

## Why the Bethlehem Shepherds?

Luke 2:1-20

November 29, 2015

Open your Bibles to Luke's Gospel, and this morning we are going to continue the narrative that we started at verse 1 in Luke, Chapter 2. And that narrative that starts in verse 1 of Chapter 2, it goes all the way to verse 20. So, we're going to begin this morning by reading that section. There is so much to see in this passage of Scripture. I am always amazed as I study God's word to see the incredible depth and intricacies of detail in Scripture. On the surface as you read it, it just seems like such a simple story. But just a little investigation, as you start to pick it apart and ask questions, just reveals there is so much more going on than you get at first glance. It's absolutely staggering. Today, we're going to go a couple layers deeper beneath the surface of this passage. You're going to get, this morning, it's a little bit different sermon. We're going to get a brief exposure this morning, to a discipline that's called Biblical Theology. Biblical Theology, it's really tracing some of

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the doctrines and themes of Scripture through the Bible over time. I'm not going to go into great lengths in that direction, in Biblical Theology, but just enough for you to get a taste of it. I want you to, to have enough to appreciate the intricacies that exist in every passage of the Bible, illustrating it right here in this passage. What what's on the surface, it just seems so deceptively simple, but it's not simple.

There's a lot of depth here. Let me start by reading the text for you beginning in Luke 2:1. And then after that, I'm going to pose a couple of questions to you that demand further attention and observation. And it's as we go through and investigate, find the answers to those questions, we're going to discover such an amazing wealth of understanding in this text. And also gain a greater insight into the character of our God. Okay. So, Luke Chapter 2, verse 1, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to

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be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there the time came for her to give birth 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.

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’ 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.’ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. When

they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told the concerning the child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds (Angels) returned, glorying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Now, that text, as I’ve read it, from verse 1 to verse 20, it all goes together. It’s all one single narrative. And I realize it’s broken up in our translations by, by headings and paragraph breaks and such, but it’s actually one continuous narrative. It may not have been apparent to you as we read the text, but that first section there, verses 1 to 7, that is not the climax of the story. It does not climax with the birth of Jesus Christ. Those verses, as significant as they are they merely introduce the main focus of the text.

The main focus of the text is what the Angel of the Lord reveals to the shepherds when he appears in verse 10 to 14. It’s that proclamation of “good news of great joy for all the people.” The verb there is interesting when the angel says, “I’ve come to

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you to proclaim good news of great joy.” The verb there is *euangelizo*. *Euangelizo*, which is the Greek word that gives us the English transliterated word to evangelize. The whole intent of verses 1 through 7 is to set up this very first evangelism encounter. The very first time that the Gospel was preached is right here. God’s sovereign direction over all these details at the global level, at the regional level, at the personal intimate levels of husband and wife and their daily life and intimacy of childbirth, and all the rest, God was working providentially, sovereignly to push these main characters in the story to Bethlehem, to the same region as these local shepherds. Why? So, he could preach to them. So he could preach the Gospel.

It’s interesting to see that. Caesar Augustus, this Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, these guys all exist for God’s greater purpose. I mean they’re big figures on the world’s stage, but God’s greater purpose is not what’s happening there. It’s what’s happening here. It’s what is happening in Bethlehem. His greater purpose to bring his Son into the world at exactly the right time, in exactly the right location, and in exactly the right circumstances. God wanted Joseph and Mary to get down to Bethlehem at this particular time of the year in close proximity

to these particular shepherds, and in the kind of accommodations that would be abnormal and unusual for a couple having a baby, by any measure. He wanted it to happen exactly as it's laid out. And here's where we need to stop.

Having read the entire narrative, having noted these marks of sovereign providence of God directing circumstances in exactly, precisely this way; we need to stop and ask a couple of questions. A number of questions actually arise throughout this narrative. We'll address them in time. But two main ones stand out for our purposes this morning. First of all, why Bethlehem? Why Bethlehem? What is so significant about this insignificant little town? You say, Well that's easy. It's because God promised the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. That's true, but it's not the end of the sermon, okay? God intended to fulfill ancient prophecy according to Micah 5:2, just as you've said. "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."

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God had bound himself to his word and he needed to fulfill a promise that he had made through the prophet Micah more than 700 years before the birth of Christ. God will do whatever it takes directing world affairs, regional affairs, even intimate, personal, individual affairs. He'll do whatever it takes to fulfill his word. He is going to keep his word. God is absolutely trustworthy. His character is unquestionably faithful. But we're not content to leave it there because we're curious. We want to ask the follow-up question, the deeper question here. Why Bethlehem? I mean God could have directed Micah to prophecy any other location really on the planet, right? Nazareth would have been convenient for this couple. I mean, could have been Capernaum of Galilee, but God chose Bethlehem. He put that town in the mouth of Micah. What is so special about Bethlehem?

Here's a second question: Once the baby is born, there's a pretty elaborate display in announcing his birth. Okay, we understand that, we've seen angels show up twice before, but why the shepherds? Why the shepherds? What's so significant about them? You say, Well that's because they're lowly and humble and the Gospel is for the humble. And you'd be right to say that.

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That's true as well. Mary said as much in her song, Luke 1:52, "God has exalted those of humble estate." But why the shepherds? The Angel of the Lord could have visited the humble, working class members of almost any other profession, the blacksmiths, the tinkerers, the shoemakers, the carpenters, whatever. Why these guys? Why shepherds? In fact, if he wanted to appear to the humble, why couldn't he have appeared to widows and orphans, the poverty-stricken of society? That would have made this Gospel for the humble point as well, right? It would have made it emphatically.

So why did these shepherds get the special privilege of a heavenly birth? Well, that's what we're going to answer this morning. Those two questions. Get your Bibles ready. Get your hands warmed up because we're going to turn some pages and do a little Bible study this morning and look at a few other Scriptures to answer the questions. As we find the answers to these two questions, we are really going to gain a, a much deeper understanding and appreciation of the angel's announcement in verses 10 to 20, okay. We're setting things up for that purpose because after all, that is the climax of the story. And at its heart is verse 11, where it says, "For unto you is born



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this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”  
Just two outline points for this morning. Simple points, I’ve  
given them to you already, really. Number one: Why Bethlehem?  
And number two: Why the shepherds? Number one: Why Bethlehem?  
And number two: Why the shepherds?

Because I don’t want you to miss the point, it’s not about  
you, it’s really about me communicating clearly, okay. I don’t  
want you to miss the point. I’m not going to keep you in suspense  
about where we’re going. I’m going to give you my thesis right up  
front just so you’ll spot it as we go along. Here’s the thesis:  
God chose for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of  
his father David, to break continuity with Israel’s unfaithful  
leadership, number one; number two, to establish direct  
continuity with David’s faithful leadership. We’re going to move  
through a number of Scriptures this morning, but let me give you  
a main passage that kind of sets our focus correctly, all right?  
Right off the bat, write this one down. You don’t need to turn  
there, but write it down, Psalm 78, verses 70 to 72. That’s the  
last three verses in Psalm 78. Psalm 78:70 to 72 say this, “God  
chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from  
following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his

people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.”

“God chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.” With very few exceptions, the kings of Israel and Judah, the entire Jewish priesthood, most of the prophets in Israel, not the ones named and recorded for us in Scripture, but most of the prophets, there were a lot of prophets in Israel that aren’t named, they were called false prophets. They arose among the people, but the kings of Israel and Judah, the entire Jewish priesthood, most of the prophets in Israel, they had all utterly abandoned that shepherding heart of David. They’d left it behind. They had totally forsaken the call of God to shepherd Israel, and God intends to restore all of that through his Son, this newborn baby Jesus Christ. And we have our first tip of the hand right here in this text.

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So first point: Why Bethlehem? God wanted the Messiah born in Bethlehem because it is the city of David. It is the city of David. Bethlehem is called the city of David first by Luke as the narrator in verse 4, you see it there. And then by the Angel of the Lord in verse 11. Now, that may not strike you as strange because really it's so familiar to us. We read the story every year. We see that Bethlehem is called the city of David, but for Theophilus, who is the first reader of Luke's Gospel, and any other first-century reader of Luke's Gospel, calling Bethlehem the city of David is absolutely counterintuitive. You know how many other times Bethlehem is called the city of David in all of Scripture? Zero. None. Never. And that's significant because there are 47 uses of that designation, city of David, in the Bible, and Bethlehem is never called the city of David, except for these two verses right here. What city do we typically associate with the city of David? Jerusalem, right? But that is not the original city of David by any means.

Bethlehem is the city of David because it was, it was where he was born and raised. It's his home town. It's where David's family was from. Bethlehem was a small, small city, but it featured in Scriptures as the setting for the book of Ruth. You

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remember that book; four chapters, it's a wonderful story and very, very important theologically as well. But prior to the writing of the book of Ruth, prior to that story, Bethlehem shows up in Genesis. Jacob buried his wife Rachel in Bethlehem. It also shows up, Bethlehem shows up in the book of Judges a few times, but not in the most pleasant settings. Let's put it that way, I won't go into it, but the book of Ruth is set during the days of Judges. They're in the days of some very dark and sinful days. Every man was doing what was right in his own eyes and all of that. And that makes that narrative account of Ruth and Boaz just a very, very bright spot during a very dark time. Precious story, kinsman redeemer marrying this girl Ruth, a Moabite. The book of Ruth is vital in the Biblical canon for another reason, though, not just teaching about the kinsman redeemer, not just a beautiful story set in a dark time, but it was also by divine authority, the book of Ruth establishes David's family as belonging to the tribe of Judah. Without the book of Ruth, we would not know that. It's that important.

Back in Genesis 49:8 to 12, you don't need to turn there, but Jacob was blessing his sons at the end of his life. You remember that? He took everyone, blessed everyone, kind of

prophesied about them and remarkably clear and accurate about every single one. And he prophesied that there would be a future dynasty that would rise in the tribe of Judah. And here are just a few of those verses. Jacob says, “Judah, your brothers shall praise you.” How many of you boys out there would like to hear that? “Your brothers will praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you. [...] The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor that ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” So it’s extending it beyond his brothers now to all the peoples. “Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes.” A lot prophesied in that. I’m not going to go into everything. I’m not going to unpack it, but I’m just showing, I’m just telling you, I’m exercising restraint here, okay? You need to appreciate that.

But at the end of the book of Ruth, in connection with that in Genesis 49, here’s what we find. Last three verses, “These are the generations of Perez.” Remember, Perez was the son of Judah by Tamar. “These are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered

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Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.” That genealogy does skip some generations here and there, but it names ten generations; ten names there spanning nearly 900 years. It starts with Perez, as I said, child of Judah by Tamar, moves through memorable points throughout Jewish history, times of the patriarchs, the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, times of the judges, times of Joshua the judges, right up to the time of the monarchy, right to there. Without that section, we would not be able to tie David back to Judah. We would not be able to establish David’s right to rule in the tribe of Judah. It’s established right there in this connection between Genesis 49 and Ruth 4.

Now turn over in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 16, and we want to get a look, a first look really, at David there in Bethlehem. This is the scene of David’s anointing to be the king of Israel. The prophet Samuel, he anointed David as king over Israel in 1 Samuel 16:1. And at that time, it was a first anointing, it was a private anointing just conducted in the presence of David’s father Jesse, before his mother, and his older brothers. “And the

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Lord God said to Samuel," 1 Samuel 16:1, "How long," Samuel, "will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse, the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Stop there for a second.

Samuel arrived, you remember, and Jesse, like any father would do, he paraded his older sons before Samuel starting with the oldest and going down the line. Impressive men, all of them, strong, strapping young men able to lead and to rule. Samuel was impressed with them. But look at verse 7, "God told Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'" One after another, Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, and one after another, God said, "no." He hadn't chosen any of them. Look at verse 11, "Then Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, well 'There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is,' What? 'keeping the sheep.' Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and get him, for we will not sit down until he comes here.' Sent and brought him in. Now he," David, 'was ruddy and had beautiful eyes, was handsome and the Lord said,

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'Arise, anoint him, for this is he.' Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers." There's Genesis 49, right? "Anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward."

He was an unstoppable force after that. There was no opposing David because if you oppose David, you're going to oppose God himself. Just a quick note on this section here, where Samuel takes a horn of oil and anoints David. You know what that little title Messiah means? It comes from the Hebrew verb, *māšah*. *Māšah* which means to anoint. Have you ever heard these back to our Jewish roots' kind of people? They say, they don't say, Jesus, they say, *Ha Mashuach*. And it sounds really holy and stuff. That's what they're talking about. *Ha* is just the definite article, the, and then *Mashuach* is the proper, it's like a title, Messiah, Anointed One. *Ha Mashuach* it's, it's a, it's the Messiah, it's the, the Anointed One. It identifies this one that God has chosen to be king. At first, as we can see right here, it's David. But ultimately, Jesus is *Ha Maschuach*. He's the Messiah, he is the Christ. Christ is from the verb *chrío*, in



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Greek, which means to anoint. So this is the Greek word for Anointed One and we get *Christos* from that. Christ.

So David, he was anointed, and he's the first to be anointed out of his family here, anointed there in Bethlehem. He's anointed privately, and he's anointed in the presence of his family, who were, by the way, shepherds. It was a family of shepherds. And David had to be called in from the pasture, notably, where he was tending sheep to be anointed king of Israel. With a little sanctified imagination, we can picture David walking the same ground as the shepherds of Luke, Chapter 2 verse 8. Following that same path, tending to his flocks, even by night. Even though David had been anointed king, Saul was still on the throne. But his anointing didn't give him any right to form a coup and overthrow Saul or anything like that. So, this is going to take some time. And as we've read in 1 Samuel, there's a lot suffering, a lot of pain, a lot of travail, a lot of worry, a lot of anxious fleeing and hiding out, getting away from the murderous, demon-inspired jealousy of King Saul. Saul had to actually die before David could ascend the throne to rule over Israel. But it all started with Samuel's anointing, a

private anointing, and the first of three times that David was anointed king.

That first anointing, though it was private, it started David's migration from the pasture to the throne, from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. David was being drawn away from shepherding the sheep and he was being put into wider service, more general service to shepherd all of Israel. David's second anointing happened after the death of Saul, when the men of Judah came to David at Hebron and anointed him king over the house of Judah. That's recorded in 2 Samuel 2 verse 4. The third and final time that David was anointed, he was this time anointed as king over all of Israel. You can turn there, it's in 2 Samuel 5:1. 2 Samuel 5:1. We'll read just a couple verses there. It says in 2 Samuel 5:1, "That all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, 'Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, "You shall be shepherd of my people Israel and you shall be prince over Israel." So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the lord, and they," there it is again, "anointed David king over Israel."

After David is anointed king over all of Israel, he turns his attention to, as every new king does, to solidifying his power. To solidify his base of power, he needed to establish a centralized location from which to rule this unified kingdom that he's just become king over. His eyes turned to a city that was then inhabited by a Canaanite people called the Jebusites. They lived in the city called Jebuse. It's a name, by the way, that's been totally forgotten. Who calls it that anymore? We know the city is Jerusalem. Look at 2 Samuel 5:6. It says, "The king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, 'You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off' –thinking, 'David cannot come in here.'" That's how impregnable they thought their fortress was, but look at the next verse. "Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David." The city of David. That's the first mention, actually, of that designation, city of David, in the Bible. And it doesn't refer to Bethlehem; notice, it refers to Jerusalem because that's where David lived as king of Israel. Verse 9 says, "David lived in the stronghold and he called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from Milo inward. And David became greater

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and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him." He was with him ever since that first anointing all the way through Saul chasing him down, all the way through the days of ruling Judah, from Hebron for seven years and all the way through his rule over Israel, God was with him.

And David made a very, very good decision to choose Jerusalem as his capital city. Militarily, strategically it was the perfect location. Jerusalem was elevated above the surrounding valleys, which meant it was very well fortified. It had an abundant water supply, it was easily defensible, very strategically located, by the way, you know, located at the crossroads of north/south trade routes, centrally located in Israel. And, by the way, Israel is at the center of the entire inhabited world. It's the connecting point between east and west, between north and south of the entire planet. North, south, east, west, all points to the compass converge here on the map in Jerusalem, the city of David. The city actually remains at the center of the world to this very day, doesn't it? I mean hardly a day goes by that Jerusalem in some way, in some fashion, and in some form is not in the news. All of our eyes continue to be drawn back to that city as world history

continues to march toward the inevitable conclusion that God has planned for it. So we watch.

But even though David's public service took him to Jerusalem, his heart was always back home. David continued to long for his home town of Bethlehem even before he ascended the throne. While he was still in Saul's service, David returned home every single year to participate in annual sacrifices. You can see that referred to in 1 Samuel 20 verse 6, where it's called his city, his town. The annual sacrifices for David and for his family was kind of like a family reunion, in his family. It was like going home to him.

Well, all the people of Israel may have referred to Jerusalem as the city of David. David acquiesced to that as well. Though God had chosen Jerusalem to be at the very center of the Davidic Dynasty, to be at the very center of the location of the temple for all the socio-religious importance and significance of that city. For David, Bethlehem, Bethlehem was the city of David. It's located just six short miles southwest of Jerusalem. But God didn't allow David to return there. He was

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stuck in Jerusalem, and that was painful for David because he loved Bethlehem. It was his city, his beloved home town, to him. He loved the tranquility. He loved the peace and quiet of the surrounding hills, the countryside where he would wander, tending his father's sheep. Out among those sheep the, and the pastures, among the flocks, no one was hunting him down there, no arrows flying to kill him. There's no controversy, no slander, nothing to correct. He was free to look up at the night sky and contemplate the majesty of his Creator penning words like this in Psalm 8:3, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" All that poured out of his heart because it was there in a quiet place of contemplation to look the majesty of God. But David wouldn't be allowed to return to the tranquility of Bethlehem, the city that was at the center of his heart. David would have to stay put in Jerusalem, which was the new city of David because God had chosen that city for himself.

David's home became even more permanently cemented in Jerusalem when the tabernacle moved there. David was right to bring the Ark of the Covenant up from the house of Abinadab and

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the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem. He was right to desire in 2 Samuel 7 to build a permanent temple for the ark. But God had clearly chosen Solomon for that project to build the temple. David, you're not going to be the one to build the temple; your son Solomon will do that. And Solomon did that. David supplied, David provided, David set everything up. Solomon did the building. Solomon executed. And when Solomon had finished that temple and dedicated it to the Lord, it says in 2 Chronicles 7:1 and 2, that "As soon as Solomon had finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and it consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house." And we're going to come back to that as we get into the next section. But for right now, the glory of the Lord filled that temple.

So Jerusalem was not only the city of David, it was the socio-religious center of the whole world, the whole planet. And that's how we know it today, right? Jerusalem is the city of David. It is the center of the Jewish faith. The Messiah is going to return and he's going to sit on David's throne in Jerusalem during the millennial kingdom; he's going to reign from

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there. And there is going to be a restored temple. Ezekiel 40 to 48 describes this temple in great detail, the sacrifices that take place there. There's going to be a restored temple in Jerusalem with restored sacrifices during the millennial kingdom. It's all going to happen. Even the Bible attests to Jerusalem's importance as the center of the world. So much so that 45 out of 47 times, that appellation, city of David, it's talking about Jerusalem and not about Bethlehem. It's only in these two verses in Luke Chapter 2, verse 4 and verse 11 that Bethlehem is called the city of David. So what is the point? Why Bethlehem? Is this just nostalgia? Is this just an acknowledgment of David's warm-hearted sentiment for his hometown? It's more than that. It's at least that. It's definitely that, but it's more than that. Look, this is a return to where everything started. This is taking the story right back to its beginning. God wanted Jesus born in Bethlehem to break continuity with Israel's unfaithful leadership and then to establish continuity with David's leadership. God wanted to connect Jesus to his father David in every way possible. He wanted to push restart on the Davidic covenant and the Davidic program.



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You're already in 2 Samuel, right? So turn over to 2 Samuel Chapter 7, 2 Samuel 7, because this brings another angle to look at this conundrum, here, and it's found at the beginning of verse 8, in Chapter 2, Luke 2:8, "In the same region," what region? The region of Bethlehem. So there's Bethlehem, the city, the town, but then there's the region around it, and in that same region there were what? Shepherds. God wanted the Messiah born in close proximity to these shepherds, these shepherds in particular. These in the same region shepherds. And that brings us to the second point in our outline. Why the shepherds? Why the shepherds? As we read in Luke 2:1 to 20, as God brings the Messiah into the world, this greater son of David, the son of the Most High God, God is here making a point. This is not going to be a continuation of that which has developed over time. This is starting over. This is a break. Adam had failed as the representative head of the human race, and he brought sin and judgment and death into the world. So, God started over, bringing his sinless son into the world through a miraculous virgin birth. Solomon had likewise failed. He was supposed to continue David's reign and to continue it in the same manner, according to the same heart. Solomon was to be the representative head of the Davidic kingdom, a Messianic kingdom, a kingdom that was appointed and anointed and approved by God.

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But Solomon didn't start, I mean he may have started well, but he did not continue well; he didn't continue in the heart of David, that's for sure.

So God started over. God anointed David's son, Jesus; brought him back to the starting point. He demonstrated his approval by connecting the birth of Christ to the birth of his father, David, in every way. It started here in Bethlehem; it started in the city of David. If you're in 2 Samuel 7, let your eyes scroll down the page a little bit to the middle of verse 8. God there tells the prophet Nathan to tell his servant David this, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you." Stop there for a second. We've noted earlier that when Samuel came to anoint David as king over Israel, they literally had to go out and find him and retrieve him from the pasture, from following the sheep. This is very accurate. And when David was finally elevated to the position of king over all of Israel, those tribes, tribal heads of Israel, the elders of Israel, they acknowledged David's call from God to be a shepherd

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king. They said, "The Lord said," to you, "you shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you shall be prince over Israel."

So God intended for that shepherding mentality which characterized David's reign to characterize the entire Davidic dynasty. Shepherd leadership was to be the hallmark of the Messianic kingdom. So, continuing in verse 9, God says to David through Nathan, he says, "I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all of your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. And when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity," obviously now we're not talking about Jesus Christ. We've separated from him and we're talking about Solomon.

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"When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you." There's that little caveat about Solomon and then this, verse 16, "Your house, your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

Now, there had been, verse 14 there, it, it foreshadows a disruption in the continuity of David's dynasty, doesn't it? It foreshadows a break. Some kind of a severing that needed to be restored. God was with Solomon, David's son, while he was faithful. But as soon as Solomon's heart drifted into polygamy and idolatry, he departed from God. God stayed with him, though. God used him to write certain portions of Scripture that we, I read to my kids every day. But Solomon's polygamy illustrated, and portended, foretold Israel's spiritual polygamy, its wandering from the Lord to worship idols. Sadly, that idolatry characterized the nation from Solomon onward. And its leaders failed to shepherd God's people. Prophet, priest, king, like I said, with a few notable exceptions to this, all of Israel's leadership had abandoned shepherding the nation.

Just to show you that illustrated, turn over to Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 34. Ezekiel 34. God here in Ezekiel 34, he summarizes his indictment against Israel's leadership. God intended the leaders to lead the people like David did, following his pattern. David was a shepherding ruler who cared for the people like sheep. He loved them with a shepherd's heart, but sadly, those who followed David, they were anything but shepherds. They were more like wolves, actually.

Take a look at Ezekiel 34 verse 1. "The word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them, even to the shepherds, "Thus says the lord God: 'Ah, shepherds of Israel who've been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothed yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were

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scattered; they wandered all over the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered all over the face the earth, with none to search and seek for them.' Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 'As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and because my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and not fed my sheep'; therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.'"

To see what the kingdom of Israel had become after David's death; it would have made David weep. It would have absolutely broken his heart. One time, you may know the story, when David's own sin of taking his own personal census, by the way, when he counted his troops and he brought down a plague in judgment on the people of Israel, David pleaded with the Lord. 2 Samuel 24:17, "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But

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these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house." David would have hated to see what had become of Israel, what had become of the throne, what had become of Jerusalem itself. It would have broken his heart. It certainly broke the heart of God. But God had a plan to remedy the situation. Look at verse 11. "For thus says the Lord God: 'Behold I, I, myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be there grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down,' declares the Lord God. 'I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.'"

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Stop there. Actually, skip down to verse 22. God continues, he says, “I will rescue my flock. They shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken. I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit,” that is uncultivated trees, by the way, they shall yield their fruit, “the earth shall yield its increase, they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who’ve enslaved them. They shall no longer be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely; none shall make them afraid. And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. And they shall know that I



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am the Lord their God with them, that they, the house of Israel, are my people declares the Lord God. And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God," declares the Lord God."

Why the shepherds? Because God's heart is the heart of a shepherd. As we read earlier in Psalm 23, God loves his people. He cares for them. He feeds them. He tends them. He pays attention to all of the details of their health and their growth and their development just as a diligent shepherd carefully, attentively cares for his sheep. By bringing Joseph and Mary back to Bethlehem, the city of David, God broke the continuity with the kings of Israel, those who were described here in Ezekiel 34 in a negative way. He broke that continuity. This is consistent with his indictment of Jerusalem, its leadership, its priests, its kings. There is nothing to affirm in that corrupt city. It just needs to be wadded up and thrown into the garbage bin and lit on fire. And in AD 70, that's exactly what happened.

So of course, God didn't want the imagery of the palace as the setting for the birth of the Messiah. He didn't want the imagery of Jerusalem with all its corruption to be the setting

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of the birth of the Messiah. He wanted the imagery of the pasture, of the shepherd because that's what God intended to restore through his son, the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. God connected Jesus with his father, David, causing him to be born in Bethlehem, the original city of David, at the center of David's heart, and by putting him in close proximity to these Bethlehem shepherds.

Now, all that to say this, let's tie this all together, why Bethlehem? Why the shepherds? Look at the context of Micah's prophecy if you can real quick. In Micah 5:2, Micah 5:2, we usually only read verse 2 of Micah's prophecy because we read it around Christmas time every time. But the context surrounding that tells us everything. We can start in Micah 5:2. It says this, "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 of old, from ancient days." Now we're talking about an eternal person there, aren't we? "Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth and then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel." That right there, in that verse, is like the reference to the interval

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between the first and second advents of Christ. There will be a, at the end, a gathering of Israel just prior to the start of the millennial kingdom. But then this in verse 4, "And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And," verse 5, "he shall be their peace." Stop there.

The angels in heaven said it on that day to the shepherds, in Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth" what? "Peace." He shall be their peace, on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. God is truly glorified when the true nature of his heart is revealed, and whenever God is glorified, when his shepherding heart is revealed, his people dwell securely, just as Micah predicted. And that's what Luke wants us to see here. God shall be their peace. On earth, there is peace among those with whom he is pleased. Bethlehem, home to families of shepherds, surrounded as a city by pastures and flocks of sheep, provide the perfect setting, the right imagery, to picture the safety, the security, the provision, the protection of God through the righteous shepherd like the reign of the Messiah. And that's why it had to be Bethlehem, the original city

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of David. That's why this announcement from the Angel of the Lord had to come first to the shepherds, because that's the kind of imagery that's most fitting for the birth of the Chief Shepherd, 1 Peter 5:4; the birth of the great shepherd of the sheep, Hebrews 13:20.

Listen, does that encourage you to know that the heart of your God is the heart of a shepherd? That he looks after us. I know that sheep, you know we call them dumb animals and all that kind of stuff and it's not very flattering that we're called his sheep but, hey, if the shoe fits, you know. But really, I mean let's, let's reverse that. Let's not look at all of our flaws. We've got them. We've got flaws. And we, like sheep, can do some really dumb things, okay? But let's flip it around and look at the fact that if we're sheep, you know what that means he is the shepherd. And, and you know what? He's omniscient. And he sees absolutely everything and he cares. Peter says, "Cast all of your cares upon him because he cares for you." He sees everything. Not only that, but he's also omnipotent, which means he's got the power to do something about it when there's trouble. He can make us, like Psalm 23 says, he can make us even in valleys of shadows of death feel very secure. He can even set a table, a

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dinner table, a feast table right in the presence of our enemies. Right in front of them. And we can have just a wonderful time filled with rich, rich joy in the worship of our God right in the presence of conflict and controversy and slander and persecution and all the rest. God is our shepherd, that's what we're seeing in Luke Chapter 2. That's why Bethlehem. That's why the shepherds. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we just want to thank you that you are our great shepherd. We love you dearly, and we're so grateful to see this unfold before us. We're so grateful to see the layers underneath the story that help us appreciate what's at stake here, help us appreciate your heart, your character. We love you. We give ourselves even more willingly to you knowing the truth of your word. Please bind our hearts to you. I know, like we sang before, our hearts can be prone to wander, but bind them to you in the truth. Bind them to you by the Spirit. Bind them to you with your love. Let us be those who manifest that love that you've shown to us through Christ. Let us be those that manifest that love to the whole world around us because they so desperately need it. It's a dark day, dark times that we live in, but you've raised us up for such a time as this and we want to

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be faithful in it. We commit all this to you in worship and praise and honor of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.