

YWJ Teen Devo: An Orderly Christmas Story

By Barry Shafer

The Backdrop

It's usually near Christmas when we're likely to see top news magazines such as *Time* or *Newsweek* with cover stories about Jesus or the Christian faith. Eyeing one of these issues on a newsstand can give a believer an encouraging moment—glad to see Jesus getting some recognition in mainstream culture. Invariably, though, as readers leaf through such articles, they usually find that they're yet other pieces acknowledging that someone named “Jesus” walked the earth, then take some slant that strips Jesus of His status as God's Son.

We shouldn't be surprised. Questioning belief in Jesus as God's Son has been happening since the day Jesus was born.

The Word

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).

The What

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the four books of the Bible that record Jesus' life, each having a specific rendition of Jesus' birth (except for Mark; he jumped right into Jesus' adult life). Luke's version of Jesus' birth is probably the most used and most famous with angels, shepherds and heavenly host singing, “Glory to God in the highest.” A quick glance at the first few verses of Luke clues us into the fact that, as today, there were differing viewpoints about Jesus circulating when Luke penned his words.

As you read Luke 1:1-4, to help you hone in on the passage look for information that helps you answer these questions:

What can you tell about the information surrounding Jesus at that time?

Why did Luke decide it was important to write an account?

What tells you Luke has done his homework?

What do these verses tell you about Theophilus?

The So What

Your first question might be: Who is Theophilus? Good question. Other than here and the greeting in the Book of Acts (also written by Luke), Theophilus isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Going by his name and title, he's probably a Roman of high position. He may have been a partner to help Luke copy and disseminate his book—as if this was Luke's blog account.

Take a minute to bring Luke 1:1-4 into your own life. Luke was pretty forceful as to why he wrote and what he wrote about, so we might be able to benefit by looking at the Gospel of Luke as if it was written to us (which it was). Three phrases from this passage are broken out below for you to chew on.

Many have undertaken to draw up an account...

How is this similar to today? What differing accounts do people believe about Jesus? What sources do we have (good and bad; true and false) for information about Jesus? Jot down any that come to mind.

I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus...

Reread that sentence and sub your name for Theophilus. Yes, Scripture can be taken that personally. Picture God cupping your face with His hands and saying: "I wanted to be sure you have this information." Write a sentence or two expressing gratitude to God for sharing His Word with us.

...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke was confident that after Theophilus and others read his orderly account, their belief in Jesus would deepen. Of course this implies they read the orderly account. So what about you? Do your sources of information about Jesus deepen your walk with Jesus?

From where do you get your info about Jesus—who or what are your sources? Write them below (we've supplied a few suggestions). After you've listed three to five of them, rank each source with regard to which gives you with the purest information about Jesus, 5 being pure and 1 being very diluted.

Possible Sources of Info About Jesus:

From Scripture
From a parent/youth pastor/pastor
From friends
From pop culture (movies, TV shows)
From the Internet

The Bottom Line Question: The purest form of information about Jesus is Scripture. That's the purpose of the Gospel of Luke and all the other gospels, as well as the entire Bible. The further our sources are from Scripture, the less reliable the information. So here's the question: Does your information about Jesus take you to a point of "certainty of the things you've been taught?" Would you like to be more solid in your belief about Jesus and less tentative when conversation turns to the subject of Jesus?

The Bottom Line Task: Make an adjustment this week that improves the certainty of Jesus in your life.

Some Ideas for the Next Seven Days:

- Find a red-letter edition of the Bible and simply read the Jesus' words.
- Read the first couple chapters of each gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and compare how they differ in describing the start of Jesus' life on earth.
- Read one of the gospels in one setting (Mark is the shortest). Take your Bible to a park and read as if you're seeing the information for the first time.