

Humble & Lowly

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[0 : 00] going to be looking at that wonderful and familiar passage, which we heard read on Friday evening, that tells us about the birth of Jesus. And up until now, we've heard about the wonderful and miraculous signs that God began to do to show that he was at work.

We heard about the two angelic visits. We heard about two miraculous conceptions. We heard about the birth of John to his elderly parents, Zachariah and Elizabeth.

And today we're going to hear about what happened with Mary, the one promised to bear the greatest of sons. We're in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2.

And I'm going to read the first few verses here for us. Luke, chapter 2, verse 1. 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 their 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.

[1 : 23] He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. So the story of Jesus' birth, Luke says, begins with the decree from the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus.

This time in Israel, the Romans were in charge. They had the empire all around the Mediterranean Sea. And we might wonder, why does Luke mention this?

What does it have to do with the birth of Jesus? Well, as we reflect on Luke's words here, we realize that it was this decree from the Roman emperor which moved Mary and Joseph from the northern town of Nazareth in Galilee all the way down to Bethlehem in Judea.

Why did they go there? Because the census required them to go there. Everybody had to go to the town of their forefathers and register.

And here it is, according to Luke. It says, This is his emphasis.

[2 : 44] We could talk about the fulfillment of the prophecy through Micah, but Luke wants us to see the connection here. He wants us to see the ancestry, the lineage.

God used the decree of a ruler across the sea to publicly confirm that, yes, this child of Mary's is, in fact, a descendant of the great king David.

And as every Jew would have known, to be the Messiah, he must be descended from David. It was to King David a thousand years earlier that the promise of a son who would reign was made.

And so that's the significance of this decree, this census. It made it obvious. It made it undeniable. It put it in the record books that Jesus really is the son of David.

Think about this. Why else would you make that journey in the third trimester? They didn't have cars back then. They were compelled to make the journey by the decree to register.

[3 : 55] This is Luke's way of saying this, this too is a sign that God gave that Jesus, the son of Mary, is that one, the Messiah. While they were there, Mary and Joseph, 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 guest room available for them.

Evidently, the little town of Bethlehem had become a bustling place with the influx of travelers who had come to register for this census.

And in the bustle, Mary and Joseph had been unable to get a guest room of their own, whether at the local inn or with family. And so they ended up in a stable or a barn or something like that.

That's the place for a manger. This is surprising, isn't it? The bed of the newly born king.

[5 : 09] God's chosen king was a feeding trough for animals. A dirty and despicable thing.

A thing gnawed on and drooled on by animals. Can you imagine laying your child in a dirty feeding trough?

Because that's the best there is. That's all you have. Can you imagine thinking the thought, at least he's off the ground.

God chose the humblest and lowliest of circumstances for the birth of his son.

The one who was to become the greatest of kings. And we wonder, why? Luke doesn't really tell us why here, beyond because there was no guest room available for them.

[6 : 22] He just sort of carries on with the story. But there are some other thoughts that we could think, places we could look in the scriptures for an answer. One thing we may notice is that God seems to have deliberately arranged the story of his son to pattern the life of his forefather, King David.

Could it be that this is done intentionally to confirm that he is the Messiah? The parallels between David and Jesus are striking.

Both from Bethlehem. Both start in poverty. Neither born to nobility. Both are raised up to the throne by God.

And for both, the path to that throne goes through tremendous suffering and affliction from enemies. And yet, God delivers both from their enemies.

And he uses both to give deliverance to his people from their enemies and to give them peace. And of course, in all these parallels, David is the lesser and Jesus, the son of David, is the greater and the ultimate.

[7 : 50] And so if this is God's intention and plan, if he's doing this on purpose to show something about his son, the manger in Bethlehem makes a little more sense, maybe.

That's where David was from, too. That's the kind of humble and lowly beginnings that he had, too. This reminds me of what Mary said in her Psalm of Praise, which we looked at a couple weeks ago, back in chapter 1.

She praised God, the Mighty One, because he is a God who has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble.

We talked a couple weeks ago about how this was one of God's signature moves. He loves to exalt and raise up and lift up the humble and lowly.

And as we ponder that signature move of God, the thing that he has done all through history with so many people, is it a surprise that he will do it this way again for his son, the ultimate king, from a manger in a small town to the throne of heaven and earth.

[9 : 14] We'll talk more about this later. Let's continue to listen to Luke's telling of how things went. Verse 7, And she gave birth to her firstborn son, her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them. 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. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid.

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, 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 heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

[10 : 38] While the circumstances of Jesus' birth are lowly, his birthday did not go unmarked or unannounced. And this announcement is quite spectacular.

It starts with one angel, a single angel, suddenly appearing to some shepherds who are out in the fields near Bethlehem at night.

And Luke describes in detail the spectacle. This angel of the Lord is suddenly there before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

this angel, it would seem, was radiant. He was lighting up the night and the area around all these shepherds with the brilliant light of God's glory.

And the response of the shepherds in that moment was terror. In the literal phrasing of Luke long ago, they feared a great fear. Can you imagine this?

[11 : 45] You're out there in the dark with nothing but the light of the stars, perhaps the moon. And then in an instant, you're blinded by this brilliant light shining at you and all around you.

And your heart begins to pound and your knees grow weak. You're frozen with fear trying to figure out what's happening. and then out of the brightness, this being speaks to you.

Do not be afraid for behold, I bring you good news. And this good news is going to bring great joy for all people.

people. And what is the news? Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord.

What does the angel want them to know about this child? We notice a few things here. First of all, notice the emphasis, today in the town of David. There it is again.

[13 : 12] But aside from that, three things the angel wants them to know. First of all, a Savior has been born. What does that word mean?

Means he is your deliverer. A deliverer has been born born for you. And we talked about this title of Savior a little bit in the past few weeks and about salvation.

The shepherds don't know this yet, what kind of a Savior he's going to be. But the rest of the story as we keep going through Luke and on into the rest of the New Testament reveals it. He will be the ultimate Savior.

He will be the one who delivers us from all of our troubles and from all of our enemies. He will be the one who saves and delivers us from our guilt, from the punishment that we deserve because of our sins.

He will even be the one who saves and delivers us from death itself. A Savior has been born to you.

[14 : 23] And who is this Savior? Let there be no doubt. He is Christ. We talked about this a little bit on Friday evening.

That's the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah. It means anointed one. He is that one. Let there be no doubt. This child born to you today is the king of God's choosing for his people.

The one promised, the one prophesied, the one that you've been waiting for. And third, he is Christ the Lord.

What does it mean that he is Christ the Lord? Up until now, that title, the Lord, has been only used once in reference to Jesus in Luke's gospel.

Maybe you remember, several months back, Elizabeth called Mary the mother of her Lord. And we don't really have lords in our culture today like they did in days long ago, but the inherent idea is master or ruler.

[15 : 37] One who has authority over his servants or his subjects or his household or his city. Interestingly enough, the Hebrew equivalent, Adonai, was used in place of the name of God by Jews for centuries before this.

And they did this out of reverence for God's name. In the scriptures, as they would copy them, they would actually have the letters of God's name, Yahweh, the consonants, but then they would put the vowel points of the word Adonai to remind anyone reading the scriptures not to say his name out of reverence for his name.

So instead they would say Lord. And so Lord was very much a name and title of God as well. It's unclear here whether the angel means to say that much.

This is Christ, Yahweh. It's going to come out later though. Or does he want to put the emphasis on the fact that he is going to be the master, the ruler, the one in authority over all.

These are the three things the angel wants the shepherds to understand about this child born to them in the nearby town. He is a savior for you.

[17 : 01] He is Christ, the Messiah. He is your Lord. And with that the angel gives them the sign, the key thing by which they might find him and identify him in Bethlehem.

And the sign is two things. A baby wrapped in cloths. This language was used to describe the swaddling of an infant in strips of cloth.

And that was a fairly common thing. And so this part of the sign is probably only signaling to the shepherds that you're looking for a baby that's brand new. How many babies had just been born in the small town of Bethlehem?

That would narrow things down a lot. But then the second thing to look for, you will find this swaddled baby lying in the manger.

The feeding trough. That's the thing Luke mentioned earlier. It shows the lowliness of his birth and it becomes the sign for the shepherds. How many newly born babies in the town are lying in a cattle trough?

[18:16] only one. Then it gets even more spectacular. A great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth.

glory to glory to glory to glory to glory to glory to glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth.

Peace to those on whom his favor rests. glory to man. This declaration speaks of the worthiness of God.

May he be worshipped, acknowledged, praised, given glory in the highest heaven, the highest place where he is. And it also speaks of God's peace and favor to humanity.

[19:35] Through this child now born, God is offering peace to man. God is showing grace, his favor to mankind.

Can you imagine hearing thousands of angels chanting this? What an awesome and spectacular moment that must have been. The greatest birth announcement ever made for anyone.

God declares it into the silent night. And yet here again we're left to wonder. The most spectacular birth announcement. The greatest news given to who?

Some sheep herders in the hills. Again we see God choosing the lowly and even the despised.

Shepherds in that day were considered to be of very little social standing. They were often looked down on with contempt. Why break this news to them and only them?

[20:52] When the angels had left them and gone into heaven the shepherds said to 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 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 heard and seen which were just as they had been told.

So the shepherds it seems waste no time in going to find the newly born Messiah. I would have loved to have been in their company in that moment and just hear some of the things that they were saying as they thought this through.

The angel told us you will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. I think we should go and find the baby.

[22:06] I think we're supposed to do that right now. Why not? Let's go. And they head into town.

Luke tells us they found him exactly as the angel had spoken lying in a manger. Verse 17 is in my opinion likely one of the most misinterpreted verses in Luke's account.

what many people see in these verses is that the shepherds went and saw Jesus and then went out into the town and began spreading the word of what they had been told by the angels about the child to all the townspeople.

And all the townspeople were amazed and then for some reason we go back to Mary who pondered the happenings of the night and then we go back to the shepherds who then returned to their flocks praising God for all they had heard and seen after an evening of door-to-door evangelism.

And from this have come all kinds of interesting embellishments about how the shepherds ran through the town knocking on doors with giddy excitement proclaiming the Messiah's birth. And look how excited and eager they are to share the news of Christ's birth and so how much more should we be too?

[23:27] I have a different take on this verse than many and you can take it or you can leave it for whatever it's worth to you. But I think it makes much more sense of the flow of Luke's account here and the key word here I think is in verse 17 that word spread.

When they had seen him they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. In English the word spread carries the idea of taking something around all over the place and so it's no surprise that we've kind of come to that imagining that I just described.

But the original word here doesn't have that connotation at all. Quite literally it would be more like and having seen they made known they revealed concerning the words which had been spoken to

them about this child.

So the shepherds arrive and after seeing the baby lying in the manger they make known they reveal what they heard concerning this child from the angel. Make known to who?

Reveal to who? I think that verse 19 speaks of Mary treasuring up all these things because the shepherds are still there with her.

[24 : 47] They made it known to her, to Joseph and to others who had perhaps gathered with them. And all who heard it, are amazed.

Like this child here is the Messiah. You saw angels that told you that this child here is the Messiah? No wonder they were amazed.

No wonder they were astonished. Mary and Joseph were probably the only ones there who didn't think that sounded crazy. You guys think that this baby right here is the Messiah?

Messiah. But it wasn't crazy to Mary. She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

She knew who her baby was nine months before this moment when Gabriel told her who he would be. This was just more confirmation.

[25 : 47] This made it even more precious to her. And then after the shepherds visit and make known what they had heard and seen, they return to the fields, praising God along the way.

Imagine that you were there in that moment with Mary and Joseph. You stumbled upon this, not intentionally, but here you are. There's this couple in a stable. There's this baby in a feeding trough. congratulations on the birth of your son. And then all of a sudden these shepherds stumble in and they start talking about how they just saw angels and that this child is the Messiah.

Would you believe them? most of us here recognize and believe what the angel said that night about this child, that he is the Savior and the Messiah and the Lord.

Maybe you're here though this morning and you haven't believed that or haven't embraced this. I wonder, is there something holding you back?

[27 : 20] what's keeping you from fully embracing Jesus as your Savior? That child born that night as your King, as your Lord?

There's one question I couldn't shake this week as I was thinking through all this. Why did God choose a manger? why did he select shepherds to receive the great announcement?

I was reminded of what the Apostle Paul said to the church at Corinth and I'll just read these verses for you from 1 Corinthians chapter 1. The Apostle Paul wrote this.

He said, for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential.

[28 : 36] Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are.

Why? So that no one may boast before him. God had a great purpose in choosing and using despised and lowly things and people so that no one may boast before him.

To shame the wise of this world. Those who are wise in their own eyes. Here it is again. This is God's signature move.

He's using the lowly and the humble and the weak to humble the proud and the mighty and the strong. God chose a manger and shepherds in part because that's the last place that the proud and the wise and the influential and the powerful would look for a king, for a savior.

[30 : 10] God is worthy of praise. He's worthy of praise. He's worthy of praise and glory and exaltation for his true wisdom and power and strength and that's God himself.

The one who gave us life. The one who brought us into being and it's a difficult thing to accept but this is the truth that's said through the whole Bible. We are not the center of the universe.

The world does not revolve around us. It rightly revolves around him. He is at the center of everything and it's a good thing.

For us to boast in ourselves, for us to think highly of ourselves is a spiritual violence against the one who truly deserves all glory and honor praise and acknowledgement.

And so what does God do? He humbles the proud by choosing the lowly, the despised, and the weak to accomplish his unsearchable plans.

[31 : 28] Even his plan to save, it comes through a nobody girl from Nazareth. it comes through a feeding trough in a small town.

It's revealed to sheep herders. It comes through a cross. It's carried forward by fishermen and a former tax collector.

This is God's signature work of power on display. That's where it starts, but it's not where it ends. God's plan will take Jesus from the manger to the throne.

It will take him from the cross to the empty tomb. It will take him from earth to the heights of heaven. His first coming was lowly and meek, seen and known by only a few.

But his second coming will be glorious and powerful and every eye will see and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[32 : 41] This is God's way. I love the news that the angels brought. God's offer of peace is here.

Salvation has come and yet only those willing to humble themselves go to the stable and bend their knee before the child in the feeding trough will receive this peace and salvation.

I think the question it brings us to had we been there and even today will you humble yourself to worship this king?

will you embrace the seeming foolishness of all this to believe in his name?

Will you give him the honor and glory that he deserves though the world doesn't see it? There is only one among men who is worthy the Christ our Savior our Lord.

[33 : 55] Let's pray. Father in heaven many of us love these words and believe them with all our hearts but for anyone who may not Lord we pray and ask that faith would be found in their hearts not just in this room but also in our community Lord we all need you we all need your salvation you are the king that our hearts truly desire we grow dissatisfied with government and bureaucracy and politics and all this stuff because our hearts long for the perfect true justice real peace decisions made and righteousness that really work and one day we cling to that promise that you will provide that when your son returns to reign blessed be your name amen up

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