



Joy at Christmas

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Luke 2:1-7

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In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

(Pastor prays)

In straightforward language, the text before us describes the most astounding, monumental, earth-shaking, and life-changing event in the history of the universe. It's a story that reminds us that God is alive and God is good. It's a story that shows us that God cares for His people, a story that opens the doors of Heaven, transcends nature, promises forgiveness of sin and renews our hope by reversing our hate and gives us a reason to smile at the future. Because if this story means what I think it means, then you will never be alone. You will always be loved; your guilt is taken away and your life has purpose and direction. And nothing has happened to you — no pain, no hurt, no abuse, no depression or loneliness has ever been wasted. It's all going somewhere.

These seven verses serve as a keyhole to bend down and look into joy unspeakable filled with glory. The drama of redemption and the story of hope and the joy of forgiveness all begin here in these seven verses. And my hope today is to simply have you meditate and dwell on God's gracious love for you in Christ. Meditate on God's care for you in this world and God's comfort for you as you live this hard life.

So let's awake to the drama of Christmas and declare war on the demons that haunt you and the sin that scares you and the tomorrows that you dread. I want you to believe that God loves you, Christ died for you, His plans are good for you, and you have nothing to fear because Christ is already standing in the center of tomorrow. And if He is for you, who can be against you?

Christmas is a Kept Promise of Love

Let's go through this passage and pull out some things of interest as we see God at work in this story of hope.

God's sovereignty means our security

Verse one begins with a place in time, "in those days." In Luke 1:5, we found that Herod the Great was appointed king in Judea. He was a brutal and ruthless man, he was a false Jew, murdered his wife and some of his sons. Caesar Augustus said he'd rather be Herod's dog than one of his sons. Speaking of Caesar Augustus, Luke gives us another historical reference on Caesar Augustus. History knows him as Octavian, grandnephew of Julius Caesar. Octavian restored the unity in Rome and created the Pax Romana. He is the Caesar that said, "I found Rome brick and left it marble." He was so powerful that the Senate voted him Caesar Augustus, it was a title. The title Augustus means "supreme, divine Lord." The most powerful man in the known world had issued a decree. It is a decree that will set in motion Mary and Joseph going from Nazareth to Bethlehem. They *think* just to be registered there but what none of those people seem to know, what Caesar Augustus doesn't know, is that there is a much higher and holier decree from Micah. Micah 5:2 says,

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.*

Caesar Augustus, the most powerful man on earth at the time, was but a pawn in the hand of the one true God. He is the God who changes the times and seasons. He removes kings and He sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. Caesar Augustus' decree is in obedience to another decree, an eternal decree. Don't fear the law of man because over the law of man stands the eternal law of the one true God. And this God has sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were born under the law so that we might receive adoption as children of God. When I read verses 1 and 2, I'm reminded of our great sovereign God ruling over this evil world and evil government regime and my worry dissipates, because Christmas is a kept promise of love. There is a good king and His sovereignty means my security. What else do we see here?

God's Providence means our protection

Watch what Luke does with the narrative, how he goes from the big picture to the small. Watch how he goes from universal to specific. He goes from the world where Caesar reigns to Quirinius in Syria to the Town of Bethlehem to the household of Joseph, to Mary then to the baby. So we have talked some about how God works in the big events of human history. Now we go in close in verses 3, 4 and 5 to Joseph and Mary. Let's read those verses with some commentary.³ *And all went to be registered, each to his own town.* ⁴ *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,* ⁵ *to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.*

Joseph and Mary are probably married at this point and yet not sleeping in the same bed. Mary is showing by now because she spent three months with Elizabeth. And now it's good to get out of Nazareth. Gossip would be in full swing. It is a 90-mile walk. That shows resilience. There was Joseph and the unknown future, all those questions, discomfort, and ridicule. And now they show up in this crowded village of David called Bethlehem. All along the way there is God's guiding hand of providence. This young couple is from Nazareth but the Messiah must be born 90 miles from here and the foster father Joseph has to go register in his hometown because, by providence, he is of the royal House of David. God is doing 10,000 different things every second in your life that you can't see so that He might accomplish His perfect will. God doesn't fit His perfect will into your life, He fits your life into His perfect will. Joseph and Mary are being woven into God's grand story of redemption found in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. And when you are yielded and surrounded in the gracious will of God and your life is hidden in Christ, then there is no safer place to be. His sovereignty means my security. His Providence means my protection.

Let me offer a third lesson to glean from this passage.

God's plan means our provision

OK, so now we are at the moment when the scared young, unmarried girl named Mary is going to give birth and nothing here is ideal. And all of it is God's plan. Are you OK with that? When nothing seems to go right, everything is inconvenient and frustrating and disappointing and odd? Nothing in this passage seems right; all of it is God's good plan. Join me there in verse six. ⁶*And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.* Galatians 4:4 says, *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,* It was God's plan. And in verse 7, she gave birth, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths like every other poor baby. She laid him in a manger, a feeding trough, because there was no room in the inn. That wasn't because the innkeeper was hardhearted, it's because God is so big-hearted. This is His plan. By controlling the world, He

created good. He arranged for Mary and Joseph to be in Bethlehem. He could have gotten them a room. But He was fulfilling the prophecy of Micah. But why was there no room in the inn? Why the humility of being placed in a manger? Luke 9:58 tells us, *And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* It's God's plan to save.

Let's look at some other verses. 2 Corinthians 8:9 - *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.* God's plan to save is by His poverty and humility. Mark 10:45 - *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* God's plan is to save His people and purchase them out of slavery to sin, by the cross of Jesus. Philippians 2:6-8 - *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

His humility means our hope. The love of God has come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Bethlehem, poverty, swaddling cloths, the manger, no room in the inn, it's God's perfect plan. Christmas is a kept promise of love. God's sovereignty means our security. God's providence means our protection. God's plan means our provision. Jesus, in His humility is our hope. Put your trust in this good God who loves you.

(Pastor prays)