

The Reveal

It's A Boy, Part 1

Luke 2:8-20

In the early 1830s, two different groups of men, one in America and one in England, were independently racing to build an electric telegraph system.

The American group would win the day . . . with its unique use of magnetic pulses and a special code invented by the group's leader, Samuel Morse. Samuel was, by occupation, a skilled painter who specialized in portraits.

But by the late 1800's, his invention took the world by storm and electric telegraph companies were soon in operation.

If you can imagine it, less than 150 years ago, the fastest way to send a message from New York to California was to use the Pony Express, which took ten days. Imagine – less than 150 years ago, the fastest way for someone on the East coast to get a message to someone living on the West Coast, was to use a horse and a rider.

That would all change. With the invention of Samuel Morse and the creation of his Morse code, that distance could be spanned at nearly the speed of light.

The Wright Brothers would use it in 1903 to send a telegram to their father that December telling him about their first flight.

I was able to see a picture of that telegram. In fact, I saw a picture of the very first telegram. It was dated May 24, 1844. On that historic day, Samuel Morse made the first public demonstration of his telegraph by sending a message from the Supreme Court Chamber in the U.S. Capitol to a station in Baltimore. His famous message was only four words, "What hath God wrought."

Samuel Morris gave his Creator God the credit. In other words, "Look what God has done!"

Nearly 2,000 years ago, God delivered a message to planet earth. And his deliver message wasn't a telegram or a letter.

He delivered it by means of angels . . . I guess you could call it – an angelgram.

God actually used angels – and still to this day they are at His beck and call.

Angels travel faster than we can imagine; their message is never lost in transmission . . . they never fail to deliver . . . everyone who receives an angelgram immediately gets the messages.

By the way, the number of angels is so vast that no one can comprehend their number.

If you literally multiply the prophet Daniel's accounting of angels around the throne of God you have his vision of 100 million angels worshiping God (*Daniel 7:10*).

The writer of Hebrews informs us that thousands upon thousands are in joyful assembly in the heavenly Jerusalem. (*Hebrews 12:22*)

Listen, if you were God and you wanted to deliver the birth announcement of God the son to the world . . . how would you deliver the message? How would you stage the big reveal? What better way, than angels.

I invite your attention back to the Gospel by Luke and chapter 2.

You may know enough of the narrative to know that Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem and, because of the imperial decree to pay taxes in your hometown, Bethlehem was overrun with people. They couldn't say no to Rome.

Joseph and Mary are committed to obedience; they are making the best out of the worst of conditions.

They found shelter in a Bethlehem stable, more than likely a shallow cave which was commonly

used in that region to provide shelter for the animals of travelers.

It is in that cave where Mary gives birth to Jesus – no doctors, no nurses, no midwife, no one to help this frightened teenage girl deliver her son into the calloused hands of her carpenter husband.

Back in their hometown of Nazareth, if everything had gone according to plan – which it obviously didn't, the birth of a son was cause for celebration.

The proud parents would call all their friends and relatives – in fact, the custom during this the turn of the century, was for the father to hire musicians to come to the home and play music – celebrating the birth of their baby boy.

Instead, here they are in a cave or lean to; and they couldn't have felt more alone than now. They swaddled their baby with strips of cloth – and their cradle was Joseph's cloak, or perhaps some fresh straw arranged in the corner of the feeding trough, cut along the wall of the cave, which was typical in their day.

There are no friends to celebrate with them . . . congratulate them. And there certainly are no musicians in sight.

But then again . . . God the Father had arranged a reveal party – and the musicians are tuning up.

Let's slip into the scene at Luke chapter 2, at verse 8. In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11. for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

This is absolutely astounding. This angel has just announced that the Son of God had been born . . . and they are the first to find out.

First of all, what amazes me about this reveal is who God would disregard.

If you were assigned the public relations challenge of announcing the birth of God the Son – you would begin by making a list of everyone who ought to know – and then, making sure that they all somehow found out.

But here, God is disregarding everyone and anyone that ought to be on the list!

He bypassed announcing the news to the educated, the religious, the elite, the politically connected, the wealthy, the powerful. He didn't announce it to the Jewish Supreme Court – the Sanhedrin; He didn't announce it to the High Priest at the Temple in Jerusalem; He didn't have somebody send a memo to Caesar Augustus and the Roman senate.

The astounding thing is who God would disregard in this reveal; but it's even more astounding who God will dignify in the reveal.

Notice back in *verse 8* the most unlikely people to ever be given the news of Christ's birth – Luke writes, "*there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night.*"

You need to understand that in Jesus' day, the only people considered socially more distasteful than shepherds were lepers.

Because shepherds weren't able to keep all the regulations of the scribes and Pharisees – such as washing their hands at certain times and never touching blood or a dead animal, which were part of the job description of delivering lambs and fighting off wolves and eating out on the hillsides without a faucet and filtered water.

According to the Mishna which was the Jewish writings that codified scribal law, shepherds were under an ongoing ban. That is, they were considered perpetually unclean. They couldn't worship or enter the temple.

Besides, they worked on the Sabbath – the sheep didn't take Saturday off and so neither could the shepherds.

They were under the ban – disqualified from worship – they were, by occupation, religious outcasts.

And they are ones invited to the reveal . . . to hear the news that a baby boy was born nearby.

Look who God disregarded . . . look at who God dignified!

- Isn't it fascinating that Jesus willingly referred to Himself as our *Good Shepherd*. (*John 10:11*)
- The Apostle Peter called Jesus our *Chief Shepherd*. (*1 Peter 5:4*).

- In *Hebrews 13:20* Jesus is called the *Great Shepherd*.

In the Bible, the title “shepherd” happens to be the title that Jesus gave to elders who will serve His church and lead His church and feed His church.

Of all the titles He could have bestowed on this office of loving leadership and careful guarding and guiding – He chose to call them shepherds (Ephesians 4:11); translated pastors – or more literally feeders who pasture the flock.

It must have seemed odd in the first century for men who lead the church in worship, to be given the title of men who were never allowed to worship in the Temple.

Let me add to that the fact that shepherds were never allowed to be witnesses in any Jewish court of law. They were considered unreliable because they were not men of the temple. They were unclean – and thus, unworthy of bearing testimony before men.

Here’s the irony . . . God chose them to be the first to testify of His Son’s birth.

Listen, at the very outset of His Son’s life – beginning with this public reveal – you cannot miss the grace of God.

Look who he disregarded! Look who he dignified!

The Apostle Paul wrote, 26. For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27. but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28. and the common things of the world and the despised God has chosen (I Corinthians 1:26-28)

One more thing about these shepherds before we move on – the text tells us that they were in the vicinity of Bethlehem (*vs. 8*) *keeping watch over their flocks by night*. Bethlehem was only 6 miles south of Jerusalem – on the rural outskirts of the holy city.

Jerusalem of course, would swell with several million Jews during Passover as they came with their lambs to sacrifice in celebration of their former deliverance from Egypt.

If you’re old enough in the faith, you may know the narrative from Exodus 12 where the death angel came sweeping into Egypt, killing the first born of every family, including Pharaoh’s family. The only way to be rescued from the death angel was to put

lamb’s blood on the door of your homes, which the Israelites did that night. And those who had the blood of the lamb smeared on their door frame – thus behind the door, as it were, and behind the safety of atoning blood, they were then passed over by the plague of death. And that began the tradition of Passover – an annual celebration that would swell the population inside Jerusalem of more than 2 million people.

One first century Jewish historian named Josephus records for us that during the lifetime of Jesus, around 250,000 lambs would be killed and eaten in Jerusalem’s annual Passover feast.

Where would they get all those sheep from? Well, many people raised their own – but the temple also raised sheep and other animals which it sold to worshippers who came without an animal to sacrifice.

More than likely, these shepherds are on the temple payroll watching flocks of sheep.

One of the most confirming pieces of evidence is a rule recorded in the Mishna, the ancient Jewish code book. It stated in printed law that any animal found between Jerusalem and a small village nearby were to be available at any time for sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem. And the name of that little village nearby was . . . Bethlehem!

These shepherds were temple shepherds. Keeping watch over sheep that were destined to become one of the thousands upon thousands of lambs headed for the altar to atone for the sins of the people.

Can you imagine now the gospel and the grace in this significant announcement? God is announcing the birth of The final sacrificial lamb to men watching over sacrificial lambs.

God is announcing to men considered perpetually sinful that the Passover lamb has been born whose blood will cleanse their sins forever.

God is announcing to men out of fellowship with the worship system of Israel that the baby has been born who will bring them into fellowship. God is announcing the gospel to men who are outcasts that they can become members of God’s family.

What a volume of truth and grace revealing the wonderful, deep, gospel and grace God! What a revel this was!

And that’s just verse 8. Verse 9 is where it really starts to get interesting. **9. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them** – by the way, angels haven’t been seen for more than 400 years.

In fact, for nearly 500 years no angel has been seen by anybody on earth – and suddenly there are angels showing up everywhere.

- *Gabriel came to Zacharias in Luke 1:19;*
- *Gabriel came to Mary in Luke 1:26;*
- *Gabriel seems to be one of God’s chief messengers to humans; it was Gabriel who spoke to Daniel in Daniel 8:16 and again in Daniel 9:21.*
- *I believe it was more than likely Gabriel who is now speaking with the shepherds – but notice further in Luke 2:9 and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid (easy for you to say!) for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11. for today in the city of David there has been born for you (wait – did you catch that? He wasn’t just born – He was born, for you! Make that personal – write into the margin of your Bible here at verse 9 your own name; I’ve done the same thing so that my Bible reads), *for today in the city of David there has been born for Stephen – a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

This reveal is quite a mouthful . . . in fact, the angel just delivers three titles for the baby boy.

The first title is the word, Savior – this was politically combustible information because this word – soter – was known all over the Roman Empire. It was the title taken by the Emperor Caesar Augustus; He claimed – and you can read inscriptions to this day about him – he claimed to the soter – the Savior of the World.

The Gentiles especially would perk up their ears at this title especially.

The next title the angel reveals is the title, Christ – a Savior who is Christ/Christos - this was a title that would have arrested the attention of the Jews.

Christos means anointed One – this was the title specifically designated for the Messianic office. Only the Messiah could claim the title Christ.

So the Gentiles and the Jews will be astonished as this message is first delivered by the Shepherds, and beyond.

But the last title summarizes it all in one breathtaking claim.

Today in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

The name, Lord, is from Kurios; it happens to be the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew term Yahweh. In fact, throughout the Greek translation of the Old Testament, more than 6,000 times, kurios is the translation of Yahweh.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Lord means God. This reveal included the astonishing truths that the Savior – who had come to save them; Christ who had come as the Messiah – was deity in the flesh.

So you could read this announcement this way: I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, the anointed Messiah who is none other than God.

The true gospel demands all three titles.

A Jehovah’s Witness can’t agree to all of these; a Mormon can’t say this; a Muslim can’t say this. They can say that Jesus was anointed; they can say that Jesus was a Savior; but they cannot say that Jesus was eternally deity; God in the flesh. He is Lord!

The Apostle Paul declared in **Romans 10:9** that in order to be saved you must confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the visible expression of deity.

One day, as the song goes, when we look into the face of Jesus, we will indeed be looking into the face of God.

Let’s jump to verse 13 where the reveal goes into surround sound. ***And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying...***

Before we rush to verse 14, I thought the angels were singing. It says here that they were saying.

We’re going to destroy a dozen Christmas hymns; what fun is that?

Were the angels singing or not? Here in **verse 13** it says that the heavenly host was praising God and saying. Well the original word translated praising is the verb aineo (αινεω) – it’s rarely used in the Greek New Testament.

However, it’s often used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint for the verb hallel. That Hebrew verb means to praise – primarily through singing. The hallels were put to music throughout Israel’s history.

Aineo is interchangeable with hallel. Both words typically refer to praising God through song.

You could paraphrase and amplify verse 13 correctly to read, “And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God with these lyrics – these words; and then in verse 14 we’re given, notice, in poetic form, the lyrics of their song. Here are the lyrics: **14. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.**

What singing this must have been. The angels explode the heavens with their song of grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Job chapter 38 tells us that angels sang at the dawn of creation – as God the Son – the Logos – spoke the worlds into existence.

The Book of Revelation tells us that the believers in heaven will sing to the Lamb and the angels will join them.

So here, at this significant moment in world history, the angelic hosts burst forth with song.

Verse 15. When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” 16. So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph (the verb translated “found their way” means to discover after searching. And what was the sign that would tip them off? Verse 12 reads that the sign will be baby – but there would have been several born that night. Oh, but this baby is absolutely impoverished, belonging to parents without a roof over their head – in fact, the baby will be wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger – lying in a feed trough . . . that would have been unusual.

Notice verse 17. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by

the shepherds. 19. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

By the way, did you notice that now the shepherds are glorifying and praising God – that’s what the angels were doing earlier. These shepherds were fast learners – the implication is that they are singing the song they’d just learned from the angels.

Has it ever occurred to you that angels haven’t sung about the gospel and the grace of God on earth since this time?

God could send more angels couldn’t He, every Christmas season? Why doesn’t He? Why doesn’t He write the message of His Son’s preexistent deity in the clouds? Why doesn’t he shake the earth with the chanting of millions of angels again?

I would. And He could!

But He is choosing from Luke chapter 2 to this very day – until the coming kingdom – He’s choosing to use ordinary, simple, sinful, faltering, forgiven, once outcast – now members of the family; God is choosing to use you and me, the redeemed, as His singers now.

We get to carry out the reveal – to the world, of who Jesus is.

The Savior – because we must be saved from sin and death.

The Christ – because we must have a Messiah to redeem us

The Lord – because we must have eternal God who alone can break the power of sin and death.

He has been born for you – and you – and you – and me; a Savior who is Christ, the Lord.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/25/16 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2016 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

After the Angels Sang

It's A Boy, Part 2

Luke 2:21-22

If you were to ask the average person on the street today, what happened to Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus after the shepherds left the manger scene in Bethlehem – most people would probably scratch their heads and say, “I don’t have a clue”.

That’s because the normal Christmas play ends somewhere around verse 20 of Luke chapter 2, which tells us the shepherds left the stable, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

Throw in a few wise men and some camels and that ends the Christmas program.

Now, part of the challenge we face is that the Bible tells us a lot about His birth, but doesn’t record much about Jesus’ life between his birth and His ministry 30 years later. For the most part, scripture is silent.

Which is a good thing because what little we have to go can easily be turned into mysticism and mythology and icons and relics and holy sites where pilgrims hope to get some kind of spiritual zap from God.

Evidently the Lord knows the human race pretty well – and so for the most part, the record of scripture is silent about the early years of Jesus.

Still, the church has made up a slew of legends so that by the end of the 4th century, there are false Gospel like the Gospel of Judas and the Gospel of Thomas that do nothing more than trivialize the Lord’s life.

One particular legend revolves around a time when Jesus as a little boy was making little

birds out of mud. The problem was, it was on the Sabbath, and Jesus would have been in trouble for violating the Sabbath by working. Some other children ran to tell on Jesus and just as Joseph arrived to punish Jesus for profaning the Sabbath, Jesus breathed on the mud birds and they came to life and flew away, leaving no evidence behind. Of course, that makes Jesus a deceiving little sinner – which creates an even bigger problem.

These spurious writings were really false gospels written 2-300 years after Jesus’ birth that effectively made him as deceptive as anybody – in fact, the Gospel of Thomas also tells about how a boy from the village threw a rock at Jesus and it hit him and hurt him – and Jesus turned around and said something that made the bully fall down and die.

On another occasion, Jesus was miraculously making mud puddles clean water, a bully came over and stomped on the puddles, splashing Jesus and messing up his work; and Jesus said something to the boy and he died too.

Now if I were Jesus, whenever somebody did stuff to me when I was a kid, this kind of power would really come in handy. Who wouldn’t use that kind of power?

We had a bully in my neighborhood growing up. I mean you risked your life to ride your bike past his house. I still remember I was around 10 years old and my 10 year old friend and I were outside on our bikes one day and we noticed this neighborhood bully walking down the street . . . I decided this was too perfect to pass up . . . I

pedaled my bicycle as fast as I could and as I rode past him I called him all sorts of names – that was before I was called into the ministry. And it was only after I called him all those names that I realized I had ridden my bicycle into a cul-de-sac. I was not very bright. He caught up to me and knocked me off my bike . . . and let's just say I never did that again.ⁱ

The trouble with these apocryphal, uninspired writings – and there are many – is that they make Jesus into a little sinner just like I was.

We aren't given much, but what we do know is that once Jesus is introduced in His ministry years in scripture, He'll never use His powers to make his life better or more comfortable and he will never strike back – even when He is falsely condemned – in fact, even when He's tortured and then hangs from a cross to die.

From scripture, we know that:

- Jesus never sinned – from birth to death – not even once; the writer of Hebrews writes that He was without stain or blemish (Hebrews 9:14);
- We also know that He perfectly fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17);
- We know that He will qualify as the unblemished, spotless Lamb, qualified to be sacrificed for the sins of the whole world – because He was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15 & 1 John 2:2)

So, let's make sure we stay with the scriptures in defining who Jesus was.

But does the Bible say anything about anything happening after that manger scene nearly 2,000 years ago?

The truth is, the Bible is not as silent as the average Christmas play might lead you to believe.

It *wasn't* over after the shepherds left the manger scene. It was just beginning.

I have time to take you to two different scenes with the baby Jesus that are often overlooked.

The first one took place 8 days later as wonderful events began to unfold in the life of this infant Messiah.

Dr. Luke records in his gospel account in chapter 2 and verse **21 [that] when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.**

Today, let's fast forward the tape to this point to this deeply symbolic and prophetic moment where baby Jesus and His parents are arrive at the Temple in Jerusalem.

1. We'll call this a portrait of identification.

Eight days after birth, every Jewish baby boy would be circumcised – that is, if the baby's parents cared at all about God's commands.

Circumcision brought the boy into the national life of the Hebrew people and identified him with Abraham's household.

It was commanded all the way back in Genesis 17 where God told Abraham, "This is my covenant which you shall keep, between you and Me and you and your descendants after you; every male among you shall be circumcised . . . and every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations.

So now, centuries later, Jesus is identifying with Abraham and the covenant of promise between God and His people.

Had Jesus not been circumcised on the eight day, He would not have identified with His people – and even more tragic, He would then not have been eligible to fulfill the promises that God had pledged to Abraham.ⁱⁱ

And by the way, what gets lost in the Christmas story is the incredible statement of faith from Joseph and Mary. I mean, here they are following God's word, relating to the command and promise of God to Abraham.

For every faithful Jewish family, circumcision was carried out on the 8th day, following their son's birth.

A Jewish leader or doctor would perform the simple surgery and it would be at this rather simple yet profound ceremony that the parent's would announce the name of the child.

Which is why Luke records that when eight days had passed, His name was then called – or announced – Jesus.

And here, in this solemn act of faith in the promises of God, you have none other than the Son of God, piercing the air with His crying, following this painful ordeal.

This marks His first moment of suffering, as it were, at the hand of mankind. These were among his first tears at having taken on human flesh . . . listen, His humiliation and suffering began early.

But what an act of faith and courage by Joseph and Mary; they're suffering too, for reasons related to Jesus.

They are dazed from all the events of the last few days; they're confused to some degree; they have been ostracized and are no doubt at this Temple ceremony alone.

Two teenagers – Joseph may have been older – they've traveled to Bethlehem under a cloud of suspicion . . . she had become pregnant before they were married . . . life had become a whirlwind – their plans and their lives had been upended.

It would be the scandal of Joseph's family and their entire village.

There would be no wedding ceremony or community celebration; there was no family festival where the village celebrated the hoopa – it was called – the union of Joseph and Mary.

And the baby will only add an exclamation point to their guilt. And they will never live it down.

The rumors will never go away. In fact, when Jesus Christ makes His claim to be the Messiah, the Jewish leaders will dig up the dirty rumors again and throw them back into Jesus' face the accusation, "***We were not born as a result of immorality, like you were.***" (John 8:41)

Listen, even though following the will of God meant scandal and rumor and misunderstanding and loneliness and accusation and loss of friendship and reputation – they obeyed.

Look at them in this scene – they are in the Temple, on the 8th day, identifying their son with the Jewish nation and the covenant promises of God.

I can't help but challenge our own lives, beloved, with this scene.

What does it take for you to say, "If this is what the will of God means for my life – if it means suffering, or loneliness, or sorrow, or misunderstanding, or accusation, I'm not interested."

"If this is what it means to run the race, I'm going to sit on the sidelines."

"If doing the right thing causes me to get into trouble, surely God will understand if I cut some corners."

Not Mary and Joseph. One the 8th day, they bring forward their little baby boy – and send a message – this family and this boy are obeying the word of God and identifying with the people of God and willing to follow the will of God.

Again *verse 21 records Luke writing, "His name was then called Jesus."*

This was the name chosen for Him before time began. The angel had come to both Mary and Joseph individually to tell them – look, when the ceremony of identification arrives, give Him the name, Jesus.

It means, Jehovah saves . . . or salvation. It carries the nuance of redeemer and redemption.

G. Campbell Morgan, the late expositor, wrote that this name was a [an act of hope] – his parents dared by faith to believe in deliverance so much that they named their son – Jesus.ⁱⁱⁱ

Hundreds of little boys were playing in the streets and villages throughout Israel named Jesus, with the vague notion of a father or mother that perhaps their son would play a role in the deliverance of Israel.

This little boy would. I can't help but wonder who was at this ceremony to hear the announcement of His name.

Did the Jewish doctor take a second look? Did the Rabbi perhaps know about the context of this birth – and the scandal behind it? Did he shake his head at the audacity of this peasant couple for actually hoping that this baby,

evidently from all appearances conceived in sin, could ever deliver anybody?

And now, under the knife and into the covenant, the deliverer has just identified with His people and the nation has no idea yet, that He has arrived.

Watch here as Joseph and Mary, and their 8 day old son still whimpering with pain, leave the Temple and go back to their simply, yet undisclosed home.

They had carefully met the demands of the law. They had observed the ceremony of identification.

I'll show you another portrait – again, barely given any mention in the average Christmas season, yet incredibly significant in relation to the gospel.

2. We'll call this one, the portrait of redemption

Verse 22 reads. And when the days for their purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord

Now if you go back and read Leviticus chapter 12 you discover that after the male child's circumcision, the mother is to wait 33 days and then bring a lamb to the priest as an atoning sacrifice – to cleanse her from the issue of blood she experienced in childbirth.

And they are to present the child to the Lord for priestly service. If the child was a Levite, he would more than likely later on serve as a priest. If he came from a different tribe, and Jesus came from the tribe of Judah – the royal tribe – his parents would pay a tax and he would be redeemed from temple service.

In the last part of verse 22, Luke adds a parenthesis because many readers wouldn't know the details of the Law. So Luke adds, (***as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"***).

In other words, God had a special claim on the firstborn male. They were to be holy – that word means, separated unto God.

If the male child was from the tribe of Levi, he would serve as a priest in this theocracy. The priests were the government – they were the senators and representatives. They ran the religious and civil system – or at least as much as the Roman government allowed them during the days of Christ.^{iv}

This was effectively the draft – and there were no exceptions.

But since Christ was born into the tribe of Judah, he was not required to serve in the priestly system and so Joseph and Mary were able to pay the redemption tax – Numbers 18 informs us that it was 5 shekels – and redeem Jesus back from priestly service as a non-Levite.

They are symbolically buying their son back from God. This was called the Redemption of the Firstborn.^v

I'm convinced that Mary and Joseph didn't understand more than a sliver of the irony of this ceremony of redemption. They were paying the redemption price to God for Jesus, when Jesus had come to pay the redemption price to God for His people.

Joseph and Mary were redeeming the One who would become the Redeemer.

And don't miss the fact that for Mary and Joseph to obey the law, would only add to their poverty. They've already paid the census tax in Bethlehem and all the expenses of that journey; now they pay 5 shekels which was several days' wages.

The will of God was taxing, tiring, uncomfortable, uneasy, lonely, and expensive.

How is it for you?

God's chosen couple to bear and raise the Redeemer seems to be paying at every turn. But to them, cost was never the issue – obedience was.

In fact, you need to know that Joseph and Mary were not required by law to bring Jesus to Jerusalem for this redemption payment. They could have paid the 5 shekels to a local priest and saved all the wear and tear and yet another journey.

But evidently, they're wanting to go above and beyond. They want to go to Jerusalem and to the temple itself to present Jesus to the priest and pay the redemption tax. Why? We're not told, but it seems likely that even though they were redeeming Jesus from priestly service, they were still interested in making the most in presenting Him to the Lord.

Again, the last phrase of verse 22 **reads; they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.**

Beyond a few shepherds and family members, no one else knew that Jesus was more than just any other baby boy. But they knew; and they knew God knew.

And yet, what irony again – they are presenting God the Son to God the Father.

Back in the Book of Leviticus, the law required that the mother bring with her to this ceremony, an unblemished lamb. But if she didn't have enough money for one, she was to bring two turtledoves or pigeons, instead.

Luke is the only Gospel writer to record this event – and he writes that Mary and Joseph came to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law – and then Luke quotes from Leviticus but skips the part about the lamb and only mentions the turtledoves and pigeons.” **(Luke 2:24)** And that's because they had no money to buy a lamb, but brought two birds instead.

How precious is this portrait? Mary didn't have the money to buy a lamb . . . oh but she brought the Lamb. She had the unblemished lamb in her arms.

Here she is along with Joseph, paying the price to redeem the One who had come to pay the price to redeem them.

- In their courageous, childlike faith, they came to the Temple and presented the Savior to the Sovereign;
- they dedicated God the Son to God the Father;

- Imagine, they brought the Lord of the Temple to the Temple of the Lord ^(Pentecost, p. 65)
- Think of it; the Object of true worship just arrived at the House of worship;

All the hubbub in the Temple that day. None of the priestly order knew it yet, but every ritual and every sacrifice and every activity and every instrument – from the altar to the candle stick to the bread to the veil to the Mercy Seat – everything on those temple grounds illustrated . . . pointed to . . . painted a picture . . . prophesied and looked for and longed for the coming Redeemer . . . the Lamb of God who would come to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

With hundreds of people milling around them; while prayers were being prayed and incense was being burned and sacrifices were being made to God – and there He was . . . God in the flesh, had come.

The one who would rip down the curtain between mankind and the Holy of Holies was at this moment in the Temple Court, cradled in the arms of a virgin girl, who is no doubt exhausted, leaning on the arm of a peasant carpenter and adoptive father.

Do you know Him? Have you received Him as much more than a baby – but the unblemished, covenant fulfilling, risen, sovereign Redeemer who did it all for you.

Is He your Redeemer? Have you asked Him to forgive your sins and become your living Lord?

John the Apostle will have a vision of heaven and he will hear Jesus described in chapter 1 as **the One who loves us and released us from our sins (Revelation 1:5)**

The One who gives us the promise that as many as received Him, to them He gives the right to become children of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/24/16 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2016 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

i Stories edited from “The Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas; M. R. James – Translation and Notes (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924)

ii J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ (Zondervan, 1981), p. 62

iii G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Luke (Fleming H. Revell, 1931), p. 40

iv John MacArthur, sermon manuscript @ www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/42-28

v William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 24