

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 on 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.

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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