



## **Born to Be ...?**

By Darrell L. Bock

### **A Sermon Resource From The Nativity Story**

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**N**ativity is about beginnings. Often at Christmas that is as far as we get. The word comes from a Latin term *nativitas* that simply means birth. It is but a beginning. We all know the moment, when a child is born, pictures are taken. Emails are sent. Was it a boy or a girl? Women want to know how much did the child weigh and men ask why that is important. It is a nativity. But to what end? Why is a child born?

When it comes to Jesus and why the world celebrates his birth, a hymn perhaps raises the question best, “What child is this who lays to rest on Mary’s lap is sleeping?” Why did a birth that took place in an animal cave or stall in a backwater town of Judea, in a corner of the Roman empire, in a town of no more than five hundred people make a mark on the world’s history, impacting even the calendar many use today? After all we are describing an event that takes place commonly around the world literally all the time.

#### *Introduction: Born to Be Wild?*

A contrast of the gospel of Luke with an earlier era in America may give part of the answer, for there is far more to Jesus than his birth.

- The sixties:
  - John Lennon claimed the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ, a statement of hubris, but also a reflection of the fact that Jesus was a number one point of comparison even in a revolutionary era like the sixties.
  - The movie *Easy Rider* typified the spirit of the sixties. Background music includes the song *Born to be Wild*, a theme song of liberation, a tribute to a new era of freedom and human choice. The title reflected life’s purpose, its goal, the point of a nativity.
- Being wild and being born to be wild is not much of a life goal.
  - It does not explain why we are here and why God put us here. If someone asked you, Why *nativitas*? Why have birth? Why your birth? What might you say?



### *The Nativity: Born for God*

When we turn to Luke's gospel, it does not take us very long to see why Jesus was different. Even before he was born, there were signs this child would be unique. The babe that Mary bore had come through an angelic declaration of divine creativity.

- Can you see the announcement? "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Listen: you will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."
- When Mary asks how this could be since she has never "known" a man, the angelic reply follows, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be holy; He will be called Son of God."
- To this young teenage girl came an announcement of *nativitas*. This child was born for God and born for man. The Son of God to be born through a teenage girl, male through female by the hand of God, just as God had designed it back with Adam and Eve.
  - Luke 3 says later in concluding Jesus' genealogy, Son of Adam, Son of God. This was a child born of God—born of God and for God to give us all a new start.

### *The Nativity: Born to Bring Light*

Luke has more than an angel tell us about Jesus.

- In Luke one, the father of John the Baptist, upon the naming of his son utters a hymn known today as the *Benedictus*.
  - The hymn's name comes from the opening words of the Latin translation of Luke's Greek that opens the hymn of praise to God: "*Blessed be* the Lord God of Israel, because he has visited and has redeemed his people, for he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David."
  - God has made a visit to the world he created in this child. That visit has a purpose, a goal, a "born to" purpose that explains the child's arrival.
  - Later in the same hymn, Zechariah proclaims that this child will be like the dawn of the morning breaking because of God's tender mercy, "to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace." (Luke 1:79-80).
- This child was born to bring light, born for God to show us new vistas about how to live in light of how we were created.



### *The Nativity: Born to Die*

A little later in Luke, angels appear again to shepherds in the fields. The glory of God shone about the angel as he came to the shepherds in the night to announce the light. Again the announcement tells us all we need to know.

- “Do not be afraid, listen carefully, for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people: Today your savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord.”
- All births have one thing in common: they lead to a death. However, most of us who are born do not come into life with the goal of dying. The birth of Jesus knows better. The birth of Jesus shows better.
- Jesus would be the Savior. He would choose to die for others. Jesus would die for sin, not his but ours. In being born to die, Jesus shows that by giving on behalf of others, rather than seeking to possess power or to take from people, there is reason for life.

### *The Nativity: Born to Serve*

Jesus’ life was different from every other Lord who has walked the earth. Lordship is about power and keeping it for oneself.

- Lordship for Jesus is about serving and saving. There was only his love, his service, and his sacrifice. A king with a peasant’s beginning, a *nativitas* in a manger, a throne for a different kind of king with a different kind of a message.
- Follow my example he says, you were born to serve (Mark 10:35-45).
- Listen again to what the babe who became king says to some of his disciples, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are in high positions use their authority over them. But it is not this way among you. Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man (the babe’s favorite name for himself) did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.”



*The Nativity: Born for Peace for Those Who Embrace the Birth*

In a final word to those shepherds the angel had one final note of joy. He told those sheep herders they would find this king laying in a feed trough for animals, a manger. Here was a king born among the people, the people he had come to serve. Here was the Son of God, not hidden away in elite isolation nor entering the world with the pomp of many heirs to a throne.

- Despite the simplicity of his regal entry, somehow the entire creation knew why he had come. For with the end of the angelic announcement the entirety of the heavenly host rang out, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased.” (Luke 2:14). In the Bible, when creation speaks, humanity is to listen.
- This angelic benediction is for those who benefit from his coming. Not those who celebrate a holiday, as fun as it is. Not those who just know the story, and can tell it. Not even those who contemplate the story and are inspired by it. This is a story about God meeting human need with blessing coming to those who embrace that need and turn to God so He can meet it.
- As the hymn *What Child Is This* exclaims in answer to the question, “This, this is Christ the king, whom shepherds laud and angels sing.” No, this is a story about a king sent from God — One who was born for God, born to bring light, born to die, born to serve, and born to bring peace to those who embrace the Birth, the Nativity.
- Luke tells us the creation and those who appreciate his coming know why this *nativitas* is different than all others. That creation even sings out in praise of his coming — in praise of his calling and work. The heavenly host knows why he came. Do we? Yes, birth is about beginnings, but what of the life that follows it? Will our lives identify with His coming and embrace why He came? That is the question raised by *the Nativity*.

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