

Good News for the world Luke 2v1-40

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 2, page 1027.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to register.

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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her first son, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

[1 : 11] But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.

This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.

When the angels had left them and had gone into heaven, the shepherds said to them, one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

[2 : 25] When the time of their purification, according to the law of Moses, had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord.

A pair of doves or two young pigeons. Now, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own souls too.

[3 : 50] There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and then was a widow

until she was 84. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.

Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke of a child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, their own town of Nazareth, and the child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.

Thanks very much, Trevor. Long reading, big passage, but we're going to work through it together with God's help. So keep your Bibles open. We'll pray and ask for God's help.

Father, just as your Holy Spirit taught and revealed to old man Simeon, all that you are going to do, we pray that your same Holy Spirit would reveal your truth to us so that we grasp afresh who Jesus is and what his coming means for us today. So we ask for your help as we look at your word together. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, it's considered to be one of the best underground cave systems in Europe. The entrance, about 25 metres below the surface, takes you on this long, winding path.

[6 : 08] And at the end of it, you come to one of the world's largest underground lakes. The brochure said it all. Immerse yourself in the subterranean world.

Enjoy the rock formations formed over hundreds and thousands of years. See the turquoise baths of Diana and take a trip over the underground lake.

So while on holidays, we went to visit Caves del Drac. And what a surprise. Apart from getting lost on the way, never trust the sat-nav, we decided to stay at the back of the tour and take our time.

But as soon as the group who were at the front of the tour went through that section of the cave, they turned off the lights. So us at the back spent our time just looking at shadows.

And to make matters worse, we had to queue up for about 45 minutes to get on this little rowing boat that would take you across the world's largest underwater lake, which took no more than two minutes.

[7 : 17] It was a surprise, all right. It was not as we expected. Well, as we enter into Luke chapter 2, it is full of surprises.

But it's not as we expect. In fact, it could leave us really disappointed. First, there is a surprising king.

Look at verse 1. In those days, Caesar Augustus, you may have heard of him from history, he was a very powerful man, ruler over the entire empire of Europe, of the Roman Empire, for 44 years. An empire that stretched across North Africa, right into most of Europe, and covering modern Turkey and beyond. He was a ruthless leader.

If you like, the power of Trump, the might of Putin, and the craziness of Kim Jong-un all rolled into one. And of course, as his empire expanded, he needed more finances.

[8 : 36] So, again, verse 1, he issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. A census was much more than just counting the population of the empire.

It was a means of collecting taxes and making money. The lands and people that he had conquered had now become the means for funding his wars.

He was a powerful tyrant who took no pity. And everyone who lived in the empire was forced to travel to their place of birth and register so he could squeeze as much money as possible.

So, verse 4, 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.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. Even young pregnant women like Mary, who were on the verge of giving birth, were not exempt.

[9 : 43] Everyone had to travel. So there was no doubt if you lived within the Roman Empire, who was ruler? Who was boss?

But let's remember what the angel had said about the coming of Jesus. Look back to chapter 1, verse 32.

Here's what it says about Jesus, God's promised king. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, a title reserved for God alone, but now applied to Jesus.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end.

So as we read through Luke, we see at least at last a challenger to the ruthless might and power of Caesar. God is raising up a king.

[10:49] But what a surprise. it's not what we expect. Look back at chapter 2, verse 6. While they were there registering, 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 room for them in the inn. Now it makes us stop and ask, what is going on?

God's promise, this great, the Son of the Most High, the King of an eternal kingdom, God who has come in human form, ends up, verse 6 or verse 7, in a manger, a feeding trough for animals in a backward town called Bethlehem.

This so-called promised king can't even find anywhere to stay. Hardly a threat to the power and might of Caesar. Mike McKinley, who's wrote a little helpful book covering big themes of Luke, shows us how these opening verses take us on a downward spiral of power and influence.

So again, look at verse 1, we've got Caesar Augustus, ruler of the Roman Empire. Verse 2, Quirinius, a local governor with some power.

[12:24] Verse 4, we're introduced to Joseph, a poor commoner. Verse 5, Mary, a young, unknown, teenage, pregnant girl.

And then verse 7, a baby, seconds old and gasping for air. From the great and the mighty to the weak and the powerless.

From the most powerful man in the world to the most fragile and insignificant. The conquering king to a crying newborn.

This struggling scrap still bloodied from the womb is God's king. Hardly inspiring or hopeful.

What's going on? Well, God's king does come, but he comes in weakness, not power.

[13:28] In fact, the whole of Jesus' life would be marked by weakness. a servant who would come to give his life. Who would end up, as we get to the end of Luke, slaughtered on a cross.

Who on this earth would want to follow and trust a king like that? But that's the point. God is calling for faith.

Will you trust in the power of men or will you trust in the weakness of my son? Will you follow the kings and rulers of this world, the might of all the powerful corporations who flex their muscles or will you follow my king who died for you on the cross?

Maybe you're disappointed that Jesus is not something more. Well, listen to the apostle Paul. He explains it for us like this.

He says the message of the cross is foolishness. It's weak. It's nothing to those who are perishing.

[14:51] But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom. And the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Who do you trust? Who would you put your life into the hands of? Well, we've got a second surprise, a surprising invitation.

for some reason, when celebrities get pregnant or give birth, they see it their duty to inform the whole world.

I'm not quite sure why, but that's a celebrity for you, I guess. Whether you're Serena Williams or William and Kate, well, people must know that we're having a baby. Well, Luke has another surprise for us.

Look at verse 8. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Now, we've all heard that, we've sung the carols, but I want us to forget the image in your minds of those nice, fluffy, cuddly shepherds that might be pictured on your Christmas cards.

[16:13] Shepherds are the lowest of the low. It was a thankless, dirty, filthy job, as verse 1 tells us. They lived out in the fields. And for good reason too.

They were considered to be thieves and robbers attacking unsuspecting travellers at night. If there was a robbery in town, well, it was the shepherds. They were so despised that their testimony was not even trusted in a court of law.

You couldn't believe them. But yet, it's to these low life that God first announces the coming of his king. Look at verse 9. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Well, who wouldn't be if an angel appeared in the sky? But the angel said to them, do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Today, in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This announcement is deeply personal.

[17 : 31] Did you get that in verse 11? Today, in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you, to you shepherds. Yes, the world will hear about it in time, but it starts personally with you.

God doesn't send out a tweet with the hashtag kingisborn, or there's no announcement in Jerusalem news on the papers, there's no press briefing inviting all the political and religious elite. Instead, it's a personal visit on a secluded hillside to a bunch of dirty low-life shepherds who no one would ever believe. In modern terms, dare I say it, it's like God going to the traveller site, inviting the so-called despised of our society.

Well, surely God can do better than that, couldn't he? What's going on? Well, it's telling us that God is a God of grace.

God is a God's favour. Verse 13, suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, on an earth, peace to men, on whom his favour, literally upon whom his grace has fallen.

[19 : 09] God invites these low-life shepherds to come and see this newborn king because, well, it's because it's God's good pleasure to do so, because God delights in showing his grace to unsuspecting people.

This is the way God works. It was the same for Elizabeth, remember, back in chapter 1 verse 25, old barren Elizabeth, verse 25, the Lord has done this for me, she said, in these days he has shown his favour or he has shown his grace upon me and taken away my disgrace.

Or look at verse 30, as the angel announced the good news to Mary, but the angel said to her, do not be afraid Mary, you have found favour with God.

Literally, God's grace has come upon you. These two unsuspecting women, these unsuspecting shepherds, God's grace is not earned or deserved, it's dispensed at God's good pleasure and will because, well, God just delights in giving his grace.

look again at what the angels say to the shepherds, verse 10, chapter 2, the angel said, don't be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy.

[20 : 45] That will be for all the people today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord. Christ is a title.

Sometimes we read the word Messiah. It means God's chosen anointed king, ruler, supreme power.

And God is saying to these shepherds, come, here is an invitation for you to go and see my saving king, my ruler, and it's a personal invitation to you.

Who would choose shepherds to be the first hearers of such momentous, life transforming, world changing news?

Well, God would, because God is a God of grace. Why would he do it? What's going on? Well, as we read through Luke's gospel, we will discover that there are two kinds of people.

[21 : 55] Of all the people we meet, they will be in two categories. There are those who are the outsiders, those who are morally broken, spiritually unclean, people who are on the edges, people like the shepherds.

And then we'll meet the others, the insiders, those who see themselves as morally good and spiritually pure, people who have influence and power, people like the political and religious elite, like the Pharisees that we'll come across.

But Luke's big surprise as we read through it is that, well, from God's perspective, the outsiders are invited in, while the insiders are left out.

You see, God has sent his chosen saving king, Jesus to invite sinners, the morally broken. He came to seek and save the lost, the spiritually unclean, those who know that they can't save themselves, the despised and the rejected.

God goes to shepherds and he shows them grace. Disappointed that God doesn't treat you differently?

[23 : 16] that you look at your good life and think, well, what a good person I am and, well, God is in some ways bound to treat me differently.

Not the case. You see, until we too, each one of us, become like the shepherds, until we stoop to such humility and see ourselves as being morally broken, with nothing to offer.

We will never, ever come to know and experience God's grace. If I see myself as an insider, one of the good people, I ain't going to know God's grace.

I must become like a shepherd to experience his grace in my life each and every day. surprised by the saviour that we meet?

Well, here's a third surprise. A surprising salvation. Remember how Luke started out in chapter two?

[24 : 30] In the days of Caesar Augustus, the great ruler over the entire empire, Israel, this small little land, this small little nation, are under the might and power of a foreign oppressor.

But let's also remember what the prophets had promised all these hundreds of years ago. Keep your finger in Luke and go back to Isaiah 52.

Isaiah 52. 52. So we've got to keep context in mind here.

Luke wants us to know Caesar Augustus, the empire, the ruler, he's the suppressor, he's in charge. But with that in mind, we've got to remember the promise of the prophets.

And the context in Isaiah 52, if you look at verse 4, God's people have been oppressed by other nations.

[25 : 46] So verse 4, for this is what the sovereign Lord says, at first my people went down to Egypt to live. Do you remember how they were oppressed by the Egyptians in slavery?

And then he says, lately, Assyria, this other great nation, has come in and has oppressed them.

And we know too that the Babylonian nation, they oppressed also.

But there is a promise of comfort and redemption to come. So look at verse 9. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. There's a promise that well, a redeemer is going to come who's going to bring comfort to God's people.

When is it going to happen? Well, let's go back to Luke chapter 2. and verse 25. Because at this stage, while yes, they're living in their own land, they're still under the oppression of now another nation, the Roman Empire.

[27 : 16] And here we're introduced to an old man called Simeon, verse 25. Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout.

He was waiting, literally his whole life, longing for the consolation or the comfort of Israel.

And the Holy Spirit was upon him. And when he sees this promised Saviour, because, verse 26, it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ, Christ.

Look what happens, verse 28. Simeon took this child in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, promised all the way back as we'd read in Isaiah, you now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.

At last, after all of these years, God's salvation has come in the person of Jesus. Jesus, but Simeon was not the only one waiting.

[28 : 28] Look down at verse 36. There was also the prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. And she meets this baby Jesus in the temple, verse 38, coming up to them, coming up to the parents at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child Jesus to all who are looking forward, or literally all who are waiting and longing for the redemption of Jerusalem.

At last, it seems that God's promises of the past have now been fulfilled. God has come in the person of Jesus Christ to redeem his people from the might and the oppression of the Roman Empire.

A mighty king who would rule forever and make everything right. But surprise, it's not as we expect. Listen to what Simeon says about this Redeemer. Verse 34, Then Simeon blessed them, that's the parents, and said to Mary his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many and Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against.

In other words, people are going to oppose him so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

[30 : 07] will be filled. It's not what we expect. Surely messiahs, these kings are meant to unite people together and build an army and be powerful and mighty, but God's king, it seems, is going to do the exact opposite.

When he arrives, well, he's going to cause division amongst the people. Depending on how people relate to Jesus, some will fall, some will rise. It seems more like there's going to be civil war. And if that's not bad enough, listen to what he says to Mary. Look at the very end of verse 35. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

The end of all of this is going to be very, very painful. Whatever the sword is, and I think it's referring to the crucifixion of Jesus, there's going to be a lot of suffering for Jesus come the end of his life on earth.

And for Mary, his mother, as she stands at the cross and sees her own son crucified, a bloody mess on the cross, well, a sword will pierce your own soul too.

[31 : 27] Your heart, you are going to be broken. So Jesus, rather than being remembered as the great liberator, is going to be remembered as the great divider.

What's going on? Where's the salvation in that? You see, so often we think of Jesus in terms of our own little immediate lives and the situations around us.

We think Jesus, the saviour, yeah, I like that, he's come to fix my life, change my circumstances, make my life more prosperous and successful.

It's all about Jesus dealing with my particular social needs. I've got a problem, call on Jesus and he'll fix it. He's the saviour, a saviour to make my life better.

But that's not what's happening here. Look at these two characters again that we have in chapter two, Simeon and Anna. Simeon, we know, well, he's an old guy at this stage, he's on his way out.

[32 : 40] Verse 26, it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. He was old and ready to die and he was just waiting.

Anna, we know, is very old. Verse 36, it tells us that she was very old and she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and was a widow until she was 84.

But as she was waiting, look at the rest of verse 37, she never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.

For Simeon and Anna, their whole life has been waiting, has been focused on Jesus, longing and waiting. You see, for them, salvation was not material and social, it was personal and relational.

They longed for Jesus. They wanted Jesus to come. Jesus was sufficient. Jesus was enough.

Again, look at how these two characters respond to Jesus.

[33 : 58] Verse 29, this is Simeon, sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation. He doesn't need anything else.

He's quite happy to die now because he has Jesus. And verse 38, look at how Anna responds.

Coming up at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child.

It was all about Jesus because he was the one who had come to bring redemption. So you see, salvation is not primarily a change in my circumstances, but a change in my relationship.

Salvation is all about ordering your life around the person of Jesus and longing for him. So let me ask us all the question, are you at the centre of your own life and is Jesus just simply there to kind of come into your life to meet your own desires and your wants?

Or is Jesus the centre of your life and you are there to serve his desires? Maybe you're disappointed that Jesus doesn't do all that you want him to do.

[35 : 29] Well, let me suggest this. Jesus has come to do more than you could ever expect or imagine. He is this promised king, God's chosen saviour who's come to invite outside like you and me, welcoming us in, coming to live in weakness and dying on a cross for my sin and for your sin so that we might have our lives reorientated, refocused and living for him.

remember, salvation starts by relating to Jesus correctly. How do you relate to him?

Let's just take a moment to reflect and think about that and we'll pray together. there. Whoa.

There we are.

There we how do you how do I relate to Jesus Father we are sorry for treating Jesus as simply one who comes to meet our own needs and fix up our life as we demand help us to reorientate our life around him and put him at the very center to look to him to long for more of him in our lives to trust him completely even when we do not understand we thank you Jesus that you came and did die for us foolish to the world powerless to all who look but for all who are trusting it is the wisdom and power of God to change our lives today so Father help us to keep following the Savior in all the ways that he calls us to live and that you would help us to orientate our lives around him we ask all these things in Jesus name

[38 : 37] Amen Mmh um of