

Breaking the Silence

Luke 1:1-25

Rev. Brian Bill

December 8-9, 2018

[Transition from “Crazy, Busy, Peaceful, Holy Night”]

How many of you feel like the Christmas season is crazy busy? It sure seems more hectic than holy, doesn't it?

My guess is the nativity has been knocked over in some of your lives [sit on couch and pick up pieces].

I wonder how many of us are stressed simply because we're focusing more on our feelings than on the facts of Christmas. When I posted what the sermon is about this week, an Edgewood member made this statement: *“If there has ever been a time that truth is needed, it is now. We moved from the Bible is truth, to science [is truth], to there is no truth, to feelings are truth.”*

Postmodernism is the prevailing philosophy of our day, which is the belief there is no such thing as absolute truth. Rather, *truth* is personal and subjective – I have *my* truth and you have *your* truth. This philosophy is not only “out there” but also in the evangelical church. Barna claims that 53% of born again believers do not believe in absolute truth.

As evidence of this, I listened to a one-minute video testimony of a Christian explaining her walk with God this week and counted the phrase, *“I feel”* four times. That comes out to once every 15 seconds where she appealed to her feelings. Sadly, she didn't mention the Bible once.

Here's what we're going to learn today: *Build your faith on facts, not feelings.*

Grab your Bibles and turn to Luke 1:1-4. Let me remind you while God used human authors to write Scripture, this is not a human book. 2 Peter 1:21 says, ***“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*** All Scripture is inspired, inerrant and authoritative.

Please stand as we read God’s Word together: ***“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 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, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”***

Here are few things about the human author and his approach:

- Luke was a respected doctor. Colossians 4:14 refers to him as ***“the beloved physician.”***
- He was personally acquainted with firsthand eyewitnesses.
- Luke was the human author of the Gospel of Luke as well as the Book of Acts. That adds up to 52 chapters, making him responsible for about one-third of the New Testament.
- This prologue is written in the most polished Greek of the New Testament, which would make it appealing to the highly educated Gentile reader.
- Luke devotes more space to the birth and infancy of Jesus than any other gospel.
- He goes out of his way to show the gospel is for every class, nation, race, generation and gender.
- Luke uses the word “sinners” 16 times, more than the other gospel writers combined
- He refers to Jesus as “Savior” twice.

How do we know that any of this is even true? Can we have any confidence that Christmas really happened? Can we know with certainty that the Savior has come? Is it really possible to have peace and live a holy life in the midst of busyness and craziness?

Luke’s prologue gives us *four facts* about our faith.

1. Christianity is historical. We see this in verse 1: ***“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us.”*** Luke begins with the word, ***“inasmuch,”*** which conveys accuracy and can be translated, *“Since now.”* He acknowledges a lot of people ***“have undertaken”*** the task of putting together material about the Messiah. The word

carries the sense of a difficult undertaking and occurs frequently in medical language. Hippocrates begins one of his medical treatises with very similar language: *“As many as have taken in hand to speak or write concerning the healing art.”*

I love that Luke refers to this as a **“narrative”** because it speaks of the historical facts about our faith. Notice there are not multiple narratives but *one* narrative. In that sense, there are really not four gospels, but one gospel as told by four different human authors. Would you also notice that this is not a story or a legend or an allegory? Incidentally, I try not to use the word “story” when referring to the Bible because I don’t want to inadvertently imply that it’s make-believe.

It’s interesting that Luke uses the phrase, **“accomplished among us,”** which means it was *“performed in the past; and was fulfilled fully”* in plain view of many people. John 1:14 says, **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

Christianity is not just a religious philosophy but rather as one pastor says, *“It’s primarily about the God who created the universe miraculously invading human history in the person of Jesus Christ who uniquely revealed God to us.”*

Speaking of the historicity of Christianity, don’t you love hearing about archaeological discoveries? Last week experts in Israel announced that a ring discovered 50 years ago at the Herodian fortress bears the inscription, *“Pilatus,”* meaning it’s quite possible this belonged to the infamous Pontius Pilate. This is just further confirmation of what we already know from the “Pilate Stone,” hundreds of coins, Josephus, and the Bible itself – there really was a Roman governor in Judea at the time of Jesus named Pilate. In February, archaeologists announced the discovery of a clay seal with the signature of Isaiah. Don’t you love it when archaeology catches up with what the Bible already says is true!

Because Christianity is historical, we can *build our faith on facts, not feelings.*

2. Christianity is verifiable. Our faith is not only rooted in reliable history, it is verifiable according to verse 2: **“Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us.”**

The word “**beginning**” refers to the events surrounding the births of John and Jesus in the first two chapters of Luke’s record. Drop down to verse 5 to see how we can verify the veracity of his writing about the birth of John: ***“In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.”***

- **When.** This took place in the days of Herod.
- **Who.** We’re introduced to a man named Zechariah. Luke doesn’t say, “*Once upon a time, some guy...*” Zechariah was married to Elizabeth, a daughter of Aaron.
- **What.** We also learn what he did – he was a priest.
- **Where.** In the division of Abijah.

The details related to the birth of Jesus are also verifiable in verses 26-27: ***“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.”***

- **When.** This happened when Elizabeth was six months pregnant.
- **Who.** We’re introduced to Gabriel, Joseph and Mary by name.
- **What.** Mary is referred to as a virgin twice in two verses and Joseph is from the house of David.
- **Where.** These events took place in Nazareth, an actual city in Galilee.

In his research, Luke consulted “***eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.***” Let’s hover over these two terms.

- **Eyewitnesses.** This refers to someone who has seen something with his or her own eyes. Luke interviewed those who could give first-hand expert eyewitness testimony. These people were eager to share what they had seen and experienced as illustrated in Acts 4:20: ***“For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”*** 2 Peter 1:16 says, ***“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”*** 1 John 1:1: ***“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.”***

- **Ministers.** If an eyewitness *sees*, a minister *serves*. This is the word for servant, or literally “*a subordinate committed to accomplish the commands of a superior.*” A minister is one who knows he or she is under the authority of an owner. I enjoyed hearing many of the eulogies given in honor of former President George H.W. Bush this past week. I especially liked what his friend former Senator Alan Simpson said about him: “*Those that travel the high road of humility in Washington are not bothered by heavy traffic.*”

Edgewood is full of servants traveling the high road of humility. I had the joy of serving alongside a large number of men at the Ladies’ Christmas Parties on Monday and Tuesday night. BTW, 575 women attended, which is the most ever! Props to Sheila and her team. I think the women enjoyed having men in white shirts and black aprons serving them. This no doubt surprised some. When Shannon Weaver saw me picking up a plate she was so stunned she remarked, “*You’re working? Now that’s funny!*” She lol’d for several minutes. I’m not sure why she found that so funny...

Speaking of servants, I was overcome and undone this past weekend to see so many servants come up front to put their Grow Time Commitment card in baskets. After one of the services, one man told me he wants to change his Commitment Card because he doesn’t think the amount he put on the card is enough. Another person indicated the same. One person who has been giving this past year has decided to give more. While I was serving at one of the Christmas Parties this week, one of the guys pulled me aside and told me something that happened this past Sunday. He wrote it out and gave me permission to share.

“At a little after nine, I was working on my commitment card in the pew. My wife and I finished filling it out. I was also thinking about the river house we just bought for an investment. I have had it for rent for about two weeks. I had no serious inquiries yet. I did not think I would get a renter until after winter. I prayed that if God would bring a renter in the next week, I would give half the January and half the February rent to the Edgewood build-out. We left church at 11 o’clock [and] was down doing a little work at the river house at 2 o’clock. A guy I know drives in the driveway with his son, who is interested in renting the place with his two friends. That night they told me they want to rent it and we signed the lease on Monday. They will be moving in January 1. On Tuesday, I was told that

I would be getting some more money from a company that owed me money, from 3 years ago. The Lord is very generous.”

We can know Christianity is true because it is historical and it is verifiable. Eyewitnesses have seen and ministers continue to serve to this day. How else do you explain such over-the-top generosity?

Are you trusting in your feelings or the facts of our faith? Christianity is historical and verifiable. It is also orderly.

3. Christianity is orderly. The Bible tells us everything is moving according to God’s plan. Let’s drill into verse 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.”*** As a careful physician, trained in noting every detail, he ***“followed all things closely.”*** This means he *“attended carefully and accurately.”*

Luke was a reputable historian who did deep research, conducting intensive interviews to put his narrative together. He interviewed eyewitnesses and pulled together other source material. As a doctor, he was observant, thoughtful and persuasive. As a scientist, he was accustomed to handling data and details as he crafted it all together into a compelling narrative we know as the Gospel According to Luke. Incidentally, if you have a skeptical and scientific mind with a logical leaning, this book is for you.

After compiling his research, he wrote an ***“orderly account.”*** The word for ***“orderly”*** means, *“consecutively in connected order.”* This practice was also followed in Acts 11:4: ***“But Peter began and explained it to them in order.”***

Friends, the Bible is fact, not fiction. What’s contained in this book is inspired and inerrant, it’s not legend but the actual life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke’s purpose was to present Jesus in all His fullness, focusing on historical, verifiable and orderly facts so his readers could know that his account was absolutely accurate and remarkably reliable. Oral history can change but what is written and recorded endures.

Both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts refer to ***“Theophilus.”*** Jump over to Acts 1:1-3: ***“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He***

presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”

It's likely that Theophilus was a distinguished official because governmental leaders like Felix and Festus were given the same **“most excellent”** title in Acts 23:26 and Acts 26:25. His name means, “*God-lover*” or “*friend of God.*” As a new believer, perhaps he was worried if Christianity was really true. Maybe he was wondering why Christians were being persecuted. This may have led him to doubt. Or, his life had become so busy and his days so crazy that he was starting to follow his feelings.

We can build our *faith on facts, not feelings* because Christianity is historical, verifiable and orderly. Because of that, we can be certain about what we believe.

4. Christianity is certain. We don't have to focus on our feelings or conjure up some kind of seasonal sentimentality. We can know for sure that it's true according to verse 4: **“That you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”** The word **“certainty”** means, “*to know fully and thoroughly, to become fully acquainted with.*” When John wrote his account of the life of Jesus, he wanted his readers to be certain so they can be saved. Listen to John 20:30-31: **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”**

C.S. Lewis summarized the reliability and relevance of our faith this way:
“Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

Silent No More

Shortly after the Book of Nehemiah ends, God spoke through the prophet Malachi, calling the people out for their sins. And then, for the next 400 years, heaven is silent...until God breaks in by sending an angel to speak to Zechariah.

We are so fortunate that God broke through all the crazy chaos and spoke into the silence that had lasted four hundred years. Take a look at Luke 1:11-13: **“And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah [“Jehovah has remembered”] was troubled when he**

saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.’”

God speaks again through an angel, this time to Mary in verse 28: *“And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’”*

Does God ever seem silent to you? If so, remember these five truths...

1. God’s silence does not mean He is inactive.
2. God’s timeline can be trusted because He is weaving His ways and His will for His glory.
3. God can do anything.
4. God sent His Son to save us.
5. God expects a response from us. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke recorded this statement from the lips of Jesus in 19:10: *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

Luke wrote to one individual named Theophilus so he could know the truth and the certainty of the gospel. *Build your faith on facts, not feelings.*

- Christianity is historical
- Christianity is verifiable
- Christianity is orderly
- Christianity is certain

God is speaking to many individuals right now. Will you choose to trust the facts and not your feelings so that through faith, you can be saved?

Invitation

[Go back to couch and knock over Nativity pieces]. The Bible says we’ve all been baa’d. Isaiah 53:6 puts it plainly, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*

Let’s go back to the survey question that was asked in the drama: *“What’s the best part of Christmas?”* Presents? Cookies? Decorations? Jingle Bells?

The best part of Christmas is Jesus. I like to think of the word Christmas this way: *Christ...mess*. Christ came into our mess. That first night wasn't calm and quiet but it was peaceful because the Prince of Peace was born. Jesus wants to enter our crazy busy lives to give us peace and lead us to holy living.

In the 1600s a man named Angelus Silesius wrote a hymn called "Though Christ a Thousand Times." Listen to the words...

*Though Christ a thousand times
In Bethlehem be born,
If He's not born in thee
Thy soul is still forlorn.*

Right before former President George H.W. Bush died, his life-long friend James Baker was at his side. In his last moments, Bush asked, "*Where are we going, Bake?*" Baker replied, "*We're going to heaven.*" "*That's where I want to go,*" said Bush.

Just then his son, George W. Bush, was put on speakerphone to say goodbye. He told him that he had been a "*wonderful dad*" and that he loved him. In a farewell to his son, George H.W. Bush's last words were "*I love you, too.*"

It was out of love that God the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the World. Love was born that first Christmas.

A week ago Friday a code went out containing four letters: CAVU. That is Navy abbreviation for Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited. It was the code that had been adopted by the inner circle of George Herbert Walker Bush to communicate that he had died. This pointed back to the former president's heroic service as a Naval aviator during World War II. Because he was born again, his closest friends and family were able to celebrate his final flight to heaven where the ceiling and visibility are unlimited.

We've named this series, "Prepare Him Room." Have you repented and received Jesus Christ into your life? Actually, He doesn't want a little room in your life; He wants your whole life.

Closing Video: "**A Baby is Coming**"