

2 Corinthians 5:20 -

²⁰ Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Attributes/qualifications include:

- Loyal;
- Authentic;
- Product knowledge;
- Approachable;
- Reliable;
- Resilient and Adaptable;
- Proactive; and,
- Good communicator.

Loyalty is the *sine que non* (absolutely necessary, essential).

Birth Day

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

This verse presents quite a contrast. We generally think of our day of birth as a really good thing, so much so that we “celebrate” it annually, although that celebration tends to dwindle as we get older. But this verse tells us that the day we die is better than the day of our birth. Our birthday starts us on a life in this world, which is filled with both good and bad. Seeing this life is so full of vanity and misery, it is a more desirable thing for a person to go out of it than to come into it. This is not to say birth is a bad thing; it’s all relative.

The day that we die starts us off on nothing but blessed goodness. Death frees us from toil, oppression, persecution and restlessness. Death puts us nearer to God. At death, the spirit goes up and returns to God, who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 3:21 and 12:7).

Note the context: This day of death scenario only applies to those with a “good name.”

This birth/death dichotomy applies to the life of Jesus Christ. But we can learn much by considering His birth. That story is told in Luke chapter 2 (and other gospels), but before that it would be good to consider a brief overview of Luke chapter 1 that serves as a lead in to the birth story:

- Prologue to Theophilus (verses 1-4): Luke addresses his Gospel to “most excellent Theophilus”, presenting a detailed, certain and reliable account based on credible “eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word.” (Luke 1:2, 3).
- Announcement to Zacharias (verses 5-25): The angel Gabriel appears to the priest Zacharias and tells him that he and his wife Elizabeth, “both righteous before God”, will have a son named John. Elizabeth had been barren; no children. Gabriel explains the mighty things John will do. Zacharias is slow to believe and is struck dumb until the promised John is born.
- Announcement to Mary (verses 26-38): Later Gabriel visits Mary, announcing she will miraculously conceive Jesus. **He shall be great, and shall be called the**

Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:32, 33).

- **Mary Visits Elizabeth (verses 39–56):** Mary visits Elizabeth, who is now pregnant with John and when Elizabeth hears Mary's voice, **the babe leaped in her (Elizabeth's) womb.** (Luke 1:41; also, 44). [So much for a collection of cells]. Mary proceeds to give a declaration of the wonderful things her Saviour, whom she is carrying, will accomplish.
- **Birth and Naming of John (verses 57–66):** Elizabeth gives birth to John, and Zacharias regains his speech, but not until after he insists, by utilizing a writing table, that the baby be named John (as directed by Gabriel).
- **Zacharias's Prophecy (verses 67–80):** Zacharias prophesies in considerable detail about the Messiah, the Messiah's critical functions and John's role as his forerunner. The chapter concludes with John growing up in the wilderness.

Now we are ready to consider Luke chapter 2:

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

- ⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
- ⁹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
- ¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
- ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
- ¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
- ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
- ¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
- ¹⁵ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.
- ¹⁶ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.
- ¹⁷ And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.
- ¹⁸ And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.
- ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.
- ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.
- ²¹ And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

- ²² And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;
- ²³ (As it is written in the law of the LORD, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)
- ²⁴ And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord,
A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.
- ²⁵ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.
- ²⁶ And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.
- ²⁷ And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,
- ²⁸ Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,
- ²⁹ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
- ³⁰ For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
- ³¹ Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
- ³² A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.
- ³³ And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.
- ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
- ³⁵ (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

³⁶ And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

³⁷ And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

³⁸ And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

³⁹ And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

⁴⁰ And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

⁴³ And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

⁴⁴ But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

⁴⁵ And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

⁴⁶ And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

⁴⁷ And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

⁴⁸ And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

This story speaks for itself in many respects, but here are a few observations:

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. (Luke 2:6). A government adding taxes is what took pregnant Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. Governments are always coming up with new taxes. That's what spawned America. But this new world-wide taxing process necessitated that Joseph go to **his own city (Luke 2:3), Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David (Luke 2:4).**

All this tumult was necessary because the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem, in accord with prophecy. **But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. (Micah 5:2, 3).** Gill: *until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: that is, according to the first sense until the Virgin Mary travailed in birth with the Messiah, and brought forth him her firstborn, or according to the latter, until Zion, or, the church of God, travailed in prayer, in the ministry of the word, and brought forth many children to Christ, both among Jews and Gentiles[.]*

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7). At a minimum, this description suggests to us that Joseph and Mary were dirt poor and had no relatives or friends in that city that could have taken them in. It appears the town was crawling with visitors, likely fellow taxpayers, and the parents of Jesus were

left on the outside looking in. This outcast infant, helpless and forlorn, was to become the mighty Savior of His people. This moment is when Jesus **was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself** * * * **Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** (Philippians 2:7-11).

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. (Luke 2:8, 9). We are not told the date of this birth. But we can glean from this Scripture that Jesus was not born on December 25; shepherds did not keep their sheep out all night long in the dead of winter in old Bethlehem.

To these shepherds, the first notice of Christ's birth was given, not to the princes, priests and learned men. Abel, Abraham, Lot, Jacob and his sons (including Joseph), Moses and David, at one time or another, were shepherds. Shepherds were often weak, illiterate, mean and lower middle class citizens. That's who God revealed this amazing birth to. Indeed, God has **chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.** (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

These shepherds, this night at this place, saw something that few have seen. A great light; an unusual light; a never-before-seen light; an extraordinary light, a light of glorious splendor with surprising luster and brightness all around them, from which they could discern the presence of the angel of the Lord. It was a sudden appearance, provoking great fear, which has been a common reaction to similar appearances of the Lord by the likes of Moses, Daniel, Isaiah, John, and others.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the

highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2:13, 14). What a sight this had to be. This multitude of the heavenly host is the Lord's angels, powerful beings that do the Lord's bidding. Psalm 103:20, 21 would support this notion: **Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts[.]** Some say the heavenly bodies such as stars, planets, galaxies and the like joined this host in this praising activity. *The great name of the Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Sabaoth, was probably intended to include both the seen and the unseen hosts, the stars in the firmament, and the angels in heaven.* (Ellicott). These powerful beings suddenly appeared, likely having flown swiftly from parts unknown, to be present with and near the babe Jesus for his protection and for the purpose of announcing his arrival and message to a suffering world. The text also suggests that not only was the praising activities heard by those on the earth, but in the heavens ("in the highest").

The message that captured the attention of diverse audiences was directed to the Lord's chosen; peace and good will to those favored folks. The gospel will bring peace. The Savior was predicted as the Prince of Peace. **For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.** (Isaiah 9:6). These comforting words, this pronouncement, was not a wish or hope, but an affirmation of reality and fact: **And this man shall be the peace[.]** (Micah 5:5).

A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. (Luke 2:32). These are the words of the just and devout Simeon who had long awaited the consolation of Israel, that is, Jesus the Messiah. The Holy Spirit had assured Simeon he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. He held the babe Jesus and then talked a good talk, and this verse is part of that sober and substantive talk.

What is Simeon saying? Jesus is the **Redeemer of Israel** (Isaiah 49:7) for the Jewish chosen. Beyond that, he is the Savior for the Gentiles as oft promised in the Old Testament in places such as Isaiah 49:22: **Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people[.]** He is the promised **Sun of righteousness** (Malachi 4:2) to the Gentiles who had long been in darkness. He is the predicted **light of the Gentiles.** (Isaiah 42:6). In sum, he is the one and only true God for both Jew and Gentile, and **this was done** that prophecy be **fulfilled.** (Matthew 1:22).

And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against[.]

(Luke 2:34) Here, Simeon continues with his comments, led by the Holy Spirit, and after blessing both parents of Jesus, makes this interesting remark about the child being set for the fall and rising of many in Israel. The idea here is that many Jews will be ruined by the coming of Jesus and many other Jews will be made happy by His salvation. Benson seems to provide some assistance with the meaning, and remember this relates to the Jews: *As he shall, in fact, be the means of bringing aggravated ruin upon some through their rejecting him; as well as of procuring salvation and recovery to others, on their believing on him. In other words, He will be a savor of death to some, to unbelievers: a savor of life to others, to believers.* This is probably an allusion to such verses as Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 as follows serially:

And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

And what of this sign that shall be spoken against? Simeon is here prophesying that Jesus and his people will be ridiculed, mocked and hated by the world. Jesus was and would be a conspicuous and distinct figure subject to contempt and rejection. Isaiah touched on this: **Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion.** (Isaiah 8:18). And the chief of the Jews, answering the prisoner Paul, unwittingly referenced it: **But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.** (Acts 28:22).

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed

not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38). This interesting lady was apparently over 100 years in age, having lived 84 years after a 7-year marriage that ended when her husband died. Others say she was 84 years old, period. She clearly had lived a life of rigorous faith, serving in God's temple night and day. As a prophetess, she recognized the significance of the birth of Jesus, publicly giving thanks and telling all that would listen of His redemptive role. Her long-term faithfulness was rewarded by her role in this birth scene. *The sense is, "to all them in Jerusalem that were looking for redemption"—saying in effect, In that Babe are wrapt up all your expectations. If this was at the hour of prayer, when numbers flocked to the temple, it would account for her having such an audience as the words imply.* (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40). This verse gives us notions of the humanity of Christ while on this earth. He grew physically and spiritually like all boys, more or less. He did not reach maturity all at once, but by degrees. His faculties were strong, and grew stronger day by day. His understanding was clear and his judgment solid. His soul was human and he had to go through the learning process just like any other child. He was, says Ellicott, *subject to conditions and limitations of human knowledge, and learnt as other learn.* The text though, in saying Jesus was filled with wisdom, suggests he possessed extraordinary understanding and was wise so as to flee from everything sinful and evil. (See Luke 2:52, our last verse).

Consider these blurbs from the commentators: Physically, Jesus grew and waxed strong; he was a healthy, vigorous child; both his mind and his body were subject to the law of growth – he experienced natural human growth.

And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? (Luke 4:22). Of this rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch the prophet Isaiah says: **And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord[.]** (Isaiah 11:1, 2). John says he was **full of grace and truth.** (John 1:14).