

“Journey of the Gospel” Luke 2:1-7 (12/28/25)

Did everyone have a good Christmas? This year, it feels like time has passed so fast. There are now only about five days left in 2025. Usually, the first Sunday of the new year is a good time to talk about direction or goals for the coming year. But since today is the first Sunday after Christmas, I would like to talk together about the direction for the coming year as we reflect on today’s message.

In 2026, I hope that all of us will have a deeper relationship with God. I would like to say this idea of having a deeper relationship with God in a slightly different way. I would like to describe it as building our spiritual strength.

When it comes to building spiritual strength, the most important thing is experiencing God’s grace in our lives. As I have mentioned before in sermons, in the Methodist tradition, we talk about the ways we experience God’s grace. These ways include reading and studying the Bible, praying, attending worship, and fasting. Because of this, I hope that in 2026 our church will truly become a church that focuses more on God’s Word and continues forward in prayer.

For this reason, I decided to begin 2026 with the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. The reason for beginning 2026 with Luke and Acts is simple. When we want to understand Jesus more deeply and understand the gospel more clearly, I believe it is helpful to begin by reading the New Testament. And to understand the many letters written by the apostles, we first need to know the historical timeline of the New Testament stories.

Among the books of the New Testament, Acts is the book that is written with the clearest historical timeline. And the book that can be understood as the first part of Acts is the Gospel of Luke. Although the Gospel of John is placed between Luke and Acts in the order of the Bible, Luke and Acts were written by one author, Luke.

Many scholars agree that it is possible to read Luke as the first book and Acts as the second book.

So in order to help us understand Scripture more deeply as we move forward, I hope that during the first half of this year we can take time together to learn and understand, through Luke and Acts, where the journey of the gospel begins and how it continues—from the time Jesus was born to the final story of the apostle Paul.

When we look closely at Luke and Acts, we can see the geographical movement of the Gospel. As we know, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, began His ministry in Galilee, entered Jerusalem, and was crucified on a hill near Jerusalem called Golgotha. After that, the gospel—the message about Jesus—spread again from Jerusalem throughout the Roman world through the apostles and the disciples of Jesus. This journey of the gospel can be seen clearly through Luke and Acts.

Because understanding Luke and Acts is very helpful when we later read the letters of Paul and other apostles, I want us to begin 2026 with these two books.

As the first step, on this first Sunday after Christmas, I would like us to look together at the story of the birth of Jesus from the perspective of the Gospel of Luke. I also want us to consider how the meaning of this story can be applied to our lives.

The Gospel of Luke was written by Luke. Luke was a doctor, and among the four Gospel writers, he was the only Gentile. The other Gospels were written by Jewish authors, but Luke alone wrote the story from a Gentile perspective.

Because of this, Luke had a clear purpose in writing his Gospel. As we see in the opening verses of chapter one, he writes to a man named Theophilus, who was probably a governor. Luke wrote his Gospel to explain clearly who Jesus was. At the same time, Luke wrote the Gospel and the Book of Acts to show that this gospel is

not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles—for people who were ignored, for the poor, for the sick, and for everyone.

Because Luke wrote from a Gentile perspective, his Gospel includes many cultural details and language from the time of the Roman Empire. These details helped readers of that time understand the story more easily. Rather than focusing on imagined or Jewish ideas about the Messiah, Luke recorded the actions of Jesus within real history to show that Jesus truly lived and that the journey of the gospel is not false, but true.

So we can see that many cultural perspectives of Luke are reflected when we read Jesus's birth story in Luke. In this story in Luke, Jesus was born, and because there was no place for Mary to give birth, He was laid in a manger.

To understand this story properly, we need to look at it from the perspective of Gentiles living in the Roman Empire. At that time, Bethlehem was a very small town. Historical records estimate that its population was between 300 and 1,000 people. That means it was much smaller than the town we live in today.

At the same time, Scholars assume that Rome had about one million population, and even Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, had several hundred to over a thousand people. Compared to the cities and towns of the Roman Empire, Bethlehem was a very small town.

Because Bethlehem was known as the city of David, many of David's descendants traveled there during the census. As a result, many people who came to register were unable to find a place to stay.

I remember being surprised when I once visited Green Bay. The city has a population of about 100,000 people, but on days when the Packers play, about 100,000 people come into the city to watch the game. That means as many people

as the city's population come in. Because of this, accommodation becomes very expensive. In a similar way, Bethlehem was crowded beyond what it could handle.

Of course, when we think about Bethlehem at the time of Jesus, it was very different from today. There was no hotel system or business accommodation for travelers. People stayed in guest rooms in relatives' homes or in shared living spaces. If someone arrived late or could not find such a place, it was possible that they had nowhere to stay.

What we need to pay attention to is the situation of Joseph and Mary. Since Mary gave birth after arriving in Bethlehem, it is very likely that she was already in the final stage of pregnancy during the journey from Nazareth.

Historical sources tell us that the distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 75 miles. At that time, people usually walked for travel. If a person walked about 12 miles a day, the journey would have taken about five to six days.

Walking 12 miles a day for 5 days is difficult even for a healthy adult. For a woman who was in the final stage of pregnancy, traveling at that pace would have been extremely hard. Because of this, many people think that Joseph and Mary arrived later than others, and that finding a place for Jesus to be born was almost impossible.

What we should notice in this situation is that within the vast Roman Empire, in the very small town of Bethlehem, Jesus was born not in a normal house or a warm room, but in a place where animals stayed. Luke tells us that Mary herself wrapped Jesus in cloths. This shows that there might not have been anyone there to help with the birth, and that the mother who had just given birth placed her baby in a manger under very difficult conditions.

Now imagine how people in the Roman Empire would think when they heard

or read this story. Early Christians said that a Savior and a Messiah had come. But the way Jesus was born was very different from the image of emperors and kings that people were used to. A very small town called Bethlehem. A baby was laid in a manger. This kind of beginning was not the way the emperors or kings came.

What Luke wanted to show was that Jesus came into the world from the humblest and most difficult place. He wanted Gentile readers to understand this clearly.

As I meet people, watch movies, read books, or watch many videos online, I notice that people really like stories of success. Not just any success story, but stories of people who grew up in very hard situations, lived through difficult childhoods, and overcame many struggles to become successful by the standards of the world.

People like these stories because they think, “If that person went through all of that and still succeeded, then maybe I also have a chance.” These stories give people hope and give them the strength to try again, even when life is challenging.

On the other hand, stories about people who succeed because they inherited wealth or lived without difficulty do not connect with people in the same way.

Because of this, Luke recorded this story to show that anyone can receive Jesus and that the way of salvation is open to everyone. The story of Jesus’ birth showed people that the way of salvation was not something only for a special group, but something open to everyone.

What I want to share with us today is this. Jesus came into this world in a humble place and in a difficult situation, more than anyone else. Even though He is greater than all, the Son of God, and God Himself, He came into this world because He loves us. The beginning of the journey of the gospel started in a humble place.

So, how should we apply this story that begins in such a humble place? What

we can learn from this story is simple. The gospel is open to everyone.

Before I attended church, one thing that I did not like was that I had some feeling that many Christians think the Gospel, the Salvation, God is their privileges. When believers spoke disrespectfully about people of other religions or treated them as unimportant, it did not feel right to me.

If we start to think that worship, prayer, praise, and reading the Bible are only our privileges, then our faith cannot explain and show the reason Jesus came into this world.

We must always carry humility—the humility of Jesus who was born in a manger. The name of Jesus Christ that we praise and proclaim is not only for us. It is the Gospel that is open to everyone.

As we start this season after Christmas, I hope that the humility of Jesus Christ becomes our hearts. Not only did He die on the cross to open the way for everyone, but from the very moment He came into this world, He chose the humble place so that the way would be open to all.

With only five or six days left in this year, I hope that with this heart, whenever we have the chance, we can share the story of Jesus' birth—the story of the Messiah—with anyone we meet. And I hope that this coming week will be a week in which this spirit of humility fills our hearts. May the humility and love of Jesus Christ fill our hearts. Amen.