

# Luke 2

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon explores the profound significance of Jesus' humble birth and God's active role in fulfilling His promises amidst human indifference.*

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1

**Topics:** "God's Sovereignty", "Humility in Christ"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the contrast between God's divine plan and human actions, illustrating how the decree of Caesar Augustus, though seemingly significant, was merely a tool for fulfilling God's prophecy of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. He highlights the humble circumstances of Christ's birth, noting that while the world was oblivious, God was orchestrating His purposes through the lowly manger. Darby points out that true wisdom comes from God's revelation, not human reasoning, and that those who are humble and obedient, like the shepherds, are the ones who receive God's blessings. He concludes by reflecting on Simeon's joy in recognizing Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises, emphasizing that Christ's presence reveals the hearts of many and brings both joy and sorrow. Ultimately, Darby calls for believers to find their identity and satisfaction in Christ, who embodies God's love and purpose.

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## Transcript

When God is pleased to occupy Himself with the world, and to take a part in what passes therein, it is marvellous to see how He acts and the instruction He gives. There is no agreement, but a total opposition between His ways and those of men. The emperor and his decree are but insignificant instruments. Caesar Augustus acts in view of his subjects; yet he is, without knowing it, the means of accomplishing the prophecy that Jesus should be born in Bethlehem. The entire course of the world is outside the current of God's thoughts. The capital fact for Him and for His kingdom here is the babe's birth at Bethlehem; but the emperor has no thought about it. The decree puts the world in motion, and God makes good His thoughts here below. How wondrous! All the world is in movement to bring about this event, needed to fulfil prophecy, that the poor carpenter, with Mary, his espoused wife, should be in the city of David, and David's heir should be born there and then. And this is the more striking, for the census itself was first made some years afterwards, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria: God is accomplishing His purpose of love. But man was blind to it. Who cared to notice the poor Jew, though he might be of the house and lineage of David? The things that are perfectly indifferent to man fill the heart and eye of God.

41 Still we are in Jewish atmosphere. Promises are being accomplished; the babe must be born in Bethlehem. "The city of David" is nothing to the Christian as such, save as shewing prophecy fulfilled: to us the Son comes from heaven. On earth the babe is the object of God's counsels; angels and all heaven are occupied with His birth; but there is no place in the world for Him! Go where the great world registers every individual, go to the little world of an inn, where each is measured by the servant's knowing eye, and place is accordingly awarded from the garret to the first floor; but there is no room for Jesus! And the manger led, in due time, to the lowest place - to the cross.

What a lesson for us as to this world! What a difference, too, between giving up the world and the world giving us up! We may do the one with comparative ease; but when we feel the world despises us as Christ was despised, we shall discover, unless He fills and satisfies the heart, that we had a value for its esteem that we were not aware of. When obedience is as important to us in our measure, as obeying was to Christ, we shall go right on whatever be before us, without regarding the world: not that we shall be insensible, but when Christ is the object we shall only be occupied with Him.

All intelligence of the things of God comes from His revelation, and not from the reasonings of men. Hence, the simple go farther in spiritual understanding than the wise and prudent of the earth. God acts here so as to set aside all appearance of human wisdom. Happy he who has so seized the intention of God as to be identified with it, and to want none but God! This was the case with the shepherds. They little entered into the great intent of the registration; but it was to them, and not to the prudent, that God revealed Himself. Our true wisdom is through what God reveals. But we never get God's fullest blessings till we are where the flesh is brought down and destroyed - I speak as regards walk. We cannot get into the simple joy and power of God, till we accept the place of lowness and humiliation - till the heart is emptied of what is contrary to the lowness of Christ. These shepherds were in the quiet fulfilment of their humble duty; and that is the place of blessing. Whoever is keeping on terms with the world is not walking with God; for God is not walking with you there. From the manger to the cross all in Christ was simple obedience. How unlike a Theudas, who boasted himself to be somebody! Christ did all in God's way; and not only so, but we must come so too.

42 The glory of the Lord shines round about the shepherds, the angel speaks to them, the sign is given; and what a sign! "Ye shall find the babe wrapped up in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God" - and for what? "The mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh." The hope of Israel is revealed to them - glad tidings of great joy to all the people. For Jesus is the pivot of all God's counsels in grace. Adam himself was but a figure of Him who was to come. Christ was ever in the mind of God. Such displays of glory are not shewn to mortal eyes every day; but God sets them before us in His word, and we must every day follow the sign given - follow Jesus the babe in the manger. If He filled the eye, the ear, the heart, how we should see the effects in person, spirit, conversation, dress, house, money, etc.

Such, then, is the sign of God's accomplishment of promise and of His presence in the world - "a babe in a manger" - the least and lowest thing. But God is found there, though these things are beyond man, who cannot walk with God, nor understand His moral glory. But God's sign is within the reach of faith. It is the token of perfect weakness; a little infant who can only weep! Such, born into this world is Christ the Lord. Such is the place God chose - the low degree. God's intervention is recognised by a sign like this. Man would not have sought that. The heavenly host praise God and say, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward [in] men." Nothing higher nor more astonishing (save the cross) for those who have the mind of heaven. The choir above see God in it - God manifested in flesh, and praise God in

the highest. They rejoice that His delights are with the sons of men. Of old God had displayed Himself to Moses in a flame of fire, without consuming the bush, and here, still more marvellously, in the feeblest thing on earth; infinite thought morally, though despicable in the eye of the world! How hard it is to receive that the work of God and of His Christ is always in weakness! the rulers of the people saw in Peter and John unlearned and ignorant men. Paul's weakness at Corinth was the trial of his friends, the taunt of his enemies, the boast of himself. The Lord's strength is made perfect in weakness. The thorn in the flesh made Paul despised, and he conceived it would be better if that were gone. He had need of the lesson, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It is God's rule of action, if we may so say, to choose the weak things. Everything must rest on God's power, otherwise God's work cannot be done according to His mind. One can hardly believe that one must be feeble to do the work of God: but Christ was crucified in weakness, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For the work of God we must be weak, that the strength may be of God; and that work will last when all the earth shall be moved away.

43 Verse 21-38. But besides the additional testimony rendered by the offering of His mother to the circumstances in this world, in which the Lord of glory was born, we may see that, while God all through the Gospel is settling man in his new place with Himself, He did not forget His ancient people. He shews us here that He met every thought in every heart that was touched by grace in Israel. His heart was especially toward those who sorrowed over the sins and desolation of His people; and who, withal, waited for redemption, crying from the darkness, "How long, O Lord?" God will accomplish in power that wherein man has failed in responsibility. Should we therefore be content if God's people do not glorify Him? No; faith is not hard; it will sorrow, but it will wait for God, and God's time too; for faithful is He who hath promised, who also will do it. He will bring about His own purposes.

Verse 25. Thus was Simeon "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Thus Anna departed not from the temple, but served with fastings and prayers night and day; thus all that had looked for redemption in Jerusalem. There were those who watched, and Anna knew and spake to them. The rest doubtless were occupied with Roman oppression; but these few waited for Him, bowing before His hand in judgment of evil, but looking for His deliverance.

I believe there was something more in Simeon's soul than the joy of holding in his arms the babe, the expected Messiah; Simeon felt he had God, and was satisfied. So he says, without even looking on to the glory, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word." In Romans 5:11 the apostle, after speaking of rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, says, "and not only so." What could be more than that hope? Yes, there is more: "we also have joy in God." The eyes of Simeon have seen God's salvation, and he begs of the sovereign Lord that he may go.

44 We often see something like this in dying saints, who deeply joy in the Lord's love to His own, and in the nearness of His coming for them. Why, one might say, what is His near coming to those who are dying and departing to Him? Just this - the nearer we are to God, the more precious is all the truth of God, and everything which is near to His heart. So in verses 30-32 Simeon rejoices as he surveys the extent of the divine deliverance. It was for the revelation of the Gentiles, who had been till now hidden in the dark of idolatry and ungodliness, as well as for the glory of Israel. But his soul is satisfied possessing Christ, and anticipating the effect of His presence in the whole world: he has all in Him, and desires to depart. If a man walks with God and has finished his course, he knows that his work is done and is conscious of the Lord's time being come. He has a companionship and communion with the Lord he has walked with. If simply brought to a bed of sickness, he is not then ready to go; not that he fears, but God is teaching him something else. But when God's time is come, all is joy and readiness. He feels like Simeon, Lord, now

lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.

But, further, when Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary, the Spirit gives him to disclose the more immediate results of the babe's presence in Israel. He should be the touchstone of many hearts, an occasion for the fall as well as the rise of many; He should be a sign spoken against, a rejected Messiah; and Mary's heart should be pierced through, whatever the present joy or the future glory.

Israel was low indeed, but did not know it; Israel must be made to know it, and Christians too; for Christ had to descend to the grave and rise again. The thoughts of the heart must be revealed, whatever the outward garb. But then He is the one who brings out God's thoughts too. If He is the Christ, the glory of God's people, He is also the one who will abase the flesh, and meet and humble man in his pride; He is the one who will make you know whether His rejection is more precious than all beside.

Verse 39. When all was done according to the law, they returned to Galilee to Nazareth. Jesus would not be the Christ we need, if He had taken any glory from Jerusalem. His place is among the poor of the flock - His place all through in Israel.

45 Verse 40. "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him." Luke gives us more of the reality of His childhood than the other Gospels. He was not made man full-formed like Adam.

If one only reads the account without comment, how the soul feels it unspeakably precious! When we see who it was, we see human nature in Him filled with God, so to speak. It is not official distinction, but the heart feels God brought nigh. The blessedness of the child's intrinsic loveliness fills the heart. Deeply instructive too is the incident recorded in connection with the passover when He was twelve years old. His true character comes out, though He was not yet to act upon it. He came to be a Nazarene - to be about His Father's business. This is here stated distinctly before He enters upon His public ministry, that it might be seen to be connected with His person, and not to depend merely upon His office. He was the Pastor of the flock in spirit and character. It belonged to Him. He was the Son of the Father, though abiding God's time for shewing it.

Verse 51. Nevertheless "He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them." What a majesty in His whole life! His being God secured His perfection as a child and man here below. He had ever the blessed consciousness of His relationship to His Father - an obedient child, but conscious also of a glory unconnected in itself with subjection to human parentage. He belonged to Mary and even Joseph; in another sense He was not theirs. His divine sonship was as well known to Him, as His obedience to His parents was in due season absolutely right.

Verse 52. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." His human intelligence being developed, He, though ever perfect, became so in a full way - the perfect man. The lovely plant grew up and unfolded before God and man.

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