

# Explore the Bible: December 24

*The First Christmas • Luke 2:1-15*

*By Laura Lee Leathers*



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**The Location (Luke 2:1-5)** – It was time for the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming of Jesus. Isaiah 7:14 tells us that a virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son. His name will be Immanuel, meaning God with us.

The religious Jewish leaders anticipated the birth of a Davidic king in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1-16, Mic. 5:2). From Bethlehem Ephrathah, “One will come from you to be ruler over Israel for Me.”

Caesar Augustus (rules 31 BC-AD14) issued an edict requiring every person to return to their family’s city of origin. The first registration took place under the ruling governor of Syria, Quirinius (AD 6-7). Joseph’s lineage required him to return to Bethlehem.

In the first chapter of Luke, Joseph is engaged to Mary. “To be engaged or betrothed” means that the couple’s fathers had negotiated a marriage contract, dowry paid, and the couple had exchanged gifts.

A couple were legally married (Gen. 19:14; Deut. 22:23-24). However, it could be up to a year before the wedding celebration and consummation (read Luke 1:26-38; Matt. 1:18-25). During their engagement period, Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:26-35). Joseph took her as his wife, but there wasn't a consummation.

The couple traveled almost ninety miles up to Bethlehem. Whether Mary traveled by donkey, cart, or walking, the trip would've been difficult.

**The Birth (Luke 2:6-7)** – After safely arriving in Bethlehem, Luke tells us that Mary gave birth, wrapped (swaddled) Jesus in cloth, and laid Him in a manger.

Jesus was her “first-born son.” Later in Scripture, we learn Jesus had brothers (James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas) and two unnamed sisters, indicating a regular marriage after Jesus's birth.

“No vacancy” signs hung throughout the crowded town; other accommodations were necessary. Mary and Joseph were within “staying range from a cave used by shepherds as a sheepfold to a room in someone's house floored with cobblestones that was dedicated for the housing of animals” (Lifeway).

**The Declaration (Luke 2:8-15)** – The long-awaited Messiah has been born! Did the glory of the Father shine more brilliantly throughout heaven? Did the angels practice singing, “Glory to God in the Highest,” before the heavens opened to the shepherds watching over their flock that night? It makes one wonder.

In the Old Testament, Moses and David were shepherds. It was a worthy occupation. More importantly, Psalm 24 is known as the Chief Shepherd Psalm. Now go to 1 Peter 5:1-7, where we read, “When the chief Shepherd (Jesus) appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (v. 4).

Pastors or elders are to shepherd God's flock. Shepherds are held in high regard according to God's standards. According to Jewish Law, shepherds were unclean and dishonest in the New Testament. The first announcement of Jesus' birth went to these men.

An angel of the Lord stood before them, and "the glory of the Lord shown around them" (v. 9). The shepherd's reaction, like any of us, was that they were terrified. Then came the calm, assuring words of the angel, "Don't be afraid . . . I proclaim to you good news of great joy." The news is for "all the people" (v. 10).

In verse 11, they are told to go to the "city of David," Bethlehem, in this context, not Jerusalem. Here, they would find "Messiah, the Lord." Messiah is the transliteration of the Hebrew term for the "anointed one" who will rule. The Greek form is Christos or Christ.

They would "find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger" (v. 12). Then the sky was filled with the heavenly host. Do you think the men remained standing, or did they fall to their knees as they listened to angelic armies of heaven singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors" (v. 14)?

God's message was delivered, and the shepherds left their flock and went straight to Bethlehem. They had to see, and as they returned to their flock, they told others.

"He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 HSCB). Now, Go and Tell!

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