

God's Glory In The Story

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Preacher: Ron Allaway

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. It is such a pleasure to be back with you this morning. And thank you, Carl. I appreciate the prayer. I felt like I needed it this morning. I feel needed to cover of prayer.

I thank David as well for your prayer also for Emmanuel, brother. We feel you and we know, I know what you're going through. So yeah, bless you, brother. And we'll speak after. I want to thank you for David also in saying that God is in the details. God is in the details of life.

God is in the details of his word and God is in the details of all things because of his sovereignty. And I hope to unpack that this morning for you and detail what it is God is in with us this morning.

Also, thank you. It was a great time to spend with you. See a few faces who were there a couple of weeks back at the men's fellowship. That was excellent. Really, really blessing time and encouragement to me also. So thank you for inviting me along to that. It was excellent.

Although I might actually say, you know, with the fellowship, the Toby Carvery sounds, where the women are going, sounds particularly good also, but we'll see. The passage I've chosen this morning to bring to us is in Luke chapter 2, as we've already alluded to. We spoke about it already. So if you have your Bibles with you or your tablets or your phone, whatever you have, please turn with me to Luke 2. And I believe it will also appear behind me on the screen so you can follow with me to read God's word. What a blessing that is. Starting in chapter 2 at verse 1.

[1 : 4 3] 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 down to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth to Judea, 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. I think we know that one.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to a firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. 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, 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 the angel, sorry, 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 whom he is pleased. When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen as it had been told to them. This is the Word of God. May bless the reading of His Word here this morning. Before I go any further, I'd love to pray for us.

Father, we thank You. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You that You have left the Holy Spirit with us to help us. Holy Spirit, would You help us this morning to be able to take hold of these very familiar words. Would You help us to not become complacent with these words. But as we delve into this sacred narrative, would You help us to see the truth and the beauty of Jesus within these words.

As we come before You, O God, would You stir our hearts with awe and reverence for Jesus. That He may be glorified in everything we do this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now, I don't know about you, but I do love the Christmas period. I do. It's one of my favorite times of year. I find it such a wonderful time of year because it's full of different traditions and different things going on. Some traditions are good, like family traditions that we have within our own households. Watching our favorite Christmas movie, for instance, or wearing your favorite Christmas outfit. Maybe it's a hat or a tie or a bow tie you wear on Christmas Day or a favorite shirt that you might have. It could be, and it's a completely ridiculous-looking dodgy Christmas jumper. Now, I know there's a few in the wardrobes out here. I think my daughter's got about three of them. It's who we see, who we spend time with. Are we spending Christmas with your family this year, or are you spending Christmas with my family this year? Then there's the favorite things about church.

[6 : 16] It's a time of year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. And we hear sermons about it. We sing songs about it. Thank you, brother, for leading us this morning. And I wonder if you have a favorite Christmas carol or a favorite Bible verse and Bible passage surrounding Christmas. For me, I think it's all of these things. And I love the story of the birth of Jesus. I have a particular carol in mind that I find encapsulates this story brilliantly. And lastly, I love a mince pie. I just love a mince pie.

And see when they go on the shelves in the supermarkets, and that's it. That's it for me. We're there. We're good. I think they started in October this year. They get earlier and earlier. I wish to do it all year round, because I'd eat mince pies all year round, but that's just me.

Now, concerning my favorite carol, in 1872, this favorite carol of mine was voted by the Church of England as one of the top four greatest hymns. Doesn't make for a very good CD, because there's only four tracks on it, or Spotify, list, or whatever it is you use. The carol or the hymn is a wonderful tribute to our Savior. It was written in 1739 by Charles Wesley, and later adapted by George Whitfield, or later calvinized by George Whitfield, should I say. A hundred years after Whitfield, a German Jew was converted and baptized into the Christian faith, and was none other than Felix Mendelssohn, who put the tune, to what we now know, to said hymn. And I'll reveal the hymn later on, but if you know, you know. There are so many traditions. There are so many familiar comforts.

And our verses this morning are no different. These verses in Luke that have been recorded for us are probably among the most well-known in the canon of Scripture. The birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior. Now, as with all of Scripture, there's a lot going on this morning. There's a lot.

It's such an amazing story, and one that had been foretold, and one that would come to pass. The prophets spoke of this event. The writings and the people behind them, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote about this time-altering, life-changing, cosmic event. The greatest gift, the greatest gift of love, joy, and peace that the world has ever known. And we are stepping into God's rich grace this morning, right here in Bells Hill, as we are privileged and blessed in Christ, to have the joy and the opportunity to read about this Jesus entry into the world.

[9 : 05] Oh, that we might gaze upon the beauty of Jesus this morning. And the plan revealed to us, that our reply is thank you, Father, we praise your holy and mighty name, for we are truly blessed.

Luke begins this chapter by recording who was in power at the time of this event. Now, this was a common practice for historical writings, as it places a sort of time stamp on the event itself.

And so we see that Caesar Augustus was the emperor of Rome at the time, and that Luke also details for us that Quirinius was the governor of Syria. This gives us an indication into the importance of why Luke has recorded this.

And you'll notice the passage this morning didn't start with once upon a time. Why? Well, because these were real people in a real timeline of history.

This is a historical account of events that took place. This is no fairy tale. Within our passage this morning, we have several characters I think we could make mention to, and I think it's right that we do.

[10 : 21] Characters that God has put in place to demonstrate His divine will and purpose. Or, as our brother already pointed out, God's detail. To make known to the intended reader and to us just how magnificent and glorious His sovereignty is.

In our passage, we have two kings. We have a Roman governor, an expectant father and mother, shepherds, the angel of the Lord, the glory of the Lord, or the Shekinah, a Theophany, and a multitude of the heavenly host.

It's a lot to pack in. It's a great number of people to pack into 20 verses. But we'll start with Caesar because he comes first. Caesar Augustus was the grand-nephew of Julius Caesar and his successor.

Now, the name Augustus means supreme, sublime, majestic one. Now, obviously, the Jews and probably some of us here couldn't, and rightly so, accept that name given to someone who, at the time for the Jews, was their enemy.

After all, that title of majestic one was revealed for another king. Verse 1, it says, in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

[11 : 40] This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria and all went to be registered, each to his own town. The decree went out in all the world, the Roman Empire at this point.

However, it's not the only decree that was happening here. There are two decrees, two decrees happening. Now, one is this earthly decree that Rome issues with everyone returning to their ancestral home.

And this accomplished two aspects for the Romans. To register everyone to see how many people they had, and from that registering how much tax they were owed.

It was purely financial. However, and I love the however, I love the but, but, the second decree is from the Lord God omnipotent.

The one who rules and reigns over all things. This decree comes from eternity past. That the Son of God, the Son of God, the second person in the Godhead, would come into this world to complete and accomplish the redemption of his people.

[12 : 54] And that he be born at a very specific time, at a very specific place, for a specific mission, to save his people from their sins in eternal hell.

Hallelujah. God's amazing plan, folks, in front of us this morning. Next, in our story, we have the introduction of Joseph and Mary.

And Joseph went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

I'd like just to think about this for a little moment. Think about what this year has brought for you in God's providence. has it been a time of joy?

Has it been a time and a season of pain and sorrow, full of challenges and disappointments? Has it been a year of deepening our love and desire to know Jesus more?

[14 : 02] Or maybe it's been a year of trial. As we come into the time where most of the world, whether directly or indirectly, celebrate the birth of the Messiah some 2,000 years ago, I can't help but think about and consider what Joseph and Mary were experiencing.

Could you imagine the stress they faced as they were now told to travel from the north of Israel in Galilee, where they were in Nazareth, to the south, to the city of David, to Bethlehem?

In my studies for this morning, I found that it was not necessary for the wife or the betrothed to travel in such a census, only that the husband is represented as the head of the family in person for the census.

But as we well know, Mary traveled with Joseph. Why? Because the birth of Jesus was not mindless fate or some chance happening. It was decreed by the Lord God Almighty and prophesied that Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem.

Joseph and Mary were required by Roman law to travel about, I don't know the definitive, but about 90 miles to get to Bethlehem. Now, this wasn't in a nice, comfy car on smooth motorway that some of us, potentially icy conditions this morning, experienced.

[15 : 27] No. This was over rough, mountainous, and treacherous terrain. This was not a simple journey, folks. It would have been extremely challenging, filled with threats of raiders, robbers, unpredictable weather.

Where would they sleep? What would they eat? Where would they eat? Now, I know that I'm going to embarrass him just a little bit here. He's looked up there. I'm going to embarrass him a little bit, but I know that the arrangements we had to make when our firstborn, Reuben, came along, the house had to be ready, the crib and Moses' basket had to be built or set up, and as many of you, if you're parents, you know what's going on here.

They're to buy all the clothes, the bottles, the wipes, the nappies. I sure don't miss them. That's for something, definitely. You name it, we had it, setting up for our baby boy arriving into the world.

Yet, when we look upon God's Word and read that Joseph and Mary, what they had to go through, it baffles and amazes. From our vantage point in history, what seemed to be a disastrous situation, worked out to fulfill prophecy and to give glory to God, because God is in the details.

Now, I know there have been times in my life, I'm sure that many of us have experienced this, but in the midst of trial and challenge, sometimes don't understand why things are happening the way they are.

[17 : 04] only to look back years later to see God's plan in the midst of the trial. The most comforting reality to me is that God is in control.

God is in control. I can trust Him in all things, both good and bad. He will rescue me just as He promised to do so, and He keeps me safe in Jesus.

What a wonderfully kind and good God we have. God could have found favor in a woman from Bethlehem as the one who would bring forth Jesus into the world.

Finding a woman from Bethlehem would have cut down the travel time, cut the expenses. It certainly would have provided an easier option for the prophecy to be fulfilled.

No. No. The Lord works in mysterious ways. The Lord God Almighty in His infinite and ultimate sovereignty displays His power by choosing massive providence to bring about the birth of His Son.

[18 : 10] Putting it into the heart of Caesar, God in His magnificent splendor moved the whole world, as it says in verse 1, to bring about the fulfillment of His prophecy as was recorded.

I'm very sure you well know Micah 5. It reads this, But you, O Bethlehem Ephrata, 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 old, from ancient of days.

Therefore, He shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth, and the rest of His brothers shall return to the people of Israel, and He shall stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, His God, and they shall dwell secure.

For now, He shall be great to the ends of the earth, and He shall be their peace. He shall be their peace. Jesus is your peace this morning.

the prophecy of Jesus. What glory to behold this birth of a baby in Bethlehem foretold.

[19 : 36] Luke records for us that Jesus was born, and the details that surround that are recorded for us are, I think, quite specific, precise, maybe.

They're a bit clinical. I think that was maybe lending to His job particularly. But the verses of 6 to 8 struck me, you know, as quite methodical, quite clinical, precise.

It's almost as if He's written down that, well, she gave birth, wrapped Him up, put Him in a trough, let's move on. Okay, we've got some shepherds to talk about. It seems very clinical. It doesn't even mention Jesus by name, it's baby, you know.

The significance, though, brothers and sisters, of what we find in verses 6 to 8 is astounding. These details again. Why record such detail about what it is, oh, sorry, what it was Jesus was wrapped in and where He was then put and then why He was put there.

No room at the inn or no place for them at the inn. There's a difference. I talked about that with Robert just this morning. There's a difference.

[20 : 48] There might have been room but there was no place for them there. What was the surrounding details around that? God moved the whole world to make sure that Jesus was born in Bethlehem only to find there was no place for them in the inn.

Did God in His infinite power and wisdom forget to book Joseph and Mary a room? Absolutely not. this was all part of His glorious plan. Christ's humiliation is apparent from the circumstances of His birth.

Yet the Father balances this whole situation with glory. This humiliation is a foreshadow of what lays in wait for Jesus.

Luke 9 57-58 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.

2 Corinthians 8-9 says for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for your sake became poor. Philippians 2 6-8 says and speaking of Jesus who though He was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

[22 : 27] Mark 10 for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Just like Luke these are very familiar words to us very familiar but God planned this whole event God the Father ordained that this should happen to Jesus that Jesus should be born in the lowest possible condition because that is the position from which He serves us and He serves us all the way to the cross as we His sheep will be saved.

Next in our story and the characters we have the shepherds. Staying in Micah I would just like to touch on Micah 4 verse 8 and we read and you O tower of the flock hill of the daughter of Zion to you shall it come the former dominion shall come kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem the future king the Messiah the saviour will not be from just the town of Bethlehem but much more specifically Bethlehem Ephrata and this was an agricultural region within Bethlehem and from there Jesus the Lamb of God was born.

I said I'd come back to the manger and the swaddling cloth and forget everything you've ever been told about the baby Jesus lying in a manger that looks soft and cozy with a hay bale potentially surrounding them the manger that Jesus was wrapped in was a stone stinking feeding trough.

There's so much more to this part of the story that we could delve into but as I was talking with Cal just last night I was like oh I really want to go with this and it's like I'd need another three hours to press this home and I've already seen the timeline I don't have that so if you want to speak about it afterwards I would love to talk about this because it goes right back to Genesis and there's Nehemiah and all sorts of different books and prophecies involved in this but I'll keep the tower of the flock explanation brief I hope I will say though that actually mining in the word of God is just it uncovers treasures about God's glory because the detail is just wonderful it is magnificent in verse 8 of our passage it says that the shepherds were within the same region and in this region is where we find Migdal Edda which is translated as tower of the flock in Micah 4 that we've just read these towers acted as a lookout post located near to

[25 : 22] Bethlehem the city of David within the city of David King David himself dedicated his ancestral land to be the flock from which the Passover lamb would come from now what made the tower special was that the bottom portion of the tower was used sorry it was used as the place where Jerusalem's sacrificial lambs were birthed and inspected and according to rabbinic tradition the priest would come every high holy day from Jerusalem to Migdal Edda the priestly tower of the flock to inspect the lamb before the big day of Passover they would place the lamb in the manger and after inspection the lamb would be wrapped in swaddling cloths and brought to Jerusalem for the sacrifice the lamb was wrapped in swaddling cloths instead of being led along the path or led along the way to ensure that nothing would happen to the lamb on the way back to the temple if it was found to be bruised or broken in any way it was deemed as unkosher and the Passover would be ruined now the way in which God's plan unfolds is truly majestic

Jesus was born in a very specific place for the very specific time as foretold in Micah Jesus is the sacrificial lamb of God to take away the sins of the world he was wrapped in the same swaddle and laid in a manger God's rich tapestry of detail is perfect will brought into the fullness of time is displayed to us in what we read from the word of God this morning regarding the shepherds just a little bit further the angel of the Lord really could have appeared to anyone to everyone and yet the angel appeared to a group of people who at the time of Jesus' birth were mostly outcasts in society they were seen as the lowest people group despised as one commentator puts it due to their work which often left them as ceremonially unclean yet yet it was the shepherds that God first chose to announce the birth of Christ as we've already talked about the angels being the evangelists telling the shepherds they were the first to be told

God's perfect faithfulness throughout the ages again is on display and God is so much bigger so much more holy so much more splendid good kind loving so much more everything I think that we can possibly imagine now imagine the scene the shepherds were tending their flocks looking out for any threats that might harm the sheep the quiet of the countryside was maybe only disturbed by a hooting owl or the rustle of the land as the wind blew by it there's a reason why it's called the dead of night and then suddenly out of the darkness the angel of the Lord appeared to them not just that but the glory as we read the glory of the Lord shone around them the glory of the Lord shone around them as mere shepherds in a field this event is like so incredibly massive that the glory of the Lord was there and not just in the details but manifest right there before the shepherds now it says in our passage the messenger well it says who who is the messenger from the Lord from our studies in Exodus we know that how Luke writes the word

Lord it's like breathing out and breathing in Yahweh Yahweh God himself now I'm not sure about you but I'd be fairly fearful too you know fear not stop stop relax relax it's fine everyone's okay fear not this message is one of great joy fear not it's one of great joy of great hope for unto them that day in the city of David right where they were the saviour Christ the Lord was born Christ meaning Messiah the saviour now a message wouldn't be lost on the shepherds as they knew their job well remember the lamb this is the significance of why it's recorded for us that Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in the manger I think you've probably gathered by now but the

I love the amazing tapestry of God's link of Old Testament and new just like they observed the lamb in the manger for Passover they are now to see the perfect sinless sacrificial lamb of God such as the brilliance of our God the Messiah the saviour Jesus now with us has come to earth to save his people and as soon as the message is delivered notice that heaven explodes absolutely explodes with praise for the glory of God the multitude of the heavenly hosts began to praise God glory to God in the highest I don't know about you but honestly I cannot wait to join that choir when I get to heaven oh to sing of what Jesus has done for me and to give him glory forever oh how sweet that sound would be the shepherds respond with haste it says in our passage and they make their way over to Bethlehem and they see

[31 : 49] Jesus lying in the manger and don't forget this was the feeding trough for animals the dirty the uncleanness yet this didn't deter the shepherds as they told of the events that had happened to them that night notice in the text that it doesn't say they were a bit sceptical you know it's not recorded as the shepherds were not quite sure or they doubted something I think we as Christians can do in our daily walk we're confronted but sometimes we still doubt how does faith come to us well faith comes from hearing and they heard the good news of great joy and what did they do they believed as we approach this Christmas season many in the world will hear the name of Jesus and be confronted with the truth of who he is and they will still reject him but for those of us who hear and believe on the name of Jesus this story is something we should be talking about to others we should be shouting about it we should be glorifying God about it every single day now although the world is rocking and reeling and its very foundations are crumbling at the center

God's eternal throne brothers and sisters is still as solid and secure as ever God is sovereign and the Lamb is still Savior and everything is under perfect control I mentioned earlier that I had a favorite carol and there was a few nods there was a few wry smiles as it went round well that carol as I say was written by Wesley Whitfield and Mendelsohn and his Hark the Herald Angels Sing and this carol has some breathtaking Christology within it and was written out of our passage we've been looking at today I know you know it but I'll read it to us just to remind us of the words Hark the Herald Angels Sing Glory to the newborn King Peace on earth and mercy mild

God and sinners reconciled Joyful all ye nations rise Join the triumph of the skies with the angelic host proclaim that Christ is born in Bethlehem Hark the Herald Angels Sing Glory to the newborn King Christ by highest heaven adored Christ the everlasting Lord late in time behold him come offspring of a virgin's womb veiled in flesh the Godhead see hail the incarnate deity pleased with us in flesh to dwell Jesus our Emmanuel Hark the Herald Angels Sing Glory to the newborn King hail the heavenly Prince of Peace hail the Son of Righteousness light and life to all he brings risen with healing in his wings mild he lays his glory by born the man no more may die born to raise the sons of earth born to give them second birth hallelujah and there's probably about another three verses potentially to that song in the original

I know Stephen's going like that no no no we don't have any more no no there's about another maybe two or three verses to that song which again just speak about the glory of Jesus Jesus is this perfect everything he is the newborn king he's also identified as the Prince of Peace the Son of Righteousness everlasting Lord the incarnate deity and most of all God with us folks this is Christianity this is it right here this is the great joy we have it is that God the eternal Son left heaven came to earth as a baby born to a woman miraculously without a human father born to save the sons and daughters of earth born to give them second birth this is Christianity this Christmas this is Jesus within our season as I close just like to in conclusion leave you with this

Jesus is the Lamb of God Jesus was referred to as the Lamb once in the Old Testament in Isaiah twice in the Gospels of John and once in the Epistles in 1 Peter he is referred to as the Lamb 28 times in the book of Revelation and we have to conclude as they rejoiced in heaven and it's taken from Revelation 5 11 then I looked and I heard the voices of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power wealth wisdom might honor glory and blessing in Luke 2 we witnessed the majesty of Jesus not in the palaces of kings but in the simplicity of a stable the divine humility displayed at his birth foreshadows the sacrificial humility of his life and death the angelic proclamation echoes through the ages inviting us to join in worship of the newborn king like the shepherds let us respond with awe proclaiming the majesty of Jesus to a world in need of the saviour's redeeming grace so as we celebrate this Christmas season may we be reminded that the true majesty of Jesus lies not in earthly splendor but in the profound love and grace that led him to dwell among us amen let's pray we have read from your word oh God and we thank you for it we thank you for that sacrificial lamb father your son

[39 : 07] Jesus to be born in the lowest point possible yet to be raised from the dead proclaiming victory over sin and death and is now seated at the right hand of God we thank you that your throne is eternal we thank you for your glory that we have read this morning and press it upon our hearts that we take this glory with us into the world until we are gathered back together as your church until we meet again in Jesus name we pray amen and enemies thank you thanks