

# The Stunning Proclamation of Christmas Eve

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[ 0 : 00 ] Living God, we believe that you inspired the words we have read from the Gospel of Luke tonight. And now I pray in your mercy and grace that you would help us enter into the reality of these words as never before.

For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. All over the world tonight and then tomorrow morning, world leaders have made or will make their traditional Christmas proclamation. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will be making his second official proclamation. U.S. President Barack Obama will be making his last official proclamation. Queen Elizabeth II will be making her 64th official proclamation. As thoughtful as such Christmas proclamations have been and will be, none of them even comes close to the stunning proclamation made on the first Christmas Eve.

Even the word stunning is not adequate to convey just how stunning the proclamation is.

[ 1 : 38 ] The fact is, the world has yet to realize how stunning it is. Much of the church has yet to realize how stunning it is.

And that is part of the reason why the world is in the condition it is on this Christmas Eve. If more people actually heard the proclamation, if more people actually took the proclamation seriously, and if more people actually lived in light of the proclamation, this would be a very different world.

A very different world. At the beginning of the Advent season, I realized that this first Christmas proclamation can be tweeted.

Maybe the angels anticipated Twitter and kept the message intentionally brief. The stunning proclamation fits with the present 140-character limit for tweets.

Listen again. Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of a great joy, which shall be for all the people.

[ 3 : 07 ] For today in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior who is Messiah, the Lord.

And this will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Hashtag angels we have heard on high.

Stunning news that night in first century Bethlehem and stunning news tonight in 21st century Vancouver. Stunning news, which if believed and acted on, takes away our fear.

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. Says the angel. For all the people.

Which shall be for all the people. The heavenly messenger says. For all the people in all the world then and for all the people in all the world now.

[ 4 : 25 ] Born for you. Is that not a strange thing to say? There has been born for you.

Sharon and I live in a strata made up of 24 units. Over the last year, three babies have been born in our strata. Must be something in the water. Can you imagine the parents in unit six after taking their child home from hospital, sending a note to Sharon and me, we have good news.

A child has been born for you. For us? For me? For Sharon? No. For the parents of the child. We have good news.

A child has been born for us. Come and rejoice with us. Right? And even that, isn't that a strange way to put it? Born for us. Shouldn't it be born to us?

Yes, the parents are going to be blessed by this child. And so, in that sense, the child is born for us. But the child is his or her own person. He or she is not for anyone.

[ 5 : 35 ] He or she is not born for anyone. Stunning news. Good news. For all the people.

There has been born for you. For Jews and for Gentiles. For Romans and for Greeks. For Arabs and Indians. For Canadians and Americans of all stripes.

For Mexicans and Kenyans and Scots and Chinese. For all the people everywhere in every period in history. For you. For you. There has been born.

Do not be afraid. And the stunning proclamation is made first. To shepherds. To shepherds. That is a big surprise. For shepherds occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder. Although at one time, their calling was highly honored.

[ 6 : 35 ] In the life of the covenant people of God. King David being a shepherd. Shepherds. And King David writing one of the greatest psalms. About God the shepherd. By the first century.

Shepherds were some of the most despised people in society. Nothing paid less than shepherding. Good people didn't want to be around them. They smelled badly. And they were thought to be unsafe.

Why? Because of the prevailing idea of holiness. It was thought that in order to be holy. One had to keep all the details of the ceremonial law. Which meant.

Regularly visiting the temple. Making restitution of their sins. By offering sacrificial animals. Which was virtually impossible for shepherds. They're too busy watching their flocks.

Which meant. That they were hopelessly unclean. You see the irony by the way. That the shepherds working in the fields near Jerusalem.

[ 7 : 34 ] Were caring for the very sheep. That would be sacrificed in Jerusalem. So that those who despise the shepherds. Could be clean. So why is the first Christmas proclamation.

Made to shepherds? Should it not be made to priests. And scribes. And should it not be made to royalty. And why was it made in Bethlehem?

Shouldn't it have not been made in Jerusalem. Or Athens. Or better yet Rome. Why do shepherds in a backwater. No big deal village. Well we'll come back to that question.

After we listen more carefully. To the angels proclamation. The angels. Words. Are loaded. Really. Loaded. Really. Theologically. Loaded. Loaded. Really. Really. Politically. Loaded. Stunning words.

[ 8 : 37 ] Of a stunning proclamation. Now. Why have I repeated this word stunning? Because in a word. The Christmas Eve proclamation.

Is the proclamation. Of the beginning of a whole new era. For the human race. It is the proclamation. Of a whole new era of history.

Why? Ready to hear? Because it is the proclamation. Of the birth. Of a new. World.

Leader. That's right. It's the proclamation. Of an. Of the accession. Of a new. World. Leader. Who is forming.

A very. Different. Kind. Of government. For all the people. Stunning.

[ 9 : 36 ] Simply stunning. Joy to the world. We said. At the beginning of the service. Let earth. Receive. Her king. This is why.

Luke. The physician. And Matthew. The tax collector. The two principal writers. Of the Christmas story. Begin. By referring. To people. Like Caesar. Augustus. Emperor of Rome. Quirinius.

Governor of Syria. And Herod. King of the Jews. For one thing. Luke. And Matthew. Want us to remember. That the story. Actually happened. It took place.

In real time. And real space. The story. Does not begin. Once upon a time. That's how. Fairy tales. Begin. Once upon a time. But not the Christmas story.

It's not a fairy tale. It begins. In those days. In historically identifiable days.

[ 10 : 33 ] In the days. When Jesus. Thought. He ruled. The known world. In the days. When Quirinius. Was trying to rule Syria. Under Roman domination.

In the days. When Herod the Great. This brilliant. Corrupt. Narcissistic. Brutal. Herod the Great. Tried to rule Israel. By colluding.

With Roman domination. In those days. But Luke and Matthew. Began the story. By referring to those. World leaders. To set the Christmas story.

On the stage of world history. On the stage. Of geopolitical history. History. Because. The Christmas story. Has geopolitical.

Implications. Good news. For all the people. A new leader. Has been born. For all the world.

[ 11 : 30 ] Who is forming. A new government. Who unlike. Caesar. And Quirinius. And Herod. Will be on the stage. Of history forever. Forever.

He will outlive. This. Quirinius. Inherit. Long after they have gone. This new world. Will still. World leader. Will still be alive. And he will reign.

His kingdom. His dominion. Will have no end. The Christmas angel said. Nine months earlier. To the virgin. Stunning news.

Simply stunning. So listen again. To the proclamation. Of that holy night. Do not be afraid. I bring you good news.

Literally. It is. I good news you. The word. That the angel uses. Is euangelion. Which comes into the English language. In the word. Word. Evangel.

[12:27] Which works into English words. Like evangelize. And evangelical. Good news. Evangel. I bring you a euangelion. An evangel.

I evangel you. I evangelize you. With a great joy. Now get this. The angel's word. Is not a religious word.

Per se. It is a word. Used by the emperors. And especially. By Emperor Caesar Augustus. The Caesars. Would periodically.

Issue official pronouncements. From on high. So to speak. Pronouncements about new developments. Within the empire. New initiatives. New policies. New appointments.

To their cabinets. New victories. In parts of the empire. That had implication. For the whole empire. Euangelion. Was the name. For these declarations. Evangel.

[13:21] Gospel. An evangel. Of Caesar Augustus. Was the way. These pronouncements. Were announced. To the citizens. Of Rome. The word.

Had an even more specific meaning. The evangel carrier. Or the evangelist. Of Caesar. Would come into a town. Or village. Either. Running on foot.

Or riding on a horse. With this good news. And the good news. The evangel. Always. Had immediate. Immediate. Implications. For how the people. In that town. And village. Were now to live.

And work. The shepherds. Who heard. This news. The night. Jesus. Was born. Had heard. Caesar's evangelist. Many times.

Many times. Augustus. Had declared. That because. He was now. The sole. Ruler. Of Rome. He would bring. Justice. And peace. To the whole world. Where previous.

[14:15] Administrations. Had failed. He would succeed. I bring you. Good news. The angel declares. I bring you. A new evangel.

This time. Literally. From on high. This time. From the realm. That has full authority. Over the earth. I bring you. God's evangel. The angel is saying.

I bring you. God's official. Proclamation. That will change. The way. You live. And work. I told you. These words.

Were loaded. Do not fear. For there. There has been. Born for you. A savior. A savior. Again. This is not. Just a religious word. For again. It is a word. That was used. By and about. The emperor. Especially. By and about.

[15:09] Caesar Augustus. Soter. Is the word. For which we get. The English word. Soteriology. Which means. The study of salvation. Augustus. Loved. This word. Augustus.

Loved. Loved. To refer. To himself. As. Soter. Savior. And the Roman. Citizens. Loved. To call him. Soter. Savior. The word.

Encompasses. A wide. Range. Of expectations. And functions. Peacemaker. Empire. Builder. Administrator. Of a new. Social. Order. Educator.

Wise man. Reconciler. Builder. Of buildings. Builder. Of roads. Builder. Of sewage. Systems. Protector. Even. Healer. Augustus. Thought of himself. In all.

Of those. Ways. And all. Of that. Was embedded. In this term. Soter. Savior. Can you imagine. What the shepherds. Felt. When they heard. This Christmas.

[16:02] Proclamation. I bring you. Good news. A soter. Has been born. For you. A new. Soter. Who. Because. He is. Who he is.

Can truly. Fulfill. All the. Expectations. And functions. Augustus. Claimed. For himself. A new. Soter. Who can truly. Make peace. Who can truly.

Administrate. Justice. Who truly. Reconciles. Humans. To humans. And humans. To God. And God. To humans. One who truly. Heals. One who understands.

What it means. To be human. More than anyone. Ever has. Or can. One who enters. Into all the. Complexity. Of the human. Condition. And starts. Putting. Things. Into order. Again.

Do not. Be afraid. A new. Soter. Has been. Born for you. Who is building. A new. Social order. I told you. These words. Were loaded.

[16:57] Do not. Be afraid. A savior. A savior. A savior. A savior. A savior. A savior. Who is Christ. Literally. Anointed one. Or. Messiah. A soter.

Who is. Messiah. Now here. The angel. Is connecting. With the Jewish world. Messiah. Embodiment. Of all the promises. God made to Israel.

And to the world. Messiah. The one. In whom. All the families. Of the earth. Will be blessed.

Messiah. The one who brings. The shalom of God. The one who comes.

To forgive. And cleanse. And renew. Messiah. The one who inherits. The kingdom. That will never end. The one who. Rolls. Rules over a kingdom. Where human relationships.

Really work. A soter. Who is. Messiah. I bring you. The evangel. Of great news. The Messiah. Has been born. Maybe.

[17:50] Now. Nations. Will hammer. Their swords. Into plowshares. Their spears. Into pruning hooks. Maybe. Now. The lion. Will lie down. With the lamb. I told you.

These words. Are loaded. Do not be afraid. A savior. Who has been. Has been born. For you. Who is Messiah. The. Lord.

The. Lord. No. Well. Not a Lord. But. The Lord. The Lord. Has been born. For you.

What. Soter. The Lord. Messiah. The Lord. We have sung this phrase. The Lord. Many times tonight. Have we not.

Do we realize. What we were singing. The. Lord. The word. The angel uses. Is the word. Kurios.

[18:47] K-U-R-I-O-S. A loaded word. I mean. Really loaded. Kurios. Yes. It can simply mean. Master. Or. Sir. But in both.

The Roman. And Jewish. Worlds. It meant. So much more. And here. Is where the first. Christmas. Proclamation. Blows. The circuit board. In the Roman world.

Kurios. Is the word. The emperor. Called himself. And it's the word. All citizens. Of the empire. Were to call him. Kurios.

Sovereign one. The one. The one and only ruler. The one and only king. In our time. We simply do not. A word. Adequate enough.

To convey. The full implications. Of this word. Prime minister. Not sovereign enough. President. Not sovereign enough.

[19:43] Crown prince. Not sovereign enough. Kaiser. Kurios. Caesar is lord. Lord. Caesar is sovereign. Over all. All Roman citizens.

Were required. To say those words. I. Good news you. I evangelize you. With a great joy. A new soter. Has been born. And he is the Messiah.

And he is. The Kurios. I wonder how. The shepherds. Handled these words. I can imagine. One saying to the other. Dude. Do you hear. What I hear. What I hear. In the Jewish world.

Kurios. Meant even more. Ready for this. Kurios. Kurios. Was the word. People used. As a substitute. For the most.

Sacred name. Of the God. Of Israel. To Moses. God revealed himself. Using the name. Yahweh. But strict Jews. Would never utter that word. Out loud. For fear.

[20:40] Of breaking. The third commandment. You shall not take. The name of Yahweh. Your God. In vain. So. When reading. Scripture out loud. And coming across. This sacred name. They would substitute. The word. Adonai.

Which means. My Lord. And then. When the Hebrew scriptures. Were translated. Into Greek. Adonai. Was rendered. Kurios. Stunning.

Simply. Stunning. I good news you. A savior. Has been born. For you. Who is Messiah. The Kurios. Yahweh. Yahweh himself. Yahweh himself. Which is why he can save us. Which is why he can save the whole world.

Are you hearing. What the Christmas angels are declaring. You will find him lying in a manger. Who.

[21:38] Who will you find lying in a manger. The Lord. The sovereign. Of all sovereigns.

Yahweh himself. In human form. You'll find Yahweh. Lying in a manger. The maker of all things. In a manger. The creator of all things. In a manger. In a manger.

There. I told you these words were loaded. You see why.

None of the Christmas proclamations. We hear and read this year. Even come close to the stunning proclamation. Of Christmas Eve. For you. Born for you.

For you shepherds. Why is the stunning proclamation. First made to them. Because. They. Hearing it first.

[ 22 : 36 ] Signals the value system. Of this new government. Of Jesus. Soter. Messiah. Kurios. As Mary sang in her Magnificat. And as Jesus would say many many times.

The first will be last. And the last will be first. One Christmas. I had the privilege of leading a Bible study. In a prison. And after reading the story. We read tonight.

I asked the 40 or so men. Who had gathered together. In that cell block. What strikes you about this story. And Hispanic prisoner. From the back row. Stood up and said. With radiant joy.

The message was first delivered. To men like us. In this room. His face surely reflected. The face of those shepherds. That first night. The shepherds hearing the proclamation.

First. Also. Reveals the heart. Of this new government. This new administration. Of Jesus. Soter. Messiah. Kurios. No one deserves to get in.

[ 23 : 36 ] No one earns their way in. It's all a matter of grace. Grace. For the lowest of the low. And for the highest of the high. It's all gift. And no one would understand this better than the shepherds.

Christ. And they hear it first. Because. Of all the people who would hear this first Christmas proclamation. They knew something like this needed to happen.

You see. They were not fooled by Caesar's propaganda. Oh they wished him well. But they were not enamored by all the arrogant hype.

They had long ago given up the illusion. They knew we desperately needed help from outside. They knew that no mere human could build a just world order.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is the beautiful Appalachian carol. I wonder as I wander. I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

[ 24 : 40 ] How Jesus the Savior did come for to die. For poor ordinary people like you and like I. I wonder as I wander out under the sky. A friend of mine pointed out to me.

That most modern hymnals have changed the original wording. Most have it the way I recited it. For poor ordinary people like you and like I.

But the original has. For poor ornery people. Like you and like I. Ornery is not an Appalachian slur for ordinary.

Ornery means ornery. Fussy. Stubborn. Easily offended. Self-centered. The Carol writer is talking about.

This is coming for ornery. People. Ordinary. People are usually content to stay the way they are. Which is why most ordinary.

[ 25 : 39 ] People do not think they need a Savior. Which is why most ordinary. People are okay with the status quo. But ornery people. Are not content.

To stay the way they are. They are not okay with the status quo. We. No. We need a Savior. We ordinary. Ornery people. Therefore. Long for something.

Like the stunning proclamation of Christmas Eve. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid. I good news you. Do not be afraid. This is what Charles Schultz. Was trying to show us. In his now classic.

Holiday TV special. At Charlie Brown Christmas. As a way to push back. Against the extreme commercialization of Christmas. Charlie decides to put on a play.

[ 26 : 43 ] And as often is the case with Charlie Brown. Things do not quite go the way he hoped. In his frustration. He blurts out. Isn't there anyone who can tell us. What Christmas is really about.

What? And Linus speaks up. Now Linus is a very bright boy. Extremely intelligent. But he has a bit of a problem.

He sucks his thumb. And he's always carrying his security blanket. Charlie and Lucy have been trying. All kinds of ways.

To help Linus stop sucking his thumb. And get rid of his security blanket. But nothing's worked.

Anyway. On that frustrating day for Charlie. Linus speaks up and says.

Sure Charlie Brown. I can tell you what Christmas is really all about. And holding his blanket. Linus begins. To read the story we read tonight. Now it came about in those days.

[ 27 : 39 ] That a decree went out from Caesar Augustus. And then the moment that Charles Schultz wants us to see. Linus reads. And the angel said.

Do not be afraid. I have good news for you. And Linus drops the blanket. Do you see? When we finally realize.

What Christmas is about. We drop the blanket. We can drop the security blankets. A new world leader has been born.

The world leader has been born. And there is no reason to be afraid anymore. People all over the world.

Are asking. Some with much anxiety. Where is the new leader of the free world? The president-elect of the United States. Wanting to lead us.

[ 28 : 40 ] Good question. But it is not. The really important one. The really important question. Is to ask.

Where is the true. Leader of the world. Wanting to lead us. This church. Just lost its senior minister. Is asking. Who will now be our new leader? And where will that leader. Want to lead us? Good question. But it is not. The important question. The important question is.

Where is the true leader. Of the church. Wanting to lead us. Each of us. In our personal lives. Are asking all kinds of questions. Where am I going? What am I supposed to do.

With my life? Good question. But it is not. The really important question. The really important question. Is where is the one. Who was born for me. Wanting to lead me.

[ 29 : 37 ] What does he. Want me to do with my life. The really important question. Of Christmas Eve. Is. How can I now live. The rest of my life.

In sync with Jesus. And the new government. He's forming in the world. That's the question. Stunning. Proclamation. Simply stunning.

Go tell it on the mountains. Tweet it through. Cyberspace. Text it across the iPhone world.

Facebook it around the globe.

Do not be afraid. A child has been born. Do not be afraid. The virgin son has been born. Jesus has been born.

The world's true soter. True savior. Has been born. The world's true messiah. The true anointed one. Has been born. The world's true kurios. The true lord has been born.

[ 30 : 36 ] The emperor of emperors. And the god of gods. Has come to us. For all the people. For you. Do not be afraid. You don't need to be afraid.

Anymore. Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas.