

She Gave Birth To A Son

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 December 2021

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Please turn with me again to Luke chapter 2, Luke chapter 2 and verses 1 through 7.

First of all, let me apologize that I'm going to keep my right hand in my pocket. I have a frozen shoulder and I can't really use my right arm very well. So you'll forgive me if I don't shake hands and I'm not as animated as I usually am.

I'll try and use my left hand instead. Luke chapter 2 verses 1 through 7. In those days a decree went out. Well, for sure this has been a very strange year indeed.

Perhaps it's because I'm getting older. And they say that time passes far more quickly when you're older than when you're younger. But it seems only yesterday that we were all making ready for our Christmas preparations for 2020.

So for the Glasgow City folk, you'll remember we put up our Christmas tree in the sanctuary. And we enjoyed a very brief respite until a new spike in COVID cases brought us to another lockdown standstill.

[1 : 09] So we do hope for a better festive season this year. Definitely not the same as last, although that doesn't seem very likely. We are so thankful as Christians, are we not?

But some things never change. Some things stay the same. Same joy that we experienced in the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ last year.

We shall experience this year. Same fusion of love and hope in the incarnation of the Son. We experienced last year.

We shall again experience this year. Light has come into the world. It has overcome the darkness, not in some kind of solemn victus pagan ceremony, but in the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah.

If you are searching for love, for joy, and hope this Christmas, don't hang on to the latest government announcement.

[2 : 19] Rather go back 2,000 years to a stable in Bethlehem, when a baby was born whose life, death, and resurrection will go on to change the world forever.

Well, in these verses, we read the account of his birth. What Luke has chosen to include and exclude from our passage are highly significant for our purposes, especially if our purpose is this Christmas to find joy, hope, and love in Christ.

Let me suggest, by way of preparation for this festive season, although for some of us, for most of us, I'm sure it's well on its way already, we understand these verses under four headings.

A humble child, a kingly child, an expected child, and a blessed child. Let this preparation be one of a Christian who, together with Luke, celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ.

First of all then, let's look at a humble child. Jesus, the humble child. Now, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts comprise one book.

[3 : 37] The Gospel of Luke is the first chapter. Here, the Book of Acts, is the second chapter. The Gospel of Luke focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles focus on the life and ministry of Jesus in the early church.

But really and truly, they are one book, written by one author, with extremely similar language, words, and themes. Now, the Gospel of Luke begins in a small village just outside Jerusalem, with an old couple called Zechariah and Elizabeth.

It's a very Jewish setting, with Jewish prophecies and Jewish ceremonies. The Book of Acts, Acts 28, ends in the great city of Rome, the capital of the world.

Acts records the story of the expansion of the kingdom of God from its very humble beginnings in Jerusalem to Rome, the greatest city in the ancient world.

Now, both Luke and Acts are written to the early church. The early church was made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. And Luke's primary purpose in writing Luke Acts is to demonstrate that God's intention was always the salvation of sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles, that that salvation should be extended to all the nations of the world, that there are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God, but that Jewish and Gentile Christians are of equal value in the eyes of God and of equal standing, therefore, in the church.

[5 : 34] Of the four Gospels, Luke is the most Gentile in flavor because the writer wants to reinforce the church's place in the world of the day.

A church for all kinds of people, made up of all kinds of people. So for that reason, Luke is at pains in this chapter to include historical events and historical people.

Caesar Augustus was the grand-nephew of Julius Caesar and according to classical Roman history, was the first of the Roman emperors proper.

He was the most powerful man in the world of his day. From all we know, everything he said was law. You want to find out more about Caesar Augustus?

Check out Wikipedia. The most famous of all the Roman emperors, the most powerful man in the world, raised in palaces, seated on a throne of gold.

[6 : 39] And then you have Quirinius in verse 2, the governor of Syria, again, a very powerful man. The Syria spoken of here is not the nation-state of Syria as we know it today.

It was a Roman province which transcended national boundaries. He was the face of Roman military power in the region.

At his beck and call, an imperial legion would march against the enemies of Rome. He held the power of life and death in his hands.

And behind him was the even greater power of Caesar Augustus himself. So you have Caesar Augustus, the most powerful man in the world, and Quirinius, the most powerful man in the region. And then you have an imperial edict. A register should be taken of every single male in the entire Roman Empire.

[7 : 46] This would have been for the purposes of taxation and also for fitness for military service. In the world of the day, it was the most wide-ranging and most authoritative of all the edicts.

Everyone had to comply on pain of death. death. So here you have powerful empires and powerful kings and powerful policies.

This is where Luke 2 begins. With historically earthly power. Military power. Economic power. Cultural power. Social power. And then in the very same breath that you read the names of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius and Quirinius governor of Syria, you've got the birth of a small child in a small village in the Roman province of Judea.

Child who doesn't belong in royal palaces or government houses, but in a stable. not surrounded by courtiers and servants and lackeys, but by an adoring young mother and father.

[9 : 07] And that's all. You know, the scenes couldn't really be any different from what they were. You have the high and the mighty Roman Empire and then you have a little baby in a manger in a stable.

And tell me, yet, out of all these three characters I've mentioned in this passage, which has gone on to have the greatest influence in the world? Which of them?

The answer is Jesus Christ. The humblest, the most anonymous of them all. This is always the way it is with the kingdom of God.

He chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the things that are weak in this world to shame the strong. Compared to the worldly power of Rome's laws, armies, rulers, what is this child in that manger but the weakest of the weakest of the weak?

But through this child the world shall be forever changed because, amazingly, the kingdom of God is built on the humility of God himself.

[10 : 27] God who contracted himself to a human span, to the dimensions of a human baby. This is pure gospel.

The rejection and repudiation of human strength, the embrace of divine weakness, the rejection of Caesar Augustus and the embrace of Jesus Christ, the victory of love, the triumph of compassion, the rout of golden crowns before the wooden cross of a savior through whose wounds were healed. and the child, born in anonymity, will live in ignominy and he will die in humility upon a cross.

Tell me today, in which of these figures shall you put your trust? Shall you put your trust in the proud Caesars of this world who reign today but tomorrow lie lifeless in the grave or disgraced in the media?

Or will you place your faith in this humble child who on the third day rose from the dead to reign in infinite power on the throne of his father in heaven, reign marked by humility, understanding, love, and grace?

[12:04] Jesus, the humble child. But then secondly, Jesus, the kingly child. Jesus, the kingly child. Well, Luke, more than any of the other gospel writers, wants to establish Jesus' family lineage.

Remember, the fulfillment of divine promise is an important theme in both the gospel of Luke and in the book of Acts. So, family lying was really, really important to him.

And so, in verses 3 and 4, Luke describes the history of Jesus' family. Every subject of the empire had to return to his hometown to be registered.

So, Joseph took a very heavily pregnant Mary from Galilee in the far north down to Bethlehem, the so-called city of David, because, as we read in the text, he was of the house and lineage of David. Now, you will know that David was the greatest of all the kings of the Old Testament. Under his government, under his reign, Israel became a proper nation for the first time, a nation to be reckoned with politically, militarily, and socially.

[13:24] The flag of Israel, even to today, contains the star of David, a statement both of Israel's proud past and a wish for Israel's future prosperity.

Whether in first century BC, Judea, or in 21st century AD, Israel, as you meet Jews walking around the streets, Jews return, Jews yearn for return to the glory days of King David.

Jesus Christ was descended from the house and the line of the greatest of all the kings of Israel. His veins ran with the noblest of human blood.

In the Israel of Jesus' day, the Messiah was called the Son of David. You see that in Luke chapter 18, verse 38, where a blind man calls out Jesus.

Son of David, have mercy upon me. It was commonly thought that the Messiah would not merely be born from the line of David, but that he would reign as an even greater Davidic king than David ever did, liberating Israel from the Romans, making Israel greater than it had ever been before.

[14:47] And you see, even Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, thought that way. A couple of weeks ago, we looked to the song from verses 67 to 80 in chapter 1, when in verse 69, he talks about God having raised up a horde of salvation for Israel in the house of his servant David.

You see, Zechariah knew that the Messiah king would spring from the family line of David, the baby born in the city of David and laid in David's manger would be a king of David's line.

And then what clinches this argument for us, the prophecy of the angel Gabriel to Mary, the mother of our Lord, back then in chapter 1, verse 32, he says to her, child you will bear will be great and will be called the son of the most high and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.

You're hearing it from the mouth of the angel himself, that child born in the stable in Bethlehem was born to be a king, a king greater than David because the kingdom of Jesus will extend to every place and run on to every time.

This child may be humble, but at the same time he is a greater king than David, than Caesar Augustus, than Quirinius could ever have aspired to be.

[16:36] In fact, he will later be called the king of kings and the lord of lords. And before him, all of us must bow.

If you would bow before such an emperor as Caesar Augustus, then surely you'd bow even lower before the king of Caesar Augustus.

The manger was not made of gold, and Jesus' infant head was not crowned with diamonds. But as his disciples will praise him, will worship him, and will serve him as our king.

Jesus, the kingly child. Well, thirdly, we have Jesus, the expected child. Jesus, the expected child. There's a rawness and a realism about the birth of Jesus here. His conception was miraculous, but his birth was really very normal, very normal indeed.

[17:47] The pregnancy took around nine months, the same kind of time it takes for us. And then as we read in verse 6, while they were there, the time came for her to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, there's nothing

mysterious, there's nothing supernatural about the pregnancy of Mary itself, nor the birth of Jesus. Her pregnancy progressed like every other mother's pregnancy progresses. The birth of Jesus happened nine months or so after the conception of Jesus.

He was born in the normal way, and just as every other Jewish mother of the day would have done, immediately wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Now, we might have supposed that by virtue of his being a doctor, Luke would have gone into more detail than he did. But this is really as much as Luke wants to tell us.

The baby reached a term, the baby was born. It's all so very normal, also very usual, also very expected.

[19 : 07] There's one born every minute, so they say. It is not that the birth of Jesus is unimportant. It is that the birth of Jesus is unimportant.

It's not that it's not unusual. There's a baby born this way every few seconds on our planet. It's normal, it's usual, it's expected.

The point is, he was born like every one of us. There was no difference. This is the kind of humble king we serve and worship and follow, a king who is like us in every way, even down to the details of his birth.

He was born the way we are born, and he lived just like we live, and he died just like one day we all will die.

He is the king of kings so far above us in every way, and yet he allowed himself to be subject to the indignity of human birth. He lowered himself to be the anonymous child of an anonymous mother.

[20 : 23] Do you want to know how Jesus felt when he was hungry? How do you feel when you're hungry? Do you want to know how Jesus felt when he was cold?

How do you feel when you're cold? Do you want to know how Jesus felt when he had a frozen shoulder? How do I feel when I've got a frozen shoulder? This is the glory of the Christian gospel. Though God be far above anything we can comprehend or grasp, his son had a human mind and a human will, human emotions, human feelings.

So we've lived through 18 months so far, nearly, actually, 21 months of pandemic. And we think to ourselves, what does Jesus know about pandemics? Don't you think that in first century Judea, they lived through uncertain times?

Times of pestilence and disease with no ventilators, no antibiotics, and no NHS. And furthermore, because he knows how it feels, he is able to sympathize with us in our uncertainty.

[21 : 38] He is approachable, he is sympathetic. Much has changed in 2021. It has been a strange year, but this has not changed.

Your king, your elder brother, he is still as approachable as he ever was in prayer. He is still as understanding and sympathetic of where you are today as ever he has been.

He is still the same humble king we served, followed, and loved in 2020. The king who is like us in every way and so knows exactly where we're coming to him from.

Not like Caesar Augustus. He never had one day of his life where he had to wash his own clothes or wipe his own nose. He's got slaves to do that for him.

But our king is with us in the day and the night, in the joy and in the sorrow, in the pleasure and in the pain.

[22 : 48] An expected child. And then lastly, he is a blessed child. A blessed child. God. I've always been fascinated, maybe you have also, by how Jesus was born in a stable because, I quote, there was no place for them in the inn.

There was no place for them in the inn. So, the picture is often presented of a hard-hearted innkeeper. And he's turning Joseph and his heavily pregnant Mary away from his door.

Perhaps the innkeeper was grumpy. We don't know. Perhaps Mary and Joseph weren't as rich as other patrons of the inn. They didn't get the honeymoon suite, they got the stable.

Who knows, the text doesn't tell us, and we can't really speculate on how grumpy the innkeeper really was. What we do know is that Bethlehem, because it was the city of David, to which all the descendants of David flooded at this time of census, was probably overcrowded.

Listen, there was no room at the inn, not because the innkeeper was grumpy, but because of the sheer number of people who descended upon Bethlehem at this time.

[24 : 15] Maybe 10,000, maybe more, descending on a small village. So, six weeks ago, we saw hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people descending upon Glasgow for COP26.

They booked out every hotel in the region. Perhaps you have some idea of what it's like. But Glasgow's a huge city.

It could take 100,000 visitors. No bother. Bethlehem was just a hamlet. In many ways, you know, Joseph and Mary were very fortunate to get a stable to sleep in, because the vast majority of people would have been sleeping in the open air.

What's the point of what I'm trying to say? Simply this. David, King David, has a lot of descendants. Thousands. If not tens of thousands of descendants, who claim their family lying from David at the time of Jesus.

[25 : 18] from this one man, David, these thousands of families now claim descent and are descending upon Bethlehem.

There are so many descendants of David, they can't find a place to stay. Now, in the thought world of the Bible, the blessedness of a man was seen in the number of his descendants.

descendants. The blessedness of a man was seen in the number of his descendants. A blessed man had many descendants. A cursed man had none.

And so, if you're reading Luke chapter 2 verses 1 through 7 from a Jewish standpoint, you're saying to yourself, wow, this child Jesus is from a seriously blessed family because there are so many descendants.

And that's the point, is it not? Even though they're no longer the kings that they had once been, David's family line by 4 BC was numerous and thriving.

[26 : 33] And then in roughly that year, 4 BC, another addition is made to David's family line. The baby Jesus is born in a stable in Bethlehem. Surrounded perhaps by thousands or ten thousands of his relatives sleeping in the streets.

But you know, for as many as David's descendants there are or there were, their number will be eclipsed and is being eclipsed by the sheer magnitude of the followers of his great grandson, Jesus Christ.

Jesus had no physical descendants because he bore the curse of our sin upon the cross. But his followers are numerous and thriving.

So many indeed that the heavenly Jerusalem is described in this way. There's a great multitude there. No man can number them. And they're taken from every nation, from every tribe, and from every people, and from every language.

For as many descendants David has, Jesus has infinitely more. And the number is growing today. Men and women, boys and girls, from every nation, tribe, language, and people who are putting their faith and trust in him, our humble king who having been born in Bethlehem, gave himself some 33 years later to take our sins away and make us new people.

[28 : 09] The descendants of David were by genetic line, but the descendants of Jesus are by spiritual faith. So this brings us back full circle to the beginning.

The early church to which Luke is writing is made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Both groups must live together as one, relying for their unity not upon a shared genetic background, not upon a common line of descent, but upon their one faith, which transcends national boundaries. Their faith in a humble king who is universal and eternal. And I'm so thankful this Christmas that nothing has changed about this Jesus.

Jesus, he is still the same humble king you can approach person to person, who though he is greater than the greatest of the great, understands you, knows you, sympathizes with you.

he invites you, as he invites me, through his word to come to know him today. He invites you to believe in him, to place your faith and trust in him, to become one of that great multitude of his spiritual descendants.

[29 : 44] If you're searching for love and for meaning, for hope and for significance, this Christmas, do not hang upon the latest government announcement.

They know about as much as we do. Believe in the Jesus born 2,000 years ago in a stable in Bethlehem, but alive right now and right here to love you, to forgive you, to change you forever. Let us pray. Amen. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for this marvelous account in Luke chapter 2. This account which seems very sparing us to the details of Jesus' birth and yet sparing because this passage wants us to look at Jesus, not the obstetrics, but the honor we owe to Jesus as our King and our Lord, so much greater than the honor we owe to the Caesar Augustuses of this world.

Lord, we thank you that he understands us and sympathizes with us. We thank you that when we come, we have a friend who sits closer than any brother.
And Lord, we pray that every one of us today, from the youngest to the oldest, would know and love him, and serve and follow him. Amen. good him good