

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Christmas Eve
Luke 2
Dec. 24th, 2012

You perhaps remember Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar. It was centered on the great Roman conqueror that came to power about 60 years before Christmas Day – the very birthday of our Savior. You remember the Ides of March (March 15th, 44 BC) and his dying words, "Et tu, Brute?" as Julius Caesar couldn't believe what had just happened. His good friend and a top senator Marcus Brutus murdered him with an attempt to overthrow the dictator. And by the way, no one knows if Caesar actually said these words. They were simply a part of Shakespeare's famous rendition.

What we do know for sure is that Julius Caesar's adopted son Octavian took over after a time. He made himself the supreme ruler and took the name Caesar Augustus. His official title was "Imperator Caesar Divi Filius Augustus" or, in plain English, Emperor Caesar Augustus (exalted one), son of God. The reference was to his adopted father Julius, who, after his death, had been declared divine. By the time Jesus was born, Augustus reigned supreme not only over Rome, but over Judea, all of Asia Minor, northern Africa and much of Europe. His power, wealth and influence were absolute and stood in stark contrast to a small, homeless child lying in a manger in Bethlehem.

And then, Augustus is mentioned in Holy Writ. "*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.*" The King James Version says, "...*that the world should be taxed.*" To be "taxed" was a part of it all, but first the people were registered. It was a census. They were being counted. Every Emperor worth his salt will know how many people he has under his authority. Every Emperor, who keeps good records, who will know how many he needs to keep under toe, will take a census. And he must be worth something. His name was exalted one. He was known as the son of God.

But what a contrast it was from the palace of indulgence in Rome to the humble barn in Bethlehem. What a contrast from the one who was in great power to the one who was so vulnerable and small. What a contrast from the one who called himself exalted and the son of God to the one who actually was exalted and the son of God. The babe in the manger is the Holy One of Israel. The babe in the manger – meek and mild – is the object of our worship and affection.

Beloved, we still have the meek and mild Jesus. No, Jesus is not a babe in the manger any longer. But He did grow to live a life of humility. He was not flashy, wealthy or arrogant as we see from so many rulers – Augustus, of course, and then even the rulers of our day. He was the son of a carpenter and most importantly for you and me, the very Son of God – God Himself, who would choose to die in the greatest humiliation ever known. God died with sinners in the full spectacle of all to see. He died the same way He was born – naked and humble.

Beloved, we still have a meek and mild Jesus who is the Lord of lords in this world where bigger is always better, more expensive is always better, and more stuff, more popularity, and more fame is always better. Our Lord shows us in His Word that the bigger, more and more expensive is not better. As a matter of fact, these kinds of things often get us in trouble. These kinds of things tend to grab our attention -- and they grab our heart. We will do anything to keep up with the Jones'. We will set our hearts on the things of this world that break down, that run out and that will never give back to you all that you have given to it. That is why our humble, meek and lowly Lord shows you and me what great things come in such small and seemingly insignificant packages.

When you, the people of God, come in to this place on a night like Christmas Eve you hear so much about that greatest of all gifts. And you should. But when you look around at our world at Christmas you would almost think this world is more in love with the Caesar Augustus – conquer the world and have every luxury known to man – type of king rather than the Jesus born in Bethlehem in a manger type of King. It's natural to want a king like that – so powerful, so rich, and so extravagant. In so many ways, that's what we would like our Christmas to be as well. We like the glitter and the glitz, the presents and the lights. And that kind of celebration is all fine and good.

But beloved in the Lord, please don't now, nor ever, let all that stuff be the reason for the season. The "more" of Christmas is actually a whole lot less. The more is more – but to the world it is less. So in other words, the more is Jesus... who is less than all the world thought a King would be. No grand palace and no great wealth for this King. The first Christmas was the most humble, the most meek and the most lowly. Even though there were angels crying and singing, it was only the lowly shepherds that they sang to. Even though for hundreds and hundreds of years the prophet pointed to Jesus in Bethlehem, the first Christmas went off without a whole lot of fanfare.

The Lord does amazing things and sometimes it doesn't come across like lights and glitter at Christmas. Sometimes it's not right in front of our nose on a night like tonight. For example, God used this pagan, too big for his britches Emperor by the name of Augustus to show the world who the real King is. The census brought Mary and Joseph back to the place the city of David – to their bloodline – to the family of the King that was promised by God. Augustus put Jesus back where He was supposed to be. God used this ruthless arrogant ruler of Rome and so much of the world to show how Jesus is the one talked about by the prophets. So, on this night, in the city of David which is called Bethlehem a greater King is born. The Lord knows how to pierce through the lights and the decorations to show what is truly important on a night like tonight.

And that, beloved in the Lord, is always our Christmas message. It's the Gospel. Jesus came, meek and mild, born in a manger, for a purpose. Not to live like Emperors and Kings, but to save a people – His people – YOU! He came the way He came because He came to be like you. He came the way He came to die in the kind of great humiliation that accompanied Him at His birth, during His life and at the very end. Shakespeare himself couldn't have written the script any better. And like the surprise of Julius Caesar at the betrayal of Brutus, the world might be surprised. But for us Christians who know and understand our God, we get it – we understand. A blessed Christmas to you and yours. It is a glorious day in the Lord. Our King has come! Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.