

Luke 2.1-20 Christmas is a Big Deal

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while ^[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. ⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

This is a big deal, isn't it? Christmas is a big deal. No other holiday is celebrated as widely or in as many ways as Christmas is. There's Christmas lights to display and Christmas cookies to bake and Christmas specials to watch and Christmas cards to send and Christmas gifts to distribute and that list could keep going. People all over our planet pull out all the stops to celebrate Christmas. And even though the Christmas traditions and celebrations of many don't reflect the true significance of Christmas, my guess would be that many, many people would still be able to tell you that Christmas celebrations have their roots in the birth of Jesus Christ. The world makes a big deal about Christmas.

So I find this interesting and kind of ironic. For as many people all over our world as there are celebrating Christmas today, that first Christmas-the actual event that we are celebrating today-was observed and celebrated by so few people in the moment. After all, perhaps the only people who were actually aware of Jesus' birth in the moments of his birth were his parents Mary and Joseph. Even the way that the Gospel writer Luke tells the story kind of hints at how little fanfare there was at Christ's birth. Luke tells that portion of the story in a very matter-of-fact, understated sort of way: **"While they were there the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."**

Is there a scene that has been more romanticized and idealized than that scene? We hear those words, we set up our nativity scenes at home, and we think to ourselves, *"Oh, what a tranquil, peaceful setting. Silent night!"* And it's awesome that we think that way about it, because you know who this child is and why he was born. It's a beautiful scene for us. But I gotta tell ya, I doubt Mary and Joseph were using the words "beautiful" and "precious" and "peaceful" to describe their firsthand experience that day. Think about that. Joseph and Mary had just made an 80 mile trip south from Nazareth in Galilee to the Bethlehem in Judea to be counted in the Roman Caesar's census-and that while Mary is really pregnant and expecting anytime. And then, upon reaching Bethlehem, there's a fruitless search for a proper motel. No one left the light on for them. And then Mary starts to labor. And I'm guessing there's a panicked search for shelter. A barn or a cave for keeping animals will have to do. And the doctor wasn't coming and the midwife certainly wasn't summoned. But then the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. And this first time momma swaddles her baby up and places him....in a manger? In a box designed for holding animal feed? I used to feed animals on the farm, and I'm not germophobe. But putting my newborn in a manger wouldn't have been my first choice. But this is how this child's birth that is now celebrated worldwide came to pass.

And you know, it all surely would have gone unnoticed-just another lowly birth to a couple peasants in hard scrabble circumstances-no one would have known about it-except that God in his grace wanted so badly for the news of this birth to get out. So the Lord called an extraordinary, angelic press conference. Messengers from heaven appear to a band of lowly shepherds keeping watch over flocks in the same Bethlehem fields where a young King David had a thousand years earlier shepherded his father's flocks. Through those angels singing sweetly o'er the plains, God communicates to some unknowing and unlikely candidates the biggest deal that had happened in world history: **"A Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord."**

That child, born in such lowly humble circumstances, whose birth announcement was grander than any birth announcement ever before or ever since-this child is God. He's the eternal one who has no beginning and no end. He's the one who created you and me and knit us together in our mother's wombs. He comes to us in human flesh. God becomes a man. He comes to be a cosmic repairman. He came to fix the greatest problem that brought curses on this world.

It was the problem that occurred way back in the beginning. We heard about the aftermath in the first lesson this evening. In the beginning God created the first people, Adam and Eve, perfectly. He created them in his image. He created them to serve him perfectly and always. But Adam and Eve rebelled against God. They disobeyed the command of God and ate forbidden fruit. Sin came into the world. And ever since that time people have been conceived and born into this world with an uncontrollable propensity for rebellion against God. Need proof of that? Check your own heart. There's darkness in there. There's selfishness and envy, bitterness and greed in there. We're people broken by our sinfulness. And worst of all, our sinful rebellion puts us at odds with God. Our sin makes us worthy of eternal punishment.

That's why Jesus entered the fray of this broken and sinful world. God becomes man to fix and restore this broken relationship between the holy God and unholy people. He comes to win salvation and eternal life for us.

And the way that he would do it? Oh my. I think that's why God chose to have his Son and our Savior born into our world in such humble circumstances. It foreshadowed the way he would have to do the work of repairing our broken relationship with God. One day a wooden manger would be exchanged for something even more lowly and humble. Jesus would be nailed to a wooden cross. Jesus did that to take the punishment for our sins which should have fallen upon us. It's our sin after all. But Jesus paid for every last one of our sins in full. So that we would have exactly what those angels sang about on Christmas night: **"Glory to god in the highest"**, they sang, **"and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."** The peace of God rests on us because of the salvation that Jesus won for us. That why Jesus was born. That's why God sent his Son into our world.

And do you know one of the real practical takeaways from all of this? It's that God always keeps his promises to us. See, the events of the arrival of this true God and true human child into our world didn't happen by chance. These were events that God had in mind for ages. In fact, the salvation that Jesus won for us when he came into this world is something that God had planned out back in eternity before he even created this world. That's a thought that is really mind-blowing. But God started revealing his plan to send Jesus into this world back in the Old Testament times. God recorded that plan in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures. So hundreds and thousands of years before the fact, God gave specific details about Jesus' life and the work he would do to save us. He made promises about a Savior. We heard a number of those Old Testament predictive prophecies earlier. Right after Adam and Eve's fall into sin, we hear God promise that he would send the Seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. We heard about a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse who would bring peace to this world. There's so many more of these types of promises in God's Old Testament Word. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised that this child would be born of a virgin. Through the prophet Micah God promised that this Savior child would be born in Bethlehem. There are hundreds of these prophecies about Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, many of them having to do with the circumstances of his birth into our world.

So it was no coincidence that circumstances arose that made it necessary for Joseph to travel from his home in Nazareth in Galilee to the little town of Bethlehem 80 miles to the south. And it was no coincidence that he took his

virgin yet very pregnant wife to be Mary with him on this trek to Bethlehem. And it was no coincidence that while they were there this child was born in the exact circumstances that had been predicted. Because when God made promises about our Savior's birth, they were fulfilled. Every last one of them.

So that means that when God promises you that Jesus has lived a holy and perfect life for you and that his death on the cross was all-sufficient payment for your sins, you can trust him. Because God keeps his promises. And when God promises you that you are his child and that he's always on your side and that he's going to work for your good in all things, you can trust him. God keeps his promises. And when God promises you that, when you close your eyes in death, he's going to take you home to heaven to be with him forever in paradise, you can believe that promise. Because God always keeps his promises. Because God loves us. The birth of our Savior proves that. So praise him like the angels did. And worship him like the shepherds did. And ponder his love for you like Mary did. And thank God tonight that you know why Christmas is a very big deal. Merry Christmas. Amen.