of Israel's messiah. God granted them a baby boy, John, who heralded the Messiah's imminent coming.

The second miraculous birth was that of our Savior. He was born of Mary, a godly virgin who considered herself the Lord's

servant (Luke 1:38). Jesus' birth was an occasion of great rejoicing, and it was good news for all people.

### **DIAGNOSIS OF SIN**

Luke wrote that John the Baptist fearlessly and faithfully summoned the nation to repent and be baptized in preparation for the Messiah's arrival. John exposed hypocrisy and denounced self-righteousness.

Luke's notes cite many cases of sin, including the most heinous sin of all: the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior. He clearly detailed events leading up to the crucifixion: betrayal by Judas, Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial of Him, the beatings He endured, arraignment before the political authorities, and Pilate's cowardly act of heeding the crowd's demand that Jesus be crucified.

### **THE GREAT PHYSICIAN'S POWER TO HEAL AND FORGIVE**

Luke's gospel also overflows with accounts of the healing and forgiveness Jesus brought to needy individuals. No one lay beyond His power and love. Tax collectors, a woman of bad reputation, a centurion's servant, and a hemorrhaging woman who had been treated unsuccessfully by a number of doctors were among the many He healed and forgave.

### **THE GREAT PHYSICIAN WILL SEE YOU NOW**

As you progress through this study, may your love and devotion for Jesus increase! While you marvel at His sinless character and selfless ministry, recognize that the Great Physician is always available to hear your concerns and meet your needs. His office is never closed!

## WHO, ME?

*Luke 1:5–7, 11–20, 26–38*

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God works in our lives through answered prayers  
and unexpected blessings.

Waiting is often hard to do. For example, when you were a child, didn't you find it hard to wait for Christmas? When you rode in your parents' car toward a distant location, how often did you ask, "Are we there yet?" When you were a student, was it hard to wait for summer break? Now that you are an adult, you may find it hard to wait for a promotion, raise, vacation, or even medical test results.

This study features a few righteous Jews who were waiting patiently for the arrival of the Messiah. Their patience and the way God rewarded that patience encourage us to wait patiently on God.

### COMMENTARY

The gospel of Luke, inspired by God to possibly the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, is a unique account of the life of Jesus for which all of Christendom is indebted and grateful. There are details of Jesus' life recorded by no other gospel writer that comprise about 60 percent of the whole book. Only the gospel of John is more unique with over 90 percent of its material unlike any of the other three gospels.

The prologue of Luke is a literary gem, written in the best Greek style of the whole New Testament, second only to the book of Hebrews. We have reason to believe that Luke lived at Antioch, Syria, and may have studied medicine at the University

of Tarsus, where there was a famous medical school in the first century of the Christian era. Since Tarsus was the hometown of Saul, who became the apostle Paul, it is possible that Luke and Paul may have been students at the same time at the university. Both men, well-trained and scholarly, later ministered together through western Asia Minor and southern Europe.

A notably accurate historian, Dr. Luke was a general practitioner. He would have been challenged to tackle the project of making a thorough investigation of Jesus' life for Theophilus, a man of considerable distinction. Theophilus ("Lover of God" or "Loved by God") even may have paid for the publication of both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, also believed to have been written by Luke. Some authorities think Luke and Acts may have been circulated together after both had been composed (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–2). We learn by tradition that Luke never married and lived to age eighty-four, thus being free to spend whatever time was necessary to write carefully and accurately both accounts of Jesus' life and much of the apostle Paul's life.

Because of its various emphases, the gospel of Luke has been called the gospel of prayer (there are twenty references to Jesus praying or His teaching on prayer), the gospel of Eucharistic hymns (five hymns are found in chapters 1 and 2), the gospel of salvation by grace (ten times the word for *evangelize* is used and there are eight uses of the word *grace*), the gospel of the poor, the gospel of humility, the gospel of the Holy Spirit, and the gospel of the universality of God's provisions for the human family.

Luke's gospel is the longest of all four gospels and, with the book of Acts, his contribution to the New Testament is more substantive than any of the other seven known writers of the New Testament. Luke presented Jesus as the Son of Man instead of the Son of God, as did John in his gospel. The great interpolation of Luke is found in chapters 10–18, where the ministry of Jesus is primarily in Perea. Only Luke recorded as much of the ministry

of Jesus there. Of a total of thirty-six miracles in the four gospels, Luke recorded twenty. Of the thirty parables in the four gospels, Luke recorded nineteen. All students of the New Testament will be blessed by what the Holy Spirit led Luke to write.

### **Zechariah and Elizabeth Had No Children (Luke 1:5–7)**

**Herod** (v. 5) the Great (both because of his construction projects—aqueducts, Masada, and the temple in Jerusalem—and his terrible wickedness) is mentioned here to date the time when John the Baptist was to be born, six months before Jesus (probably 5 or 6 B.C.). Because of his cruelty in ordering the slaughter of babies in and around Bethlehem after Jesus was born, Herod was greatly feared. The parents of John the Baptist were **Zechariah** and **Elizabeth**, who were **descendant** from the **priestly line of Aaron**. **Both of them were upright . . . observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children . . . and they were both well along in years** (vv. 5–7).

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#### WORDS FROM WESLEY

*Luke 1:6*

*Walking in all the moral commandments, and ceremonial ordinances, blameless—How admirable a character! May our behaviour be thus unblameable, and our obedience thus sincere and universal! (ENNT)*

As a Jewish priest, Zechariah worked at the temple teaching the Scriptures, directing the worship services, and tending to the temple’s upkeep. It is estimated that there were twenty thousand priests at this time, divided into twenty-four separate groups of nearly a thousand each, who took their turn in serving. Early in



the morning, a priest on duty would enter the Holy Place and burn incense. It was at such a time that the Lord gave a special message to the elderly couple. They were going to have a baby, chosen because they **were upright in the sight of God** (v. 6).

### Gabriel Startled Zechariah (Luke 1:11–20)

Angels are spirit beings created by God to do His will. Only two are mentioned by name in the Bible—Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) and Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). In this text, Gabriel is called the **angel of the Lord** (v. 11). He was **standing at the right side of the altar of incense**, and because of his sudden and unexpected appearance, **when Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear** (vv. 11–12). Throughout the Bible, awe, surprise, fear, and consternation are almost universal reactions to angelic encounters.

#### WORDS FROM WESLEY

*Luke 1:12*

*Zacharias was troubled*—Although he was accustomed to converse with God, yet we see he was thrown into a great consternation, at the appearance of his angelical messenger, nature not being able to sustain the sight. Is it not then an instance of the goodness as well as of the wisdom of God, that the services, which these heavenly spirits render us, are generally invisible? (ENNT)

The message of Gabriel was both comforting and exciting: **“Elizabeth will bear you a son because your prayer has been heard”** (v. 13). Furthermore, **“He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice . . . for he will be great in the sight of the Lord”** (vv. 14–15). The joy this child would bring was not only because his parents had prayed for him, but also because

he was to be great as the forerunner of the Messiah. Several directions were given to Elizabeth and Zechariah. His **name** was to be **John** (meaning “the Lord is gracious”). He was **never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth** (vv. 13, 15).

The qualification of John to be the forerunner of Jesus was not only because of the seal of the Holy Spirit, but also because he was to be preserved in purity as part of the law of a Nazirite. This ancient vow, instituted in Numbers 6:1–8, was one that Samson, and possibly Samuel, took in holy consecration to God’s service. John would **go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, turning many of the people of Israel . . . back to the Lord . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord** (Luke 1:16–17).

**Zechariah** questioned that this could happen and said, **“I am an old man and my wife is well along in years”** (v. 18). Since Zechariah doubted, **Gabriel** responded: **“I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. . . . You will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens”** (vv. 19–20). We all must learn that what God has promised He will accomplish at the right time.

### **Gabriel Troubled Mary (Luke 1:26–38)**

Six months after Zechariah had been told his wife was to have a baby, **God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary** (vv. 26–27). This is only the fourth time in the Bible that Gabriel is named. His name means “God is mighty,” and each time he visited, he made an announcement or gave direction or information to Daniel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21), Zechariah (Luke 1:19), or **Mary** (v. 26). The words of Gabriel to Mary were, **“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. . . . Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God”** (vv. 28, 30).

WORDS FROM WESLEY

Luke 1:28

*Hail, thou highly favoured; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women—Hail is the salutation used by our Lord, to the women after His resurrection: Thou art highly favoured, or hast found favour with God, ver. 30 is no more than was said of Noah, Moses, and David. The Lord is with thee, was said to Gideon (Judg. 6:12), and blessed shall she be above women, of Jael (Judg. 5:24). This salutation gives no room for any pretence of paying adoration to the Virgin: as having no appearance of a prayer, or of worship offered to her. (ENNT)*

**Mary was greatly troubled at Gabriel’s words and wondered what the greeting meant** (v. 29). The angel’s words were, **“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus”** (v. 31). Although every young woman among the Jews knew the prophecy of a coming messiah and wondered who might be chosen to be His mother, Mary was utterly amazed and probably with furrowed brow asked, **“How will this be . . . since I am a virgin?”** (v. 34). Mary was a poor, young, pure woman, who was **pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David** (v. 27). The pledge in Jewish custom was more than our contemporary idea of engagement. A pledge was legally binding and could be broken only by a legal divorce. Thus, Joseph would have needed to divorce Mary quietly, as he had considered, if the pledge was severed, according to Matthew (Matt. 1:18–19).

The Lord’s blessing on Mary to be the mother of the Messiah brought her much pain. She found it necessary to stay with Elizabeth, probably to escape the scorn and near divorce by Joseph. Her son, Jesus, was going to be viciously attacked and murdered. But **He was to be great and . . . the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the**

**house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end** (Luke 1:32–33). Many centuries before, God had promised that David’s kingdom would last forever (2 Sam. 7:16). This promise was fulfilled in Christ, who was a direct descendent of David. Thus, Jesus our Lord will rule and reign throughout eternity.

WORDS FROM WESLEY

*Luke 1:37*

The omnipresent God sees and knows all the properties of the beings that He hath made. He knows all the connexions, dependencies, and relations, and all the ways wherein one of them can affect another. In particular, He sees all the inanimate parts of the creation, whether in heaven above, or in the earth beneath. He knows how the stars, comets, or planets above influence the inhabitants of the earth beneath; what influence the lower heavens, with their magazines of fire, hail, snow, and vapours, winds, and storms, have on our planet; and what effects may be produced in the bowels of the earth by fire, air, or water; what exhalations may be raised therefrom, and what changes wrought thereby; what effects every mineral or vegetable may have upon the children of men: All these lie naked and open to the eye of the Creator and Preserver of the universe. . . .

And is the Creator and Preserver of the world unconcerned for what He sees therein? . . . Does He sit at ease in the heaven, without regarding the poor inhabitants of earth? It cannot be. He hath made us, not we ourselves, and He cannot despise the work of His own hands. We are His children: And can a mother forget the children of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will not God forget us! On the contrary, He hath expressly declared, that as His “eyes are over all the earth,” so He “is loving to every man, and his mercy is over all his works.” Consequently, He is concerned every moment for what befalls every creature upon earth; and more especially for everything that befalls any of the children of men. (WJW, vol. 6, 316–317)

Gabriel told Mary, when she asked how she could be the mother of Jesus, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God”** (Luke 1:35).

The name Jesus was a familiar name among the Jews. It means “the Lord saves” and is the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, the most well-known being the Joshua who led the children of Israel into the Promised Land (Josh. 1:1–2). Jesus came to lead those who receive Him into everlasting life. This symbolism was striking to the Jews of Jesus’ day, setting Him apart as a special person, the incarnate Son of God.

Mary was informed that **even Elizabeth**, her cousin, was **going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren was in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God** (Luke 1:36–37). **The angel left** Mary when she answered, **“I am the Lord’s servant. . . . May it be to me as you have said”** (v. 38). It is possible that at the moment of Mary’s faith and in her submission to the Lord’s will the miraculous conception (not immaculate conception, the term that describes the belief that Mary was born without sin) took place. It was John Wesley who observed that the greatest proof that God saves us and sanctifies us in a moment is because any work in a believer’s life must, of necessity, come by faith. In that moment of belief, the work of grace occurs.

## DISCUSSION

Generally, we regard medical doctors as reputable men and women of science who are concerned about our well-being. Dr. Luke, a reputable man of science in the first century, wrote his gospel with concern for our faith and our overall spiritual health.

1. Read Luke 1:1–3. How does this passage confirm and/or strengthen your belief in Jesus as a real, historic person?

2. How would you describe the character of Zechariah and his wife?

3. Why do you agree or disagree that Zechariah and Elizabeth were part of a spiritual remnant in Israel?

4. How does Luke 5:11–20 encourage you to pray?

5. How do you believe John’s birth would cause many people to rejoice?

6. How does Zechariah’s renewed hearing encourage you to trust God to keep His word?

7. What characteristics in Mary’s life would you like to incorporate into yours?

8. Read Luke 1:38. How can you truthfully and confidently say that you are the Lord’s servant?

## PRAYER

Father, we see in the willing service of these faithful followers a challenge to live a life set apart for Your use. Purify us from anything that would soil us or keep us from being useful in Your service.

## GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

*Luke 2:1–20*

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Good news is for all people.

Abraham Lincoln quipped that God must have loved the common people, because He made so many of them. Honest Abe may have been right, although God certainly loves “uncommon” people too. God didn’t announce the birth of His Son Jesus first to the cultural elite but to shepherds, whose station in life was distant from the rich and powerful. They heard that Jesus’ birth was good news for all people and, after visiting God’s Lamb, they spread the word about Him.

Like the shepherds, we have received the good news, and we are called to share it.

### COMMENTARY

Jesus’ birth is perhaps the most famous birth in history, and rightly so. The universal nature of Christ’s advent is summarized in the message of the angels found in Luke 2:10: “good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

Jesus’ coming and His death and resurrection are not just for Jewish people, but for “all the people.” Jesus died for the sins of the world, not just those of a single nation or race.

### A Census Was Taken (Luke 2:1–3)

Luke’s mention of **Caesar Augustus** (v. 1) and other political leaders gives chronological context to the book, helping to establish dates. The **decree** was simply a ruling passed on by Caesar. It

was to be followed without delay. A **census** was taken about every fourteen years. **Quirinius** and his country, **Syria** (v. 2), are mentioned to help further pinpoint the authenticity of the book and the census. Luke was careful to use specific details whenever possible. **The entire Roman world** (v. 1) was literally the entire world, with the word **Roman** being added by translators for clarity. But the Greek word *oikoumeneen* sometimes refers specifically to the land of Israel, and history verifies that a census was taken in Israel with a larger census some years later. So perhaps a better understanding of where the census took place would be “the entire Jewish world.”

It was the custom of the day that people **went to their own town to register** (v. 3) themselves, their occupations, and their families. The purpose for the census was probably taxation. For other nations under Roman rule, a census also served as a notice of those eligible for military service. But the Jewish people were exempt from Roman military obligations.

### **Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4–7)**

The hand of God is seen in the calling for a census because it required **Joseph** (v. 4) to travel home to Bethlehem. It was God’s will for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem as the prophets foretold in Micah 5:2 and as recorded in Matthew 2:6. **Nazareth** is about eighty miles from **Bethlehem**, which is known as the **town of David** (Luke 2:4) because King David grew up there. The prophets foretold the lineage of the Messiah through David in Jeremiah 33:15–17. All this detail validates Jesus’ birthright as the Messiah.

Mary was **pledged to be married** (Luke 2:5) to Joseph and was expecting a child, Jesus. **Pledged** actually means she was betrothed, or in today’s terms, engaged. Betrothal was a serious commitment, sometimes requiring a certificate of divorce to break.

It must have been a difficult trip for the two of them. Some historians tell us that Mary was not obligated to make the trip.



That being said, she may have gone because she realized her role in fulfilling the prophetic voice of the Old Testament. Verse 6 tells us the time of pregnancy was the ninth month, because **the baby** was **born** while they were in Bethlehem. Her **firstborn** (v. 7) is mentioned to reaffirm Mary’s virginity. There were no older siblings and there was no sexual union between Joseph and Mary prior to Jesus’ birth (see Matt. 1:25).

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WORDS FROM WESLEY

Luke 2:6

*And while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered—* Mary seems not to have known that the child must have been born in Bethlehem, agreeably to the prophecy. But the providence of God took care for it. (ENNT)

**Cloths** (Luke 2:7) were long linen strips that bundled the baby tightly. Hospitals wrap infants in a similar way today using blankets. There was **no room for them in the inn** (v. 7) because the small town was flooded with people registering for the census. Typical Jewish custom leads us to expect the young couple to stay with relatives. It may have been that their family’s homes were already full to overflowing as was the inn. Sometimes the innkeeper is portrayed as a gruff and uncaring soul, but the biblical record doesn’t offer such detail. The reason there was no room in the inn is because others arrived before Joseph and Mary and occupied all the rooms. Bethlehem was crowded, and there were more people than accommodations. The **manger** (v. 7) may have been a feeding trough. Some historians feel the actual location of Jesus’ birth was either a cave-like place where shepherds kept their flocks in inclement weather or in the courtyard of the inn where travelers boarded their beasts of burden. Whichever,

the symbolism is profound. The Lord of all creation came to earth and there was no room for Him. Similarly, many people today are too busy for Jesus—they have no room for Him in their lives.

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WORDS FROM WESLEY

*Luke 2:7*

*She laid him in the manger*—Perhaps it might rather be translated *in the stall*. They were lodged in the ox-stall, fitted up on occasion of the great concourse, for poor guests. *There was no room for them in the inn*—Now also, there is seldom room for Christ in an inn. (ENNT)

Another interesting parallel in this story is the play on the term **Bethlehem** (v. 4), which means “house of bread.” Jesus referred to himself as the “bread of life” in John 6:35. So, the house of bread produced that which feeds the whole world—Jesus, the Bread of Life.

It is fascinating that the Sovereign Lord of all creation became a helpless child. The Creator became one of the created. The all-powerful one became the vulnerable one. The one who used political giants and kings to control the behavior of many people and orchestrate a census became the infant child of a humble carpenter.

For Caesar, it was business as usual—take the census. For Joseph and Mary, it was the realization that they were part of the greatest spiritual and religious event in the history of the world at that time—the birth of Christ. For the angels, it was the greatest announcement the world had ever heard—a Savior had been born. For the shepherds, it was the highest honor they would ever have—to be the first to worship the Christ child. For us, it is the

greatest opportunity we will ever have—to serve Jesus and proclaim Him through our testimony, teaching, and lifestyle.

### **Angels Proclaimed the Birth of Christ to Shepherds (Luke 2:8–20)**

The **shepherds living out in the fields** (v. 8) were hardworking men who took their job seriously. They kept **watch over their flocks at night** (v. 8) instead of sleeping on the job. For the announcement about the birth of Jesus to come to ordinary, blue-collar workers is significant and symbolic. It is symbolic in that Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10:11. It is significant in that shepherds were thought to be “unclean” people. They were considered such because their jobs often kept them away from temple worship for weeks at a time. They often neglected the rules of hand-washing and so forth that meant so much to the religious elite. The first people to hear about the birth of Jesus from the angels were a group of common men busy at work. Some historians feel that these shepherds were tending the flocks used for temple worship. If so, the symbolism of the angelic annunciation to them is even more incredible. The birth of Jesus, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, came to shepherds who may have tended the flocks of sacrificial lambs for temple sacrifice.

**An angel . . . appeared** (Luke 2:9) first and then was accompanied by many others in verse 13. It must have been quite a sight for those seasoned shepherds to see the brilliance of the angels against the darkness of the night. The **glory of the Lord** (v. 9) refers to this brilliance or brightness. Paul experienced something similar on the road to Damascus. It is also reminiscent of Moses’ face, which shone with the glory of God and required a veil to cover it. Heaven has no luminaries such as the sun or moon. The radiance of the Lord is all that is needed. When the angels came to earth, they shone with the brilliance of heaven and it caused the shepherds to be afraid.

The angelic message was profound—“**Do not be afraid**” (v. 10). A supernatural appearance of this kind would frighten anyone. The shepherds were no exception. The angel’s message was of **good news of great joy** (v. 10). What a wonderful message that still brings great joy today, the birth of Jesus. We all enjoy hearing good news. It cheers our hearts and souls to hear that our friends and loved ones are faring well. Even more so does the good news about Jesus bring cheer and joy to our hearts and souls. This message is **for all the people** (v. 10) not just for Jews or shepherds. The entire world is to hear the glorious truth about the Son of God born in Bethlehem. He is a **Savior** (v. 11) who saves us from the guilt and consequences of our sins. He is **Christ** or **Messiah**—the Anointed One who will redeem the world and set things right. The sign of truth given to this announcement is the baby’s location: **wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger** (v. 12). The shepherds would have to look for the child, but they knew where mangers were located.

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### WORDS FROM WESLEY

*Luke 2:14*

*Glory be to God in the highest; on earth peace; good-will towards men*—The shouts of the multitude are generally broken into short sentences. This rejoicing acclamation strongly represents the piety and benevolence of these heavenly spirits: as if they had said, *Glory be to God in the highest heavens: Let all the angelic legions resound His praises. For with the Redeemer’s birth, peace, and all kind of happiness, come down to dwell on earth: Yea, the overflowings of divine good will and favour, are now exercised towards men.* (ENNT)

A company of angels appeared and began praising God. Then they proclaimed a message: “**Glory to God in the highest**”

(v. 14). Only our highest praise is worthy of such a loving and self-giving Lord. **“On earth peace to men”** (v. 14)—one thing the world can agree on is the desire for global peace and the ability to get along with one another. In Jesus, this can be accomplished. Neither ideology nor philosophy nor philanthropy can bring about world harmony. It is only in Jesus that global peace can be found. Oh, that the world would unite in praises to the one who came as the Savior of the world!

**“Let’s go to Bethlehem”** (v. 15) was the response of the shepherds. They could do nothing else. Their hearts compelled them to find the child announced by angels. They did find Him, and His parents too. The Bible says they **hurried off** (v. 16). Once we know the will of God, it behooves us to do it quickly. There is a time to wait and a time to get going. This was a time to hurry, and the shepherds knew it well. They were eager to see what God was doing in the world. Their response after finding the Christ child was to **spread the word** (v. 17) about Him. Once we find Jesus, we want to tell others about Him. He is the greatest thing to happen in our lives. We cannot contain the **good news of great joy** (v. 10) that comes to us when we find Jesus. Our lives are forever changed, transformed into the fragrance of holiness, a thing of beauty, a reflection of the Master.

**All who heard it were amazed** (v. 18) because the message was incredible and the men who told it were trustworthy and hard-working. The story they told was so wonderful it had to be true.

**Mary treasured . . . these things and pondered them in her heart** (v. 19) as any mother would do. Her heart overflowed with joy at the Lord’s work in her marriage, her childbearing, and her son. The treasures of her heart were not temporary; she **pondered them**. Mary loved her husband and her son. These things filled her heart and her example of motherhood is a fine one to follow.

WORDS FROM WESLEY

*Luke 2:16*

Holy Ghost, apply Thy word  
And promise to my heart,  
Tell me I shall see the Lord,  
Before I hence depart:  
When my faith the Christ hath seen,  
Creator of that inward eye,  
Thee I shall acknowledge then,  
The Lord and God most high.  
Spirit of faith, reveal in me  
The sure approaching grace,  
Then I shall the Deity  
Of my Inspirer praise,  
Bless my God for ever bless'd,  
Glory in salvation given,  
Late obtain the promised rest,  
And go in peace to heaven. (PW, vol. 7, 247)

When **the shepherds returned** (v. 20), they praised and glorified the Lord for everything they experienced that fateful night. They found the angelic message to be true and they were changed forever.

The good news about Jesus is **for all the people** (v. 10). The story of Christ's birth is a message that can bring salvation to the world. Although this passage is familiar, every time we hear it, it warms our hearts and touches our souls. How wonderful if all the people of the world could experience the advent of Christ in their lives!

## DISCUSSION

Taxes! They are about as popular as measles. However, a wonderful event occurred when Joseph, accompanied by Mary, journeyed to Bethlehem to register for taxation. Mary gave birth to Jesus, and the world has never been the same since then.

1. How might God orchestrate political decisions to serve His will?
2. Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem instead of Jerusalem?
3. Do you think it is significant that God first proclaimed Jesus' birth to shepherds? If so, why was it significant?
4. Read John 1:29. Why do you agree or disagree that the shepherds visited God's Lamb in Bethlehem?
5. What aspects of Jesus' birth give you great joy? Why?
6. What actions on the part of the shepherds do you find admirable? Why?
7. How can you share the good news?
8. How might believers glorify and praise God more fully?

## PRAYER

Precious Lamb of God, we're awed at the humiliation You endured by entering the world as an infant. Let us serve others with this same humility. Help us reflect Your compassion to a world of people who need Your salvation.