Intro

* \*transition from *O Holy Night*…
  + This Christmas season, we’ve been **Celebrating Our Savior’s Heritage** by walking through Luke’s account of the incarnation (\*explain incarnation – (Latin: incarnatus))
    - Because of the incarnation, we can **Rejoice and Rest in the Arrival of the Messiah**
      * Please turn to our passage for this morning: you’ll find it in Luke 2:1-20 (pg. ///)
  + \*shockingly normal

Text

* + *Luke 2:1-20 – Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.****2****This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.****3****And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.****4****Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,****5****in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.****6****While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.****7****And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.* ***8****In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.****9****And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.****10****But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;****11****for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.****12****This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”****13****And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,* ***14****“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”* ***15****When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”****16****So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.****17****When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.****18****And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.****19****But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.****20****The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.*
    - From our text, we’ll look at **3 truths to remember for the Christmas season**
      * The opening of this famous passage begins with a call to…

**I. Rest in the Providence of God**

* + There’s a lot going on, right from the beginning
    - And the temptation with such a familiar passage to just let the words pass over our ears
      * Many of us would be able to recite the beginning of this text—you read it several times during the Christmas season, hear it during Christmas pageants – it even makes it into Charlie Brown’s special!
        + Familiarity can breed complacency

The more we hear somethings, the greater chance there is that we allow our eyes to glaze over and miss the core of what’s being said

* + - * So let’s not miss the incredible action taking place in this passage—we even see God’s sovereign hand working…
* **A. Through governing authorities**
  + - Put yourself in the position of a citizen of ancient Israel at this time
      * You’re being ruled by a foreign government that ranges from distant to overbearing
        + Most days, you go about your typical life, paying very little attention to whoever happens to be sitting on whatever throne at any given time

Life is pretty normal—barring the infrequent interjections from the Romans

* + - * But then, one of those inconveniences takes place…
  + **Luke 2:1-3 – Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.**
    - Caesar Augustus was his *given* name—the man was born **Gaius Octavius** [please insert “Gaius Octavius” pic] in 63 BC
      * After a very messy ascent to power, Octavius took the uncontested throne in 27 BC when he was 36, and was given the name/title Caesar (meaning “emperor”) Augustus (meaning “honorable”)—where we get our word “august”—which essentially means “distinguished” or “revered”
        + History generally looks on Caesar Augustus as just that: a fairly honorable ruler

It’s alleged that Octavius said in his dying days that he found Rome brick and made it marble

His administrative giftings brought Rome to the place it was in Jesus’s time: a robust epicenter of the known world, with a network of commerce and travel that extended to all its vast provinces

I don’t have to introduce you to the phrase “all roads lead to… Rome”

Octavius is credited as the one to make this happen

* + - * But like most Roman emperors, he gave little thought to powers higher than himself
        + At best, they would give a semblance of reverence to the so-called “gods,” but generally saw themselves batting in the same league

As such, any notion of a single sovereign, all-powerful God ruling over all creation was a foreign—if not rejected—concept

They made decisions with the standing assumption that they were the first and final authority in all matters—they bowed to no one

* + - But God doesn’t wait for the men and women of this world to give Him permission to carry out his sovereign rule over every situation carried out in His creation
      * His Word says it this way…
  + **Proverbs 21:1 – The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.**
    - Octavius may *believe* he’s acting independently—even *supremely*—but there’s nothing he can do that’s outside of God’s direct allowance
      * Why does that matter for you and me, today?
        + If God is able to direct the heart of the godless ruler of the known world, do you think He has any trouble with *your* heart? With *my* heart?
    - How about the decisions of our leaders *today*?
      * As the heading of this point would indicate: we can *rest* because of God’s rule over all hearts and circumstances around us
        + We can *rest*—even when things seem chaotic

And you can bet that’s what it felt like at that time: your passage says in v 3: “EVERYONE was on his way to register for the census…”

* + - * Let’s say, for the sake of argument, you forgot to do your Christmas shopping until this very moment
        + Right now, you’re probably scrambling to scrape together a plan in your head to go out and get what you need for the folks on your list

You’ll get everything you can online or in town, but there’s always that one person on your list that requires a trip down to Indy…

What’s that going to look like this afternoon—two days before Christmas Eve?

In a word: mayhem

* + - I imagine that’s what the crowded streets would have looked like as the ancient world was scrambling to get back to their place of origin
      * And yet, God is in control of every last iota
        + What seems chaotic to us is fully in the hands of YHWH

And that may be what you need to wrestle with in this season of your own life…

However chaotic things may appear to be… God is in control

* + - * Remember that He works through the shockingly normal
        + He does this through the governing authorities, and He does this…
* **B. Through family lineage**
  + - Right now, God is in sovereign control over the circumstances that are taking place in the moment
      * But He’s also been orchestrating events in the past that are constructing His desired present result
        + We see that…
  + **Luke 2:4-5 – Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.**
    - When Octavius was issuing a decree, most people received it as an inconvenience
      * But that was God getting Joseph and Mary to the place where the Messiah would be born, as it was prophesied in the Book of Micah…
  + **Micah 5:2-5a – But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. Therefore He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. This One will be our peace.**
    - How do you see this playing out?
      * Was God reading His book—the Bible—and saying, “uh oh, Jesus is supposed to be born in Bethlehem—I better shake things up to get Mary going that direction—after all, that baby’s coming on His own timeline…”
        + OR, do you see a God who is standing above time, altogether?

When He wrote that passage in Micah, He was already fully aware of Octavius’s census?

Brothers and sisters, this should bring us incredible comfort

God is not anxiously awaiting what tomorrow may bring, like you and I have the unfortunate tendency to do

He stands above it all—the beginning of a matter is no different from its end, to Him

* + - * That means *your* life is already fully orchestrated, from God’s perspective
        + This should lead us to… REST

Our lives may seem normal, but when you view them through the lens of God’s sovereignty, they are *shockingly* normal

And the extraordinary coming of the Messiah is no different: God works through rulers, He works through time and family lines, and He works…

* **C. Through hard circumstances**
  + Verse 6 confirms that when Mary and Joseph finally arrive at the “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” there comes about the “O Holy Night”
    - Verse 7 goes on to say…
  + **Luke 2:7 – And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**
    - Have you been in that room?
      * It might have been an “O Holy Night,” but to Mary, that didn’t mean she wasn’t asking for the epidural
        + I don’t want to be irreverent, but we can’t paint over the birth of Jesus with 17th century depictions of halos and the belief that “no crying He made”

There were tears, pain, and mess

…but what did that produce?

* + - \*\*Alexandra’s insight on the first moment of quiet after giving birth (staring at the face of God)
  + Trust that our God is working, and that should lead you to REST—rest in a God who *through* and even *in spite of* the deeds of sinful man
    - He used the shockingly normal to bring about the redemption of mankind
      * We can picture a God who is in control of a perfect world—but does your theology have a category for a Creator who is *just as capable* of working His sovereign rule over a world plunged into chaos and sin?
        + Because that’s the God *I* worship, and I hope you know Him too
    - And the only way we know Him *relationally* is though His Son, who was born to a teenage girl some 2,000 years ago
      * A shockingly normal event that leads us to…

**II. Rejoice in the Savior**

* + Octavius may have understood himself to be ruler over all the known world at the time, even ushering in *pax Romana* (Roman peace), but in terms of our real problem, he’s nothing but…
* **A. The imposter: Ceasar Augustus**
  + God uses rulers like him to show us…
* **B. The genuine: Jesus is Lord**
  + - Again, I don’t want us to miss the SHOCKING nature of this passage that we’re about to read—though you may have heard it a hundred times…
      * [Kari-if possible, please keep the same text, but insert clicks at each highlight, revealing the text bit-by-bit]
  + **Luke 2:8-12 – In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**
    - Some 1,400 years before this point, there was *another* shepherd keeping watch over his flock
      * It says *this* in Exodus 3…
        + Exodus 3:1-2 – *Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.*

What did God do, though a burning bush?

Commission this lowly shepherd to lead His people out of slavery

* + - About 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus, there was yet *another* shepherd keeping watch over his father’s flock
      * It says this in 1 Samuel 16…
        + 1 Samuel 16:11 – *And [the prophet] Samuel said to Jesse, “Are these all the children?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep.” Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.”*

What was the name of that young shepherd? (David)

And what had Samuel come to do? (anoint him as king)

* + - 2 shepherds, visited by God or His messenger while going about their *totally normal* life of watching sheep eat grass
      * But this time was different…
        + These shepherds were being given a totally different commission

They weren’t being told “go and do,” but rather “come and see”

Because God was providing a greater deliverance than Moses was sent to accomplish

God was giving His people a better King than David could even be

* + - * + Listen to what THESE shepherds hear in this normal evening, which very quickly turns *shocking*…
  + >>>>>>>
    - Do you suppose there was any anticipation in the hearts of the shepherds?
      * The way the text states it (*suddenly*), and the way they responded (*terribly frightened*) would indicate, probably not
        + They were probably just a couple of guys, having a relatively normal evening

Their minds were likely occupied by normal stuff, like the task at-hand, or their next meal, or maybe one or two were catching a bit of sleep

* + - Then, just like that, their world was turned from dreary night into holy light
      * \*brothers waking me up with Harry Connick Jr
        + But the message that was blasting here was one of GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY!

The message was of the promised *Savior*

* + - By the way, how would *you* receive that message?
      * What type of person needs a savior? Someone who is in need of saving…
        + Is that you?

Like in the time of Moses, do you see your slavery—not to an oppressive nation like the Egyptians during his time or the Romans during Christ’s time, but slavery to *sin*, today?

And like in the time of David, do you see your need for a King, or a Good Shepherd to lead you?

Just as it says in Isaiah 53…

* + - * Isaiah 53:6 – *All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.*
        + Who is this “Him” that Isaiah, and Micah, and the angels are talking about?
  + >>>>>>>>>>
    - “Christ,” meaning the Messiah, or anointed one, and “Lord” meaning ruler over all
      * And if you were to press pause right there on the angel’s message, what sort of images would have been conjured up on the minds of the shepherds?
        + You have the long-anticipated heir of king David, who is the anointed one, and Lord over all things created

How do you imagine this Savior would enter the world?

Surely in a manner for more grandiose than even the son of Caesar Augustus could be ushered into this life

* + - * But what does the angel tell the shepherds to expect?
  + >>>>>>>>>>>
    - Something fairly… normal
      * Unlike the high treatment of that day-and-age, Jesus wasn’t going to be rubbed with salts and swaddled in costly material—He was going to be wrapped in cloths
        + And Jesus wasn’t going to be placed in a carefully crafted crib, made by his carpenter-father

He was going to be found lying in a manger

Does this remind you more of the birth of a king, or the delivery of a barn animal?

Those shepherds may have thought: “I did that last Tuesday with one of my pregnant ewes… What is *Christ the Lord* doing wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger?”

* + - This king wasn’t coming to rule in the same way as Octavius—His beginning was a foreshadow of His end
      * No lamb destined to be sacrificed on a temple’s alter is born in the chambers of a palace and laid in a crib—each propitiatory lamb is delivered in a barn and laid in a manger
        + Jesus was born to die. Merry Christmas

This was the GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY that the angel was heralding to these normal shepherds

But this was the beginning of the gospel

* + - This message was so shocking, that it led to a spontaneous worship session, where heaven was called down to earth for a moment’s time…
  + **Luke 2:13-14 – And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”**
    - This is the profound mystery of the gospel—this good news
      * Heaven mixes with earth, the common with the celestial, the normal with the shocking
        + The salvation that God provides through His Son should lead us—especially in this Christmas season—to praise Him like heavenly host

Don’t let this normal passage lose its shocking punch your heart

Praise God for His Salvation, and if you haven’t done so already…

**III. Respond to the Gospel News**

* + The sacrificial Lamb of God would one day hang from a Roman cross
    - There, Jesus would fulfill His mission and atone for the sins of all those who would follow Him as the Good Shepherd
      * Are you a part of His flock?
        + All who are born presume themselves to be like Caesar Augustus—our song is not that of the angels praising God, but that of William Ernest Henley’s famous poem “Invictus”…
  + **Out of the night that covers me,**

**Black as the pit from pole to pole,**

**I thank whatever gods may be**

**For my unconquerable soul.**

**In the fell clutch of circumstance**

**I have not winced nor cried aloud.**

**Under the bludgeonings of chance**

**My head is bloody, but unbowed.**

**Beyond this place of wrath and tears**

**Looms but the Horror of the shade,**

**And yet the menace of the years**

**Finds and shall find me unafraid.**

**It matters not how strait the gate,**

**How charged with punishments the scroll,**

**I am the master of my fate,**

**I am the captain of my soul.**

**- *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley (*Poems*, 1920)**

* + - This is the “song of praise” that each of us sings, until we encounter the sweeter song…
  + **Colossians 1:15-20 – [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.**
    - Which is the sweeter song to your heart?
      * Are you the captain of your own fate, or a sheep in the Good Shepherd’s fold?
        + Caesar Augustus may have been sitting on a throne, it wasn’t even capable of ruling his own heart

Make peace *today* with the Prince of peace—come down from your throne situated upon the precipice of hell itself, and join the flock being ushered into eternal bliss, led by the Lamb who was slain

All it takes is a *shifting of faith*—off of yourself and onto Christ

That’s something you can do in this very moment—don’t delay

* + - We see elements of this in…
* **A. The shepherd’s reaction**
  + - Just as suddenly as the *shocking* infiltrated the *normal*, everything was jolted back into its previous state, in what could have been under a minutes-time…
  + **Luke 2:15-18 – When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.**
    - Let’s give these shepherds more credit than you typically may hear in a Christmas sermon
      * The only information they were given by the angel is that this baby was born in “the city of David”
        + They knew enough to conclude that this was Bethlehem, lending credence to the assumption that they had some Jewish background or familiarity
    - But we also need to ask the question: if these shepherds came in a hurry to find Jesus, what happened to the sheep??
      * Though inferred, I believe this is the first example of Christian *discipleship*…
    - Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all fishermen
      * When Jesus came to them and said, “follow Me,” what did they do? (left their boat)
        + When Jesus found Matthew at His tax collector booth and said, “follow Me,” what did he do? (left his cash)

This is the pattern of discipleship: you go after Jesus

A response to the gospel message is one of *abandon*…

* + - * + That same tax collector would later recount these words of Jesus:
    - **Matthew 13:44 – The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.**
      * Don’t pity the sheep left in the field, don’t cringe over undocked boats, and don’t cry over money left behind
        + Instead, pity the one who hears GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY, and instead of dropping everything to follow Christ, stays with the sheep, or the fish, or the cash

Fellow disciples: let’s keep pursuing Jesus over all else!

* + - This was also seen in…
* **B. Mary’s faithful response**
  + You wonder what that conversation would have been like
    - I imagine the breathless shepherds, who had just booked it about 2 miles (according to tradition), frantically trying to explain to this couple all they had just witnessed
      * According to the angel, that birth had happened “this day,” so Mary was still recovering and probably trying to figure out all the new-mom stuff that every mother goes through
        + Again, we have the *normal* mixed with the *shocking*…
  + **Luke 2:19 – But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.**
    - Mary’s treasures were *gospel truths*
      * I hope you and I can say the same
        + This Christmas season, I’d challenge you to drill deeper into at least *one aspect* of this GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY that we’ve discussed

Perhaps it’s the fact that God chooses to work so often through the *normal*… \*(sacrifice | sovereignty | discipleship | meditating)

* + - * Take time to ponder these things in your heart
        + This will result in loving Jesus more, as you store up treasure in heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy
    - Finally, our passage closes with…
* **C. The shepherd’s response** 
  + - Let me give you a pro tip: don’t linger too long when you’re visiting the new mom at the hospital
      * I’m not sure if you’re aware, but giving birth takes a bit of energy
        + Most folks want to rest up after the whole ordeal

Ben Franklin is credited with saying: “fish, like house guests, go bad after 3 days…”

And If you’re a random shepherd crashing in on the recovery room, I’d go with a measurement of *minutes* rather than *days*…

* + - * + Thankfully…
  + **Luke 2:20 – The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.**
    - Does this seem anti-climactic? I’ve always thought so…
      * They have this incredible mountain-top moment where they are visited by heaven, meet the Savior of all mankind, and then they… just kind of meander back…
        + You might even say, after the shock of the day, things sort of return to… normal
    - Far from a contradiction on what we talked about a bit earlier regarding discipleship, this is in line with God’s calling
      * ///////\*conclude

Conclusion

* + sd