

*The Holy Night:
Meditation on
St. Luke's
Account of the
Nativity*



Luke 1: Purpose of the Narrative

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, 2 just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

Luke 2: 1-2: When

- **Augustus** ruled 27BC to 14AD
- Census? “Enrolled”: for taxing purposes?
 - Decreed a tax or loyalty oath: 3-2BC
 - Evidence of a Roman census in Egypt in 6-5BC
 - prolonged process?
 - More evidence for census in 6AD:
Jewish rebellion
 - “first enrollment”
 - 2 stages? 1) Register, 2) Pay

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.”

Luke 2: 1-2: When

- **Herod the Great:** most have said died 4bc.
 - Now many scholars say **1BC**
- **Publius Sulpicius Quirinius**
 - “governor”?
 - “Hegemoneuo...”
 - Pilate
 - Legate of Syria in **6AD**:
 - 5 –3/2 BC military campaign, probably legate in Galatia and Cilicia

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.”

Cross-reference: 30 years later

- Tiberius Caesar: 14 AD to 37 AD
 - “fifteenth year”= **28/29AD**
 - “Jesus was about thirty years old”
 - 28/29AD – **30 years** = **2/1BC**
- SO:
 - Augustus ruled 27BC to 14AD
 - Herod the Great: died **4BC - 1BC**
 - Quirinius: maybe **5 – 3/2 BC**
- SO...Most scholars believe **Jesus was born between 4 - 2BC**

Luke 3: 1-2, 21, 23: “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, ...the word of God came to John...in the wilderness...

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry.

What is Luke's point?

Salutation to Theophilus:

- “to write an orderly account
- “that you may know the truth”

Theologically:

- That Jesus was born in time
 - Historic reality
 - God the Son really became a human baby and entered the world
- All history revolves around Him
 - Christ is the turning point in history—the center of history

Galatians 4:4:

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law...”

St. John Paul II (Redemptor Hominis):

“Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history.”



Luke 2: 3-4

Significance of “His own city...Bethlehem”

- Joseph was born in Bethlehem (Some Fathers)
- Joseph had property in Bethlehem (Some scholars: Pope Benedict XVI)
- Jewish custom would have provided he go to his ancestral home to be counted (most common): “because he was of the house...of David”

Theologically:

- Jesus is the direct descendant of King David

“And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David...”

Luke 2: 3-4: The Prophesies Fulfilled

The Prophesies Fulfilled

Micah 5:2 “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah...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.

Matthew 2:3f: “When Herod the king heard this, ...assembling all the chief priests and scribes ...he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “And you, O Bethlehem...”’”

“And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David...”

Luke 2: 3-4: The Prophesies Fulfilled

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

John 7:40f: “...some of the people said, “This is truly the Prophet.” Others declared, “This is the Christ.” But still others asked, “How can the Christ come from Galilee? Doesn’t the Scripture say that the Christ will come from the line of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?””

“And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David...”

Luke 2: 3-4: The Prophecies Fulfilled

Promise to David

2 Samuel 7: 12-14: “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 body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”

“And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David...”

The Prophesies Fulfilled

Theological: God moved the whole Roman Empire, to fulfill the prophecy, and his promise/covenant to David.

“And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David...”

Luke 2:5

“his betrothed”

- Married under Jewish law
- but still not consummated
- Two parts: 1) Betrothal 2) Taking into Groom’s home

“to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.”

Matthew 1:18ff: “When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, ...decided to divorce her quietly....[T]he angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. ...When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.”

Luke 2:5

- “Betrothed”: signifies virgin
 - Note: St. Matthew: “taken her in...”
- “Who was with child”: signifies mother
- SO: Virgin Mother

“to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.”

Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel. ... ”

Matthew 1:22-23: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel...”

Luke 2:6-7a

“delivered”: *tekein*

- It is silent about the “labor”
- She merely “delivered” or “bore”

And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son

Exodus 13:13ff: “all the firstborn of man among thy sons shalt thou redeem. And ...when thy son asketh thee ...What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, ...when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, ...the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, ...therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the womb, being males; but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.”

Luke 2:6-7a

Mary's Perpetual Virginity

“delivered”: *tekein*

- It is silent about the “labor”
- She merely “delivered” or “bore”

first-born: *Prototokos*
(proto + tekein)

- Legal term in the Law of Moses
 - Does NOT imply other children
 - Applies to only son
- Purpose :
 - Heir
 - dedicate first born to God

**And while they were there,
the time came for her to be
delivered. And she gave birth
to her first-born son**

Exodus 13:13ff: “all the firstborn of man among thy sons shalt thou redeem...[W]hen thy son asks you...you shall say unto him...the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, ...therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb; but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.”

Luke 2:6-7a

- First born of the Father
 - First born who is sacrificed to God for our redemption

And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son

John 1:29: “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Hebrews 9:12: “he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”

Luke 2:6-7a

- First born of the Father:
 - Heir
 - Unique First born who sets the order of Creation:

And she gave birth to her first-born son

Hebrews 1:2: “...in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things....

Colossians 1:15ff: “...who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible....; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist.

Luke 2:6-7a

- First born of the Father:
 - First born of many brethren: the Church
 - First born of the dead: the Resurrection of the Dead

“And she gave birth to her first-born son”

Romans 8:29: For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be **the first-born among many brethren.**

Colossians 1:18: “...And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Luke 2:7b

OLD Testament

Prophesy/Prefigurement:

- King Solomon was David's son
- Jesus is the “Son of David” promised
 - prefigured in Solomon, who was famous for
 - Wisdom
 - Building the Temple

“and wrapped him in swaddling cloths”

Wisdom 7:4 “I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths. For no king has had a different beginning of existence; there is for all mankind one entrance into life, and a common departure.”

Luke 2:7b

OLD Testament

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 - prefigured in Solomon

“and wrapped him in swaddling cloths”

2 Samuel 7: 12-14: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you...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 to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”

Luke 1:32-33: “the Lord God will give to him the throne of **his father David,** and he will reign over the house of Jacob **for ever;** and **of his kingdom there will be no end.**”

Luke 2:7b

What are “swaddling cloths”?



Luke 2:7b

New Testament Prophesy/Prefigurement:

- Burial cloths--plural:
 - Napkin (Sudarium)
 - Shroud (Sindon)
 - Bindings (Othonion)
- “Cloths”: Similarity to swaddling

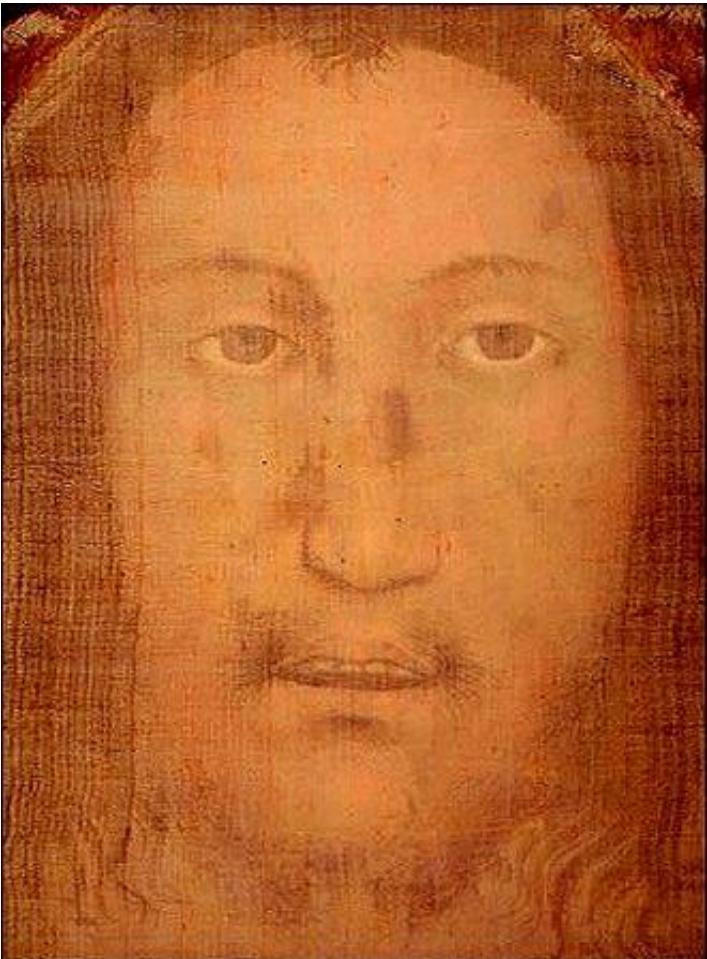
Jn 20:6 “cloths”

“and wrapped
him in swaddling
cloths”

John 20: 6-7: “Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen **cloths** lying, and the **napkin**, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.

Matthew 27: 59: “And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth...”

Luke 2:7b



Napkin/
Sudarium



Volto Santo of Manoppello

Volto Santo of Manoppello

Luke 2:7b

Manger:

- No crib, but an animal food trough
 - sign of humility of Jesus
- Food:
 - Bethlehem: “house of bread”
 - St. Augustine/Pope Benedict XVI: Jesus is our true food

“and laid him in a manger...”

Pope Benedict XVI, “Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives”:

“Augustine drew out the meaning of the manger... The manger is the place where animals find their food. But now, lying in the manger, is he who called himself the true bread come down from heaven, the true nourishment that we need in order to be fully ourselves. This is the food that gives us true life, eternal life....”

Luke 2:7b

Manger:

- Wood of the Manger: wood of the Cross
 - Christ enters the world to go to the Cross
- Combined with the swaddling cloths/burial cloths...

“and laid him in a manger...”

Pope Benedict XVI, “Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives,” p. 68,
“The child stiffly wrapped in bandages is seen as a prefiguring of the hour of his death: from the outset, he is the sacrificial victim....The manger then, was seen as a kind of altar...”

Luke 2:7b

Mangers are in Stables, but in Bethlehem the Stables are Caves

Ancient tradition
reflects ancient
practices



Luke 2:7c

No place for them:

- Humility of Jesus
- Born into suffering
- Jesus would not be accepted by his people
 - (Esp. if Joseph was from Bethlehem...)

“...because there
was no place for
them in the inn.”

Isaiah 53: 2ff: “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. ...

John 1:10-11: “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.”

Luke 2:7c

Poverty of Jesus:

- The things of this world were not important to him
- Poverty of Jesus: poverty of spirit
 - Not “homeless”: travelers
 - Joseph/Mary both had home in Nazareth
 - Joseph known as “the carpenter”

“...because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Luke 9:58 “...the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

John 17: 14 “.... they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

John 18: 36 Jesus answered, "My kingship is not of this world...."



“...there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.”

Luke 2:8

- The Jews are the first to hear the good news
- And the poor: shepherds in the field
- David was a shepherd: Abraham and Moses were shepherds as well
 - Shepherd Kings
- Christ would call himself the “good shepherd”

“And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.”

John 10: 11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Luke 2:8

Christmas on December 25?

- “too cold in December”:
 - either no shepherds or not December
- **Mishna (Talmud)**: Temple lambs had to be born in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem, i.e., near Bethlehem.
 - Lambing season begins mid-December
 - “Spotless” Male lambs designated for Temple sacrifice
 - These Levitical shepherds remained here year round to provide sacrifices for the daily needs of the Temple
 - Christ is the Lamb of the New Passover

“And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.”

Luke 2:8

Christmas on December 25?

- Some say: established in 3rd century
 - pagan holidays (Osiris, Adonis, Dionysus)
- Or is it vice-versa?
- No cults had major celebrations on Dec 25.
 - Emperor Aurelian (270-5 A.D.) established December 25 as festival of the 'Birth of the Unconquered Sun'
 - unify various pagan cults of Empire
- 1st century: Christianity sought to calculate exact day of Jesus' death.
 - Eastern chose April 6; Western chose March 25.
 - ancient notion of an "integral age":
 - So Jesus was born on January 6 or December 25

Luke 2:9

“The Glory of the Lord”

- Exodus 10: precedes the gift of Manna

Exodus 10:8ff: “ ..[T]he whole Israelite community... looked toward the desert, and there was **the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud....**[A]nd in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.

“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.”

Luke 2:9

“The Glory of the Lord” on Mt. Sinai

- Exodus 24: God’s presence in the cloud and fire
- Exodus 19: thunder, lightning, trumpet, smoke, fire earthquake

Exodus 24:15ff: “When Moses went up on the mountain, **the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled** on Mount Sinai. ...To the Israelites **the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire** on top of the mountain.”

Exodus 19: 16ff: “On the morning of the third day there was **thunder and lightning**, with a **thick cloud** over the mountain, and a **very loud trumpet blast**. ...Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the **LORD descended on it in fire....and the whole mountain trembled violently.**”

“**And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.**”

Luke 2:9

“The Glory of the Lord”:

- Exodus/numbers:
 - Cloud: mysterious, ethereal,
 - Fire/lightning: power, majesty
 - contrast this with
 - The simple incarnation and poverty of the Babe

Effect of this in Exodus: fear and separation

Exodus 19: 16: “Everyone in the camp trembled.”

Exodus 19: 12: “Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death.”

“9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.”

Luke 2:9

Effect of this is fear: exodus etc.

- The shepherds “were filled with fear”
 - At the “glory” revealed in the angel’s appearance
- Contrast with the incarnation and humility of Babe
 - Not cloud, but flesh
 - Not fire and thunder, but a cooing Baby
 - Not separation, but “dwelling among us”:
 - incarnation and a Baby in His Mother’s arms
 - Not fear but love.

“You can no longer fear me, you can only love me.”

(Benedict XVI, citing 12th cent. William of St. Thierry)

“9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.”

Luke 2:9b-10a

What is fear? Reverence!

- Ps. 110: “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”
- Isaiah 11:2: a gift of the holy spirit
 - “the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom...”

But fear can cross from reverence to aversion, terror

- Shepherds were “afraid”: Greek: *phobeo*:
 - Luke says the same of Zechariah,
 - But not Mary: *diatarasso*-- “troubled”
 - The angels tell all three (plus Joseph) the same:
 - “be not afraid: “may phobe”

“they
were
filled with
fear.

And the
angel said
to them,
“Be not
afraid...”

Luke 2:10

- Euaggelizo/Euaggelizo: evangelio
 - response to Christ and the Gospel: “great joy”
- To all the people: *Pas epo*
 - The people: a group of people, specific
 - “God’s people”: Israel
 - all the people?: the world?

**“... Be not afraid,
for behold, I bring
you good news of
a great joy which
will come to all
the people...”**

Luke 2:11

- “To you”:
 - the Jews
 - “Levitical” shepherds, who raise the lambs
- “This day”: again, in time, historicity, incarnate.
- “In the city of David”
 - earlier Luke (2:4) calls Bethlehem “the city of David”
 - Matthew says **5 times** Jesus born in Bethlehem
- HOWEVER:
 - Samuel calls Jerusalem “the city of David.”

“... for to
you is
born this
day in
the city
of David
...”

2 Samuel 5:2: “Zion, that is, the city of David.”

2 Samuel 6:12: “So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obededom to the city of David with rejoicing;”

Luke 2:11

So which is the “City of David”?

- Fathers: ark of the covenant is prefiguration of **Mary**
 - containing the new covenant/presence of God:
Jesus
 - This is cause for “rejoicing”!
- The city of David begins with Bethlehem and moves to Jerusalem
 - Just as David was born in Bethlehem but reigned in Jerusalem
 - From the manger to the Cross
 - The house of bread to the upper room and Calvary

“... for to
you is
born this
day in
the city
of David
...”

Luke 2:11

“a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

- The new David
- Savior from sin and fear
- “Christ”: “Messiah”
 - The messiah king promised to David
- “Lord”: God
 - True presence of Christ, with Mary
 - True cause for rejoicing

**“... for to you is
born this day
in the city of
David a Savior,
who is Christ
the Lord.”**

Luke 2:12

The swaddling clothes and manger are a **sign**:

- “Levitical shepherds” wrapped new-born lambs in swaddling clothes, placed in a food trough, apart from the other sheep, protect from blemish.
- Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be sacrificed like a lamb

“...And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

Isaiah 53:5ff “...he was wounded for our transgressions... and with his stripes we are healed...[A]nd the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He ...he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter...

Luke 2:13

- God is “the Lord of Hosts” in the OT, over and again
- A “host” is an army,
- The “heavenly host” is the army of angels

Jeremiah 33:22: “the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured....”

Nehemiah 9:6: “You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host...; and the host of heaven worships you.”

Daniel 7:9: As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat; ...a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; ...

“... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host.”

Luke 2:13b-14

- Contrast and relationship between “God in the highest” and “men of good will”
- *Eudokia*:
 - “men of goodwill”
 - or “men with whom he is pleased”
 - God’s good will: those are pleasing to him: who are open to him
 - Jesus: Luke 3: men/people who are like Jesus

Luke 3:22: “and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.””

“...praising
God and
saying,
“Glory to God
in the
highest, and
on earth
peace among
men with
whom he is
pleased!”

Luke 2:15

“Which the Lord had made known”

- Angel speaks for God: God's messenger
- In all the Nativity stories:
 - God doesn't appear, the Angel does
 - Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and shepherds
- Why angel? Why not God's voice/light?
 - God is about to appear in the flesh!

“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."

Luke 1:41ff: “...Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “...Blessed are you who believed that **what was spoken to you by the Lord** would be fulfilled.”



Luke 2:16

- “went with haste”: *Spoude*
 - Mary: Luke uses exact same word to describe Mary’s response to the angel
 - Joseph: different word, similar action
 - This is the way to respond to Christ

“16 And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”

Luke 1:39: “And Mary arose in those days, and **went** into the hill country **with haste**, into a city of Juda;”

Matt. 1:24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

Matt. 2:14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

Luke 2:16

- “Mary and Joseph” listed before “the babe”
 - Importance of Mary and Joseph
 - Role as his true parents by God’s gift
 - Mary is first....
- “Found...the babe lying in a manger”
 - Just as the angel said: fulfillment of God’s promises
- Finding Mary and Joseph is important to finding Jesus
 - Where Jesus is...

“16 ...found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”

Luke 2:17-18

Shepherds “made known what they had been told”:

- “shepherd” in Latin is “pastor”
- Prefiguration of shepherds of the New Testament: priesthood
 - Bishops/priests proclaiming the Gospel
 - Handing on what they have received

(note: 3 *munera*: king, priest, prophet)

Response of “all who heard”: “wondered”

- *Thaumazo*: to wonder at, to marvel
 - What is our response?

“And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.”

Luke 2:19

- **Mary is the one who passed all this on:**
 - she is the “eyewitness”: “kept”
 - and she’s been meditating on this
 - the “heart” : the core of the person
- “But”: *deh*: but, however, now, and....
 - Contrast to others: she understands
 - teaches us how to meditate on these

“But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.”

Luke 2:46ff: “After three days they found him in the temple....And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.”

Luke 2:16

- Response to seeing and hearing:
 - glorifying and praising
 - the role of pastors to lead worship
- “as it had been told them”
 - fidelity: important to Luke’s history:
 - “Eyewitness”
- “and Seen”: not just told/word:
 - The Word made flesh

“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

1 John 1:1: “That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have **looked at** and our hands have **touched--this we proclaim** concerning the **Word** of life.”

