

Christmas 2022: Luke 2:1-14

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[0:00] And please take your copy of God's Word and join me in Luke chapter 2. Our text for today will be Luke chapter 2, verses 1-14.

To wish somebody a Merry Christmas, which we've said already many times this season and certainly this morning, is to wish them a day full of cheer or good feelings.

The sincerest version of this desire for a Merry Christmas is for someone to be happy, but not simply based in their circumstances, the particular joys of this day, but to be happy regardless of their circumstances.

That their happiness would be based in an enduring reality. That reality, the thing that bases our merriest of Christmases, is that God has loved us in Jesus Christ.

My hope for our brief time together this morning as we take a look at this first bit of Luke chapter 2, is that we will marvel at the arrival of God incarnate.

[1:16] That our affections for Jesus Christ will be warmed this morning, and that those affections will flavor the rest of this day. Before I read these 14 verses, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's Word to us.

That it was written for His glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Luke chapter 2 and verse 1.

In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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.

[2:28] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger. 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 among those with whom he is pleased. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word this morning. And we pray that you'll bless us as we've made effort to come together this day, and hear what it would say for us, that you will bring forth fruit from the preaching of your word.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So in the hope of marveling at Jesus' coming and warming our affections this morning, I just want to make two observations from this text.

[3:47] Much more could be said, but just two observations. First, the humility of Jesus Christ's coming. And secondly, the glory of Jesus Christ's coming.

So firstly, the humility of Jesus Christ's coming. Jesus certainly had a humble beginning. You can read of this in the first seven verses.

We see in these verses the circumstance of Joseph's and Mary's travels. They were being sent to be counted. And the nature of this particular account that was to happen was a poll tax.

Caesar wanted to know exactly how many people were under his reign that he might charge them for the privilege of being Roman citizens. They were to give one denarius per year per person.

So this very circumstance was a humble circumstance, right? It was a Roman headcount. It was a way of saying, you belong to someone else.

[5:01] And it's for this reason that they had to pack up the family and take this journey to Bethlehem. Bethlehem, a seemingly insignificant town, a humble town.

The prophet Micah records in Micah 5 and verse 2. 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 able to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

This little, humble, insignificant town is located just south of Jerusalem, 85 to 90 miles from Nazareth.

So even the very journey was an arduous one. It wasn't just a hop, skip, and a jump over to the next town. It was a travel that had to happen for them to arrive in this town.

Jesus had humble, societal standing, right? He didn't come in a significant way to a significant family.

[6:16] Joseph and Mary, seemingly insignificant parents. Joseph was a carpenter in the tiny town of Nazareth. We find this out in the biblical narrative when Jesus is rejected in his hometown in Matthew chapter 13.

And in that text, those there go, isn't this Jesus Joseph's son? He doesn't seem to be prominent for the furniture that he made in that town.

Joseph was not a wealthy carpenter. Later in Luke chapter 2, Jesus is presented at the temple, and a sacrifice is made for Mary's purification. If you look at verse 24, we can read, And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. And this is from Leviticus chapter 12 and verse 8, in which God allows for this lesser sacrifice if a lamb could not be afforded.

So Joseph wasn't even able to afford the customary sacrifice that would have been made for Mary's purification, but had to buy the lesser sacrifice of a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

[7:37] Jesus had a humble ministry. He had humble admirers. The very first admirers we see here are the shepherds of verse 8.

And the shepherds were night shift employees, right? They were the lowliest of employees. They went out and they slept amongst the sheep, out in the danger in order to protect this commodity that some wealthy man owned.

Jesus had humble followers, largely made up of fishermen, at least seven of them, a tax collector we know, Matthew, hated by those Jewish people.

And his ministry had a humble goal. We read in Mark chapter 10 and verse 45. Jesus says there, the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And we know that Jesus' ministry had a humble end. Christmas should aim our hearts and minds at Good Friday, where this humble servant met the ultimate humiliation in suffering God's wrath for our sin, the perfect dying for the imperfect.

[8:56] You see, God's economy works in seemingly peculiar ways. God seems to accomplish everything in his kingdom in an upside down fashion when considering it from the world's standards.

But we do well to note that God's ways are always right side up. Augustine once said, man's maker was made man that he ruler of the stars might nurse at his mother's breast, that the bread might hunger, the fountain thirst, the light sleep, the way be tired on its journey, that truth might be accused of false witnesses, the teacher be beaten with whips, the foundation be suspended on wood, the strength might grow weak, that the healer might be wounded, that life might die.

The humility of Jesus Christ coming ought to produce in us great humility. In Philippians chapter 2, verse 5 and following, Paul exhorts us to humility in this way.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.

And here, Paul tells us how it is that he emptied himself. He didn't empty himself by putting off his deity, but rather, he says, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

[10:43] He emptied himself by adding to his being. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Humility that leads to glory. Praise be to God that the story doesn't end with Good Friday, and that our hearts and minds should then be drawn to Easter.

Humility that leads, that yields to glory, a glory that has come and is yet to be fully realized, which brings us to our next and final observation this morning.

So secondly, the glory of Jesus Christ's coming. So we see in the beginning of this text, such humility, right? In the way that Jesus comes, in who he comes to, but we also see a great measure of glory.

[11:54] This word glory means praise or honor. So when I say the glory of Jesus Christ's coming, I mean the praiseworthiness of his coming.

On the evening of the birth of our Lord, an announcement is made by an angel, and then by angels. We see this in verses 9 through 14.

An ever-expanding cacophony of praise for our God. And they model for us how we ought to also praise our God, to glory in his coming.

Angels most simply and rightly understood are messengers of God. There's a lot of other erroneous things out there, some true things out there about angels, but we ought to see at their core, they come to speak on behalf of our God.

John Piper once wrote, angels were created for Christ's everlasting glory and for our everlasting joy. So we see verse 9, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, these humble shepherds out in this field, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

[13:11] Note that accompanying this proclamation of glory, there's also a tangible glory. There's a visible glory. In Revelation chapter 21 and verse 23, John writes of his vision of the new Jerusalem.

And he says this, and the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its light is the lamb.

Christ is the radiance of the new earth, John tells us. And this is what the shepherds in that field on that night experienced. What a moment to behold.

And just as the shepherds physically saw the glory of God, so have we. And I've got to meditate on this.

They visibly saw the glory of God. It shone. It was radiant before them. And so have we. Because Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 6, for God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[14:34] So because we can take up and read, and by the illuminative power of the Spirit, we can know Christ, we also get to behold his glory.

Now, this should fill our hearts with praise, but also with awe. And you notice the shepherds, they were filled with great fear.

Rightly so. To have such a being present himself to them and such a radiant glory exposed, they were afraid. But in the wonderful kindness of God, the angel says to them, fear not.

For behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Gospel news is what he's declaring to them.

It's a victory declaration. He says, don't be afraid. I come to you declaring victory. Right? This God who said, let light shine out of darkness, is now shining in to the world.

[15:40] And he is declaring that sin and death will have its defeat. This is for our God's people. Great joy. And it is for, note he says, all the people.

And I love that right here, the angel makes a declaration of God's global purpose. Right? That his glory would spread across the earth and the saving work of Christ.

Right? This Christmas text is also a mission text. He goes on, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord.

So we see here in the text that this is the aim of Christmas. Jesus came to die and to be resurrected. I said this last night, but we do well as we think about the baby, the humble baby, wrapped in swaddling cloths, lied in a manger, to not let our thoughts stop there.

Right? They must go on. They must go higher than that. Christmas points us to Easter. And we don't celebrate Christmas well without a mind toward Easter.

[16:57] In fact, each day of the Christian life ought to be a celebration of both. And as we gather corporately, each Lord's day, we do the same.

Our lives are meant to be a celebration of the incarnation of God, his life, death, resurrection.

Right? His now reign and his soon coming.

Right? So, unto you is born this day in the city of David. Right? Let me insert. A baby who is Christ the Lord, the Christ, the Messiah, the promised one who will come, conquer, take his people, and reign forever.

Jesus sums this sentiment perfectly in Luke chapter 19, verse 10, where he says, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Right? The Son of Man came, Christmas, to seek and save the lost. Easter and beyond.

[18:01] After this astounding announcement, the angel then gets really practical and says, this will be a sign for you. You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

He gives them specific directions on how to go and praise, like how to give glory to this baby. Then a great heavenly host joins in this solitary angel's purpose.

So we see it broaden. 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 among those with whom he is pleased.

We see that the angels glorify God because of the peace that Christ brings and Christ seeks to glorify God in the salvation of his people.

At his trial before Pilate, recorded in John chapter 18 and verse 37, we read, Pilate saying to him, so you are a king?

[19:09] And Jesus answers, you say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. John in chapter 8 and verse 47 records Jesus' words, whoever is of God hears the words of God.

The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. And so, beloved, if we are God's people, as we open God's word this morning and read from it about the purpose of Christmas, that we would learn the humility of Jesus Christ's coming and the glory of Jesus Christ's coming, we will hear this and our hearts will be moved in affection toward him.

And if we don't, if our hearts are hardened against him, then I would plead with you that today would be the day of your repentance, that you would throw yourself on the mercy of this Christ that we celebrate today.

I hope that this morning's brief look at this text has aided you in marveling at the arrival of God incarnate and that your affections for Jesus Christ have been warmed this morning and that those affections will flavor the rest of your day.

[20:43] Let's pray together to that end.