

Polishing the Christmas Jewel

Luke 2:1-7 | Dave Geldart | Dec 22, 2019

- 1) Intro Story:
 - a. cleaning off my glasses
 - b. getting Jenn's wedding ring cleaned
- 2) The Christmas story is a lot like that
 - a. Over the years and decades and centuries it's accumulated extra dirt and grime that's obscured what really happened
 - b. Some of these scratches and smudges need to be removed
 - c. Just like seeing out of smudged glasses, can still see the main shapes, but fine details hidden, obscured → can see all that's really there!
 - i. SOME details are added in and shouldn't be there at all --- that's actually a hair on your lens!
 - d. In fact, the longer you look through the smudged glasses the less you know what things REALLY should look like – you begin to think it's normal!
 - i. That wedding ring becomes so familiar, we hardly notice the cloudiness,
 - ii. And easily forget what it was like at first – when it SHINED AND SPARKLED
 - e. That will be our aim tonight together tonight as we continue our Christmas series about Good News of Great Joy
 - i. This evening, we're going to seek to clean off the lenses, gently wipe off the extra stuff that's collected and hung on to the Jewel of Christmas during the centuries of loving use, so that we can see CLEARLY back into the past
 - ii. And perhaps more Clearly see what is true NOW, for us!
 1. Its not about tearing down, but washing clean!
 2. Rediscover the jewel, and let it sparkle again! → more than ever!
- 3) PRAY → invite others to pray?
- 4) What's the xmas story?
 - a. An elderly obese diabetic who lives in the frigid arctic utilizes an army of elven slave labor to produce billions of toys for the world's children each year
 - i. He styles himself as the Judge Judy of Juveniles, giving gifts only for those who have earned it through their moral excellence – or humanly keepable niceness
 1. The naughty only get a lump of coal
 - ii. And all these he delivers one night, on Xmas eve, in a flying sleigh driven by magical reindeer
 1. Themselves Led by a special reindeer with a bioluminescent red nose
 - b. And all he asks for his price: more insulin flooding sugar cookies in each home – and a glass of milk if you please
 - i. All totaled, Santa Claus will consume 150 billion calories on xmas eve
 1. That's 60,000 times his daily allotment
 - c. For MANY of our neighbors and friends, this is the Christmas story
 - i. At root, then, Christmas is ultimately about multicolored lights, sugar, nostalgia, food, shopping, selfishness, possessions, debt, & family stress.
- 5) As most of you know, though, know, this isn't the true story of Christmas
 - a. This legend has a kernel of history related to Christmas (though only tangential to it)
 - b. Around 300 AD there was a Christian monk named St Nicholas in modern day Turkey

- i. Which eventually morphed into the Dutch “SinterKlass”
 - c. Saint Nicholas was known for his generosity and kindness and protection of children
 - i. His deeply held Christianity led him to give away all his inherited wealth and travel the countryside helping the poor and sick.
 - ii. One story said he saved 3 poor sisters from being sold into slavery and prostitution by their father by providing them with a dowery so they they could be married – dropping 3 bags of gold through their open window
 - d.
- 6) But, as most of you know, this isn’t the true story of Christmas either.
 - a. Let’s keep cleaning and wiping this lens, this jewel.... See if we can restore it...
- 7) Most people have a passing understanding that Christmas was originally about celebrating the birth of Jesus
 - a. So what’s the traditional NATIVITY Christmas story?--> you in the church?
 - b. Full term pregnant Mary and frazzled Joseph limping into Bethlehem late in the evening with her on the back of a donkey
 - c. And she goes into labor as they get near the city
 - d. It’s nighttime now. Joseph is freaking out. Mary is moaning quietly.
 - i. Nobody will help them
 - ii. Everyone is cold and standoffish
 - iii. Doors and windows shut
 - iv. Passersby avert their eyes
 - e. They search frantically for a room at the local motel, but all the rooms are full
 - i. And pointing to the no vacancy sign the innkeeper says “SORRY WE’RE FULL”
 - ii. After more begging from a desperate Joseph the innkeeper says well you can go out back and give birth in the stable with the animals
 - iii. And there, Mary gives birth to Jesus, alone in a drafty cavelike stable, surrounded only by cows and sheep and chickens.
 - f. The story goes on filled with singing choirs of angels, a spotlight mega-star beaming down on the stable (that nearly everyone misses somehow), and three colorfully clad kings bumping into the shepherds just leaving after coming to the stable to worship the newborn king in the manger
 - i. Baby Jesus is lying there with a glowing halo around his head
 - 1. Super white and Caucasian
 - 2. Quiet and uncrying
 - ii. And Mary is looking remarkably refreshed in the background!
 - g. That’s pretty much the popular CHRISTIAN traditional Christmas story!
 - i. Right?
 - ii. Or IS it right?.....
- 8) The Christmas story is found in Luke and Matthew
 - a. The main Birth Narrative of JC is found in Luke
 - b. some other elements found in Matthew, like story of Joseph’s dream, and the Magi following the Star
 - c. But the BIRTH narrative in the Bible comes from Luke
 - i. That’s what we’ll focus in on today
 - ii. More on the Magi and the Star in a couple weeks: on Epiphany --- Jan 5, 2020
- 9) Let’s read the story from Luke 2 (starting in v 1)
 - a. As we read: notice what it says and what it doesn’t

- b. **2** In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when^[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town.
 - i. It was at one time believed that Luke had totally flubbed up these events surrounding JC's birth
 - 1. Critics had argued there was no Roman census
 - 2. Quirinius wasn't governor of Syria at that time... but later
 - 3. And ppl DIDN'T have to return to their ancestral homes.
 - ii. But we now know from archaeological discoveries
 - 1. Rome DID hold a census to enroll ppl for taxes every 14 years, and that this practice was indeed begun under Caesar Augustus
 - 2. Quirinius was governor of Syria at the correct time (an inscription found in Antioch indicating he was governor 2x)
 - 3. And a papyrus found in Egypt teaches that Roman census did require all ppl to return to their ancestral residences for family registration
- c. ⁴And 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, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed,^[b] who was with child.
 - i. Another point of authentication: though nazarath was 70-90 miles north of Bethlehem,
 - 1. This is geographically accurate!
 - 2. You did indeed go UP to Bethlehem from Nazareth, since it was a good bit higher in elevation
 - 3. Which is indeed how ancients spoke of directions
- d. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.
- e. Lots here:
 - i. While they were there – no indication of haste, nor immediacy of birth
 - 1. That 70-90 mile journey was a difficult one, 4-7 days, camping., NOT to be done w/ a 9mo preg wife (indeed text never says it anyways)
 - a. We know from ch 1 that she had stayed with Elizabeth, her cousin, during her pregnancy for 3 months, then returned home.
 - b. But we have no data whatsoever about how far along she was for the trip to Bethlehem.
 - c. All we know was she was past her 1st trimester.
 - 2. Merely, that they traveled to Bethlehem WHILE she was pregnant.
 - a. And that some time later, while they were there, she came due and gave birth
- f. ⁷And 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.^[c]
 - i. Manger, swaddling cloths, and no room in the inn
- g. Let's take the INN first
 - i. Greek word for INN (motel – as we think of it) *Pandocheion*
 - 1. used in Lk 10:34 (good samaritan)
 - ii. NOT THE WORD HERE: this word is *katalyma* – Greek
 - 1. Literally: guest room, upper room
 - 2. same used in Luke 22:11 (last Supper)
 - iii. A brief note about typical houses in Middle East at that time

1. Indeed, you can still find many in that region TODAY
 2. (show pics)
 3. Single room houses
 - a. Most would have a KATALUMA
 - i. Guest room ... or UPPER ROOM
 - b. On their flat roof – hence UPPER ROOM
 - i. Or sometimes an additional room on the main level.
 - c. Hospitality was a GIGANTIC VALUE in their culture
 - i. Still is
 - ii. Far far more than we have in our culture
 - iii. It was a matter of strictest honor for families to welcome visitors into their homes, offer them lodging, food (see this ALL THROUGHOUT scripture)
 - iv. So it was common to have this guest (upper) room ready for these frequent drop ins
 - v. There were some INNs, but most people stayed in private homes of extended family
 1. Or travelers welcomed in to strangers homes when they needed lodging for the night
 2. Again, matter of great honor for family and community
 4. These ancient houses also were built With a slightly lower level where the family animals would be brought in a night for protection and warmth
 - a. Then they'd take them back out each morning and tie them up
 5. In the main room of the house, near this animal area, there's typically a manger or 2 so animals can munch at night.
 - a. Higher raised wooden manger for sheep,
 - b. Built in stone mangers for cows
- h. So with this knowledge, let's review
- i. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem at some point in her pregnancy – and because they weren't stupid, they travelled there long before she was due to deliver.
 1. No mention of a donkey!
 - ii. They traveled there because they were ordered to by Augustus
 1. They both KNEW she was pregnant with the promised Messiah
 2. AND that he was long prophesied to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2?)
 3. How amazed they must have been, when Augustus's orders reached their ears while they were living in Nazareth – as their families had likely lived for generations
 - a. Telling them to go back to his ancestral hometown – the exact place the Messiah was to be born!
 - iii. They arrive there the city of David, the royal Jewish line, JOSEPHS family, and seek out lodging from any number of his distant relatives there
 1. And of course any number of homes there would be eager to show honor to this young couple, their family (blood ties were super strong)
 2. No one would dream of neglecting visitors, least of which their own relations!... and a pregnant woman to boot! -- to do so would be a great shame on the whole town!

3. HERE we must pause and consider the scandal of the virgin birth.
 - a. We know that some in Nazareth knew of the claim, even later in JC's ministry, that Joseph wasn't his real father.
 - b. How would this scandal have affected the family time in Bethlehem
 - i. We don't have any direct evidence of this from scripture, so we'll have to be contented with educated guesses
 - ii. But the ~100 miles separation over rough terrain between Nazareth and Bethlehem likely meant that distant relatives in Bethlehem didn't know of it
 - iii. Chances are high it wasn't probed into at all.
 - iv. And even if they did catch wind of the scandal, they would have likely assumed, at worst, that Joseph had gotten started a little early on consummating their marriage
 1. This might have earned them a few snickers or disapproving looks, but wouldn't likely have amounted to much.
 2. she was after all legally his wife.
 - v. Remember, in that culture, blood and hospitality were paramount values
 - vi. Even hints of the scandal wouldn't have changed their disposition toward showing hospitality and great care to Mary, Joseph, and the baby boy.
- iv. So they stayed in a regular home there with one of Joseph's relations.
 1. And since there was no room for them in the GUEST ROOM, already occupied by other visitors the family was showing hospitality to – surely a glut of other distant relations in town for the census – they were hosted comfortably in the main family room with the rest of the family.
 - a. Nights filled with warmth, stories, laughter
- v. And when the time eventually came for her to give birth, all the men were shoed out of the family room,
 1. The village midwife called, family women attended with doting care and attention
- vi. And when Jesus was born, he was welcomed into the world by a roomful of happy women... family.
 1. He was rubbed with salt to clean and sterilize him
 2. Wrapped in clean strips of swaddling cloths – much like we still do today
 3. And laid in the host family's living room manger, stuffed with fresh straw, and covered in a blanket.
 4. All the animals likely outside!
- vii. Another indirect evidence: Later on in Luke 2, when the shepherds hear the Good News from the Angels, and come see Jesus, it says in v 20 –
 1. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.
 2. They praised God for ALL they had heard and seen
 3. This indirectly but powerfully points away from the idea they found Mary, Joseph, and Jesus alone in a drafty stable
 - a. They would NOT have rejoiced at that!

- b. They would have been incensed at this unimaginable mistreatment of fellow Jews and would have insisted they come home with them and let their women care for Mary and the baby – show them what hospitality THEY could
 - c. Instead they left rejoicing.
 - i. ALL WAS WELL
 - d. Their messiah was cared for well, in a loving Jewish family, in a loving Jewish home, as would be appropriate
 - viii. Jesus wasn't born in a lonely stable, he was born in a warm home, surrounded by loving family
 - ix. THIS IS QUITE DIFFERENT in many ways from the traditional Xian Xmas Story!
 - 1. SO HOW DID We get here
 - 2. Beyond some translation issues with the best English word for KATALUMA
- 10) NT scholar David Garland writes in his commentary on Luke:
- a. It may be unpopular to trespass on popular images associated with Christ's birth and to debunk myths, but it is theologically dangerous to allow the account of his birth to be hijacked by fiction.
 - b. ... The fictional Christmas has been a long time in the making. It has been said that whoever (it is debated) wrote "'Twas the Night before Christmas" in 1822 changed the way Americans celebrate the holiday of Christmas. The poem manufactured the character who became Santa Claus by combining St. Nicholas Day (Dec. 6) with Christmas. In 1863, Thomas H. Nast drew a cartoon of Santa as a fat, jolly man with a white beard, who became the standard image. A Coca-Cola advertising campaign from the 1930s dressed Santa in red and white clothing.
 - c. **The same kind of fictional development happened centuries ago in the popular conception of what happened at Christ's birth.**
 - d. *David Garland (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke)*
- 11) SO WHERE DO WE GET OUR Traditional Xmas story?
- a. Our modern Xmas story – colored!!! – it actually came from an early Christian novel written about 200 yrs after JC's birth: The Protoevangelium of James
 - i. Anonymous Author non Jewish (not familiar with Jewish tradition or Palestinian geography)
 - ii. says road to Bethlehem from Jerusalem was a desert (actually rich farmland)
 - iii. Containing copious amounts of fanciful and fantastic elements
 - b. In account, Mary tells Joseph she's about to give birth as they get close to Bethlehem
 - i. Joseph takes her down from a donkey (not in text)
 - ii. leaves her to run ahead to find shelter
 - iii. Leaves her in a cave
 - iv. Returns with a midwife after Mary gives birth
 - v. Finds the cave in shadow with a bright light shining down on it
 - c. So not surprisingly, this fictional account was attacked by early church leaders: Jerome, popes
 - i. But pieces of this work have stuck.... And have survived to this day
- 12) So, as we polish off our glasses, as we clean off that wedding ring...
- a. And let it shine with its original, its true brilliance
 - b. What do we see?

- c. What does it mean for us, today, in 2019.... More than 20 centuries after the historical events?

13) Applications:

a. 1) Welcome JESUS into your home

- i. One thing the polished jewel of Christmas shows us is that Jesus actually came into the world in the midst of a warm, loving, normal home, surrounded by relatives.

Welcomed by commoners.

1. Swaddling cloths – common practice
2. Indicated maternal care, that the child was WANTED and received and embraced.
3. Unwanted children (especially Romans) were sometimes left exposed, unsalted
 - a. (salt used to dry and sterilize)
4. But this baby was WANTED. Embraced. Wrapped in care.
5. JC Fully wanted invited accepted
6. This is perhaps an element of Christmas we've missed before.
 - a. Christmas is about family!
 - i. Biological AND Spiritual (those in the Body of Christ are now our family)
 - b. And Christmas is INDEED ABOUT receiving Jesus
 - i. The baby in a manger who would become the bread of life
 - ii. Broken for us on the cross
 - iii. God himself come to satisfy the deepest hunger of our souls, for reconnection with our creator, for righteousness, and eternal life
 - iv. THAT'S what Christmas is about
7. So this Christmas, I ask you to consider IS JESUS WARMLY WELCOME IN YOUR HOME?
 - a. I'm not talking about a prayer you may have prayed
 - b. I'm talk about is Jesus a member of your family?
 - c. Do you talk about him together? Pray together?
 - d. Is he and his word embraced, wanted, sought after, fussed over as a family over a newborn baby?
 - e. How might you practice this out THIS WEEK with your family or friends?

b. Which brings us to:

Thoughtfully engage with Christmas celebrations and traditions

- i. Does this teaching mean we need to throw away all our nativity sets that show Jesus in a stable?
- ii. Do we need to become the Christmas story police for our friends and extended family?
- iii. Do we need to toss out every reference to Santa Claus?
- iv. Not so fast. Instead of simplistic answers and new rules, lets instead Lets consider the heartset and work outward...
 1. The core of Christmas is to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus – the Great Gift from Heaven, God in flesh come to rescue us.
 2. HOW we do that is varied and leaves a good bit of room for diversity and experimentation

- v. As we've taught here before, when it comes to sorting through traditions and practices that come to us from our culture, we have 3 options:
 1. Reject, Receive, Redeem
 2. Some things we must outright reject
 3. Some things we can receive as they are
 4. While many things can be redeemed – infused with new meaning in light of the Truth
 5. Here are some suggestions and examples:
 - a. Reject the self-focus, the increased fuss over getting exactly what I want....
 - b. Reject materialism, looking to the accumulation of more stuff to make me happy
 - c. Reject the secular narrative for the meaning, big story of Christmas
 - i. The singular focus on Santa,
 - d. Receive the value of gathering with family this Christmas
 - i. Most will find ourselves engaging with extended family this week
 - ii. Embrace it! And as you sit there on the couch in your inlaws house, choose to remember that gathering with family is actually what the 1st Christmas was about.
 - e. Receive the opportunity to take time off work, and spend special quality time with your loved ones, your kids
 - f. Receive the heritage of great Christmas songs that point us to Christ
 - g. Redeem everything you can!
 - i. The use of evergreen bows has a mixed past with pagan connections.
 - ii. But early on Christians decided to redeem this and infuse it with new meaning, and we can too
 - iii. Remember that Scripture itself associates evergreen trees with God's favor towards his people
 1. Num 24:6, Psalm 104:16, Isaiah 41:19, Ps 148:9, Is 55:13
 - iv. And that evergreen trees were mentioned specifically by God as part of his revitalization plan for Israel and his temple
 1. 1 Kings 6:15, Is 60:13, Is 41:19
 - v. When you look at the Christmas tree, remember that like the evergreen leaves, Christmas is about God's great work to enable us to live forever
 - h. Redeem gift giving not primarily as a vehicle for materialism or greed, but an overflow of gratitude for the great Gift of Jesus for us, and the essential nature of God being a lavish gift giver
 - i. Redeem the multitude of lights and candles, each as reminders that the Light of the World came into our darkness to save us, and light up our lives.
 - i. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it!

6. Even Santa Claus might be something you'd want to redeem (though some may choose not to). You might choose to:
 - a. Teach your kids about the true story of Saint Nick and why he's connected with celebrating Christmas
 - b. It's ok to enjoy fictional stories about red nosed reindeers.
 - c. As long as you remember and lift high the truth of Jesus and the real reason for the season
 - d. I think there's some freedom here on how we land, as long as it's processed through thoughtful consideration in light of the truth:
 - i. Our family decided not to teach our kids that santa was real
 - ii. But neither did we deride the story or pretend it was evil
 - iii. We enjoy the songs, and the old Rankin/Bass Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer stop motion movie
 - e. But we are clear to our kids about the true meaning of Christmas
 - i. And why we celebrate JESUS
 - ii. We even help them see how Santa was originally trying to point us to JESUS!
 1. And see how Father Christmas is portrayed as a noble servant of Aslan in the Lion Witch & Wardrobe
 - iii. But how sometimes people miss all that and this it's just about getting all the toys we want
7. Remember the great value here is what and how we choose to celebrate, and what we teach and value with our kids and friends.
 - a. Our main goal isn't to criticize or police others
 - b. 1 Pet 3:15 ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect
- vi. This Christmas, Consider taking a step to polish off the Jewel of Xmas with your family
 1. Even if you haven't done anything yet, take a step with one of a few of these ideas:
 - a. Advent readings with your kids
 - b. Intentional questions and conversations over dinner, Xmas morning
 - c. Stop and read this Xmas story Luke 2:1-7 with your family and pray together before opening presents.
 - d. Intentionally reconnect or infuse for the 1st time TRUE MEANING into the traditions and practices of Christmas holiday
 - i. Tell your kids WHY we give gifts
 - ii. Why we put up a Christmas tree (even if you're only now infusing it with meaning!
 - iii. Initiate conversations that help us and others connect what we do with what the Bible says is true
- vii. Take a step. Clean off your Christmas glasses...
- viii. Dust off the Jewel of Christmas
 1. And let the light of the World, Jesus Christ, the Bright and Morning star, shine anew
- ix. **Merry Christmas Yall!**

Evidence:

- 1) ETDAV: p 86-87 – Problems with census and Quirinius
- 2) Bailey – Kataluma, GUEST ROOM, Answers in Genesis articles say sam, Intro: diamond ring occasionally needs cleaning to restore clarity, shine!