

The Event of Christ's Birth and Our Response

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: 24 December 2021

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Now, Christmas.

Christmas is perhaps the most important and anticipated time of the year. The law around it is unrivaled, I think, by any other holiday in our society, in our culture.

I think this is pretty much universal in Christian countries or in countries where there's a majority of Christians. Now, I think even in non-Christian countries now, Christmas is a huge holiday.

We start preparing months in advance. We have a whole category of songs for the holiday, which radio stations start to play incessantly from November.

[2:15] Right? Right? We have totems and legends built around this holiday that engages all our senses. Mistletoes, Christmas trees, garlands, helps, eggnog, peppermint mocha, logs over the fireplace.

Is that already evoking, right, the season to you? All these things are lovely. I personally love them. Christmas is my favorite holiday. And these are some of the reasons, the things I've listed, some of the reasons I particularly love this time of year. Except for the incessant Christmas songs.

I don't like that one so much. But have you noticed how the main event of Christmas is often overlooked?

And by main event, I don't mean Santa coming down the chimney to deliver your gift. You might be forgiven if you think that is the main event of Christmas. But it is not.

[3:30] The birth, over 2,000 years ago, of a baby boy in the town of Bethlehem is the main event of Christmas.

It's the reason for the season to be cliché. But how often does all the other things that we've just named, all these other things, good things in and of themselves, how often do these things that we've mentioned drown out this main event in our mind and imagination during this time of year? Well, this is our task this morning to examine closely the event of Jesus' birth. And its interpretation as given by Luke.

And this is why I particularly like this Luke passage, Luke chapter 2. I want us to first notice the backdrop of Christ's birth.

There are two seemingly powerful wills at play here, as Luke starts this chapter 2. There's the will and command of Augustus, emperor of Rome, ruler of the known world.

[4:44] And then there's the will and divine purpose of God from eternity past. Of course, we know that God's divine purpose is supreme and more powerful than that of Augustus.

But I don't think that would have been obvious to the people around in those days. It might not even be as obvious to Mary and Joseph. In truth, I think we are very much like them, if we're honest with ourselves.

How easy it is for us as well to lose sight of God's promises and will as revealed in the Bible. How easy it is for us to lose sight of God's continuing saving acts in and through His church and even in history.

If you take the time to look through the internet or the newspapers or the TV news channels, very rarely will you hear the mention of the birth of Jesus and its importance for the world.

Very rarely. In fact, I'm willing to wager that you likely will go a whole day, a week, listening, looking around to all these news agencies.

[6:06] They will never speak of it. And don't mind you, there's many talks. There are myriads of talks in this time about Christmas. We talk about Christmas incessantly.

But we rarely talk about Christ. And this is an indictment all around. It's not particularly to one side or the other.

It's an indictment all around. Sometimes even an indictment of the church and Christians themselves. There's nothing sacred about this season in our imagination anymore. We've hollowed out. We've hollowed it out of its true meaning. We've reduced a sacred event to a purely secular one. Even worse.

Even worse. We've used it. The event of the birth of Jesus Christ. We've come to use it in recent years to score points against those who we consider our enemy.

[7:06] This is why Luke's account that we read this evening. This is why it reminds us. This is why it's so important.

It reminds us of the meaning and importance of the event. As God himself will have us remember it. Luke tells us that in the time of Quirinius.

Who was governor or legate of Syria. This region of Syria includes the region of Judea. In that time according to the will.

And according to the decree of Augustus. Ruler of the Roman Empire. The divine Augustus. Caesar. Son of a God.

Imperator of land and sea. The benefactor and savior of the whole world. Now I didn't make that up. That is how Augustus Caesar was described.

[8:08] In his known world. He was described as the son of a God. As the emperor ruler. Lord of land and sea. Benefactor and savior.

Of the whole world. If that is scandalous in your hearing. It should be. But I want to tell you. There was not scandalous. To the people. At the time. Many saw Augustus as that. Years of civil war. And turmoil.

And Augustus came on the throne. Rome. And became ruler of Rome. And he effected a peace. Throughout the known Roman Empire. By the sword. Right?

But it was a peace nevertheless. A peace. And a stability. So many saw him as that. And his will and his decree. Was law.

[9:05] In all these areas. And so. We have this. This Augustus. And his will and rule. And Joseph. And upon this decree.

To go and be registered for the census. Joseph and his heavily pregnant wife. Journeyed. From Nazareth in Galilee. To go up to Bethlehem. To be registered.

Now just imagine. The inconvenience. Inconvenience is almost. In consequential words. He described. What it would have meant. For a heavily pregnant.

Woman. And a man. To travel that distance. In that time. Over a hundred miles. Up. Mind you that I describe. It's up to Bethlehem.

Right? Bethlehem is even. On a higher plane than Jerusalem. Right? So it's. It's an arduous journey. For them. Can you imagine. Inconvenience. And the imposition. Of this decree.

[10:02] On all the subjects. Of Augustus. Not the least. On Mary and Joseph. Themselves. What would we have done. While we in their stead. Well we know.

What they did. In obedience. To the decree. That went to Bethlehem. Perhaps. Also. Being faithful Jews. They knew.

That the Messiah. Is to be born. In Bethlehem. Perhaps. They recognized. That in fact. They are obeying. A greater decree. Than that of Augustus.

On one level. It is Augustus decree. Yes. But on a truer level. It is the will of God. Being accomplished. And even the mighty.

Augustus. Is a tool. In God's hand. To bring about. His purposes. We know. That this is God's. Divine purpose. Because.

[10:57] God himself. Through his prophets. In the Old Testament. Have promised. That his Messiah. Will be from the lineage. Of David. Even more specifically. The prophets.

Have prophesied. For example. The prophet Micah. 400 plus years. Before this event. Takes place. Prophesied. That the Messiah. Will be born. In Bethlehem. Micah 5.

2 says. But you. O Bethlehem. Of Ephrathah. Who are one. Of the little. Clans of Judah. From you. To which are comfort. For me. One who is to rule. Israel.

This is the prophecy. Of God. Concerning his Messiah. His birth. So. Even the churning. Of time. And the pretense. Of kings. And presidents. Does not.

And cannot. Stop. The fulfillment. Of God's purposes. Do we believe that. As people of God. God's purposes.

[11:55] And God's will. Marches on. Do we rest. In that truth. As the people of God. I think Christmas. Is for the Christian. A joyful reminder.

Of the sovereignty. And the omnipotency. Of our God. And of his Messiah. Jesus Christ. It should be. For us.

At least. That. That much. In the least. And so. We continue. In this story. While Joseph. And Mary. Having been gone. To Bethlehem.

While they were there. In Bethlehem. The time for Mary. To be delivered. Of her child. Came. She gave birth. To a first born son. Luke tells us.

Wrapped him. In swaddling clothes. Laid him in a manger. Because there was no place. For him. In the hymn. By the way. Bethlehem. Bethlehem. Is a tiny. Now.

[12:47] Bethlehem. Is a. A small. Small. Village. Really. By. Modern standards. In present day. Bethlehem. Is. Is about. 7,000 to 8,000 people.

It's quite small. Right. But even at that time. There were probably about. It's a tiny village. It's about 200 people. In Bethlehem. In the time of the first century.

So you can imagine. Everybody coming in. It's very oddly. There's very little room. To begin with. And there's very little room. At the time of the census. Right. And there's a lot to say.

About the summary. That Luke gives us here. Of Jesus' birth. We can clearly see. Even by first century standards. The condition of Jesus' birth. Was extremely humble.

Both by circumstance. Of the overcrowdedness. Of the village. And even by. By the poor status. Of his parents. Joseph and Mary. Of his earthly parents.

[13:46] Jesus could not afford. To be born. Anywhere else. But in a shed. Where animals are kept. But you might say. What of his heavenly father. Surely God.

The supreme God. Could have orchestrated. A more dignified place. For his son to be born. The answer to that question. Is yes. He could have. But God.

Intentionally. Orchestrated. It should be this way. I think it is in keeping. With God's plan. Isn't it? Remember.

As disclosed earlier. In Luke's gospel. When Mary. By the Holy Spirit. In his. In our magnificat. Praises God. What does she say? He is come.

This savior is come. To lift up the downtrodden. And scatter the proud. And his birth. In fact. His whole life. On earth. Shows Jesus' identification.

[14:45] With the spiritually. And physically downtrodden. His birth. Is an example of that. Even right from the beginning. Jesus identified. With the downtrodden. So let's look.

This is. This is. This is. This is a summary. Of Jesus' birth. Right? He was born. In Bethlehem. As prophesied. Of old. And also. By. The circumstances.

Of the decree. Of Augustus. Jesus was born. In Bethlehem. So. Here we have it. Jesus. Is it. Is born. As foretold.

But. But without the accounts. In this gospel. From verse 8 to 20. Without that account. How are we to know. That this birth. Is any different. From any other birth.

Despite the humble nature. Of his birth. I doubt. That Jesus. Is the first child. Born. In such lowly conditions. In fact. I don't think. He's the only one.

[15:43] His only baby. That's been laid in a manger. In all of human history. Very likely not. So what sets this birth apart. From any other.

In all of human history. The Bible. In the following verses. From verse 8 to 20. Really. But it's specifically. 8 to 14.

Gives us. The interpretation. Of the events. Of Jesus' birth. God. In his kindness. And this is a kindness. God. In his kindness. Did not leave us.

Groping in the dark. To find out the meaning. He gives it to us. Himself. In keeping with the theme. Of lifting up the lowly.

As Mary had already prophesied. The good news. Of the birth. Of God's son. The most noteworthy. Event. In human history. Was not disclosed.

[16:39] To rulers. Was not told. To princes. But it was declared. To lowly shepherds. There's something else. I want us to see. In these verses.

God himself. Gives the interpretation. To his great act. Of deliverance. He sent his heavenly messengers. Angels. To deliver the news.

And to tell these shepherds. Of what has happened. Let's look attentively. At the good news. As the angels delivered it. The angel of the Lord. Appeared to them. Luke tells us.

And the glory of the Lord. Shown around them. And they were filled. With great fear. And the angel said to them. Fear not. For behold. I bring you. Good news.

Of great joy. That will be for all people. For unto you. Is born this day. In the city of David. A savior. Who is Christ Jesus. Christ the Lord.

[17:35] And this will be a sign for you. You will find this baby. Wrapped in swaddling clothes. Lying in a manger. And suddenly. There was a multitude. Of angelic hosts.

Praising God. And saying. Glory to God. In the highest. And on earth. Peace among those. With whom. He is pleased. It's almost like. Heaven invaded earth. There's been. At the birth of Jesus. There's celebration. Glorious. Heavenly celebration. In heaven. The plan of God. For the redemption. Of the old world. Or the whole world. The salvation.

Of mankind. Is being. Now. Embarked on. Is being fulfilled. In the birth of Jesus Christ. The one. Who is going to save. Who is going to defeat. The great dragons.

The great serpent. Who is going to win. Deliverance for his people. As being born. The one prophesied. From of old. Heaven is rejoicing. And we kind of. It's almost like.

[18:32] Heaven is rent open. So that these shepherds. Have a glimpse. Of the rejoicing. That is going on in heaven. The angels. Announcement. Especially in verse 10 to 12.

Becomes the focal point. Of the interpretation. Of Jesus' birth. Look at the juxtaposition. Of the darkness. The darkness. That enveloped the shepherds at night.

Look at the juxtaposition. Of that. And. And look at. Look at the breaking forth. Of God's glory. In the appearing. Of the angels. The angels. The angels. The angels. It's like.

The passage. You read in Isaiah. Right? The people who walked in darkness. Have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land. Deep. Of deep darkness. On them. As a light. Shined. You've multiplied the nations.

You've increased its joys. They rejoice before you. This is fulfillment. Of God's prophecy. And you see it here. Being displayed. In the. The breaking forth. Of God's glory. This is the language.

[19:30] Of epiphany. The manifestation. Of a divine. Or supernatural being. I hope you can see. Now. Why it is appropriate.

That the birth of Jesus. Should be accompanied. Should be accompanied. By the angels.

Interpretation. Without this interpretation. We might. We wouldn't know.

The significance of it. Now. It tells us. That this is not like. Any other birth. In the history. Of mankind. It's like. Zechariah's song.

This newborn child. Is the dawn. From an eye. God in flesh. Who will give light. To those. Who sit in darkness.

This. Child. Is the one. Promised. Of old. And look at the. Look at the. Look at the. Angels words. To. To. To the shepherds. In verse 11.

[20:28] For unto you. Is born. Is born. This day. In the city of David. It's very curious. That it didn't say. Unto. Joseph. And Mary. Is born. In the city of David.

A savior. Christ. Who is Christ. The Lord. It says. Unto you. Even you. Shepherds. It's unto you. Even you. Here. Unto you.

Unto us. Because Jesus. Is not a private man. Jesus. Is the. Is the. Is a public man. From his conception. To his death. He was a public man.

His whole life. Is everything he did. Was. Was a public. I don't mean this. When I say. He's a public man. I don't mean that. You know. He's a celebrity. Like. We think of public.

People here. I don't think he was powerful. Many. Many. Augustus never knew him. Right. Quirinius never knew of him. They might have heard of him. But they didn't. Take much account for him. I mean that. His.

[21:23] Life. Was. Lived. For the sake. Of us. For our sake. So that all that he did. And all that he. He. He. He accomplished.

In his perfect obedience. And even his death. Was. Was. For you and I. For all that are in Christ. Right. His perfect holiness. Was.

Has been given to you. His perfect righteousness. Has been given to you. When you come to him. And receive him. His death that he died. Should have been your death. He. He died. So Jesus in this way.

Is a public. Public man. And so this is why. It's appropriate then. For the angel to say. Unto you. Is born this day. He's. For the whole world. And in fact. The you here. Encapsulates. Not just Israel. Not just the Jews. The said shepherds. Very likely. Were Jewish men. But look at the. What Luke has already. Set up for us. The scope. Of.

[22:17] Is. The setting. For telling us. About the birth of Jesus. Was not. Only in the sphere. Of the Jewish world. Luke. Sets it up. In the sphere. Of the known world.

The known Roman world. These are the rulers. Of the world. Right then. But this is the ruler. Now being born. And. The angels. Declared. He has been born.

And they gave them a sign. This baby. Will be. Will be wrapped in swaddling clothes. Lying in a manger. And then. As. As if. Up to now. It was just one angel. Right.

And the shepherds were fearful. It's one angel. And he tells them. Fear not. Right. That's also important. Right. God has come. In flesh. Fear not.

This is significant. God has come. To tabernacle. Among men. Fear not. He has not come. In judgment. He has not come.

[23:14] To. Enact. The desert. Punishment. That we deserve. Upon us. He has not come. Raining. Fire. There upon us. As he probably should have. He has come.

To identify with us. He has come. To be as one of us. Fear not. This is good news. Fear not. And the angels cry.

Glory to God. In the highest. Glory to God. In the highest. Because they know. This is an act of God. At the initiative of God. This is not something.

That we deserve. No one in mankind. No. One group. Or even person in mankind. Deserved this good news. It is God's mercy. And grace. That has brought it about.

It is God's initiative. And it's. To his glory alone. That it accords. But peace on earth. Among those with whom he is pleased.

[24:15] This event. That we celebrate. The birth of our Lord. And Savior Jesus Christ. Is the basis for peace. On earth. I know.

You know. That's the great wish. You know. I don't know if people still do it. In pageants now. When they ask. I don't watch pageants. So I don't know. But I remember. That this is the thing. Right. You know. When you ask. One of the pageant contestants.

What do you wish for? They say peace on earth. Right. There's only one way. There can be peace on earth. Brothers and sisters. It is. The only person that brings peace.

Is the prince of peace. Jesus Christ himself. This is. Our peace is enacted. This is how we have peace. Both with God. And with one another. It is in Jesus Christ.

Christ. And this is the declaration. Of the angels. Peace on earth. Among those. To whom he is pleased. You know. Key word there too. We should. We shouldn't. We shouldn't.

[25:10] We should. We should look at it. Peace on earth. Is only. It's. It's still not. And not everyone will enjoy that peace. The peace is available for everyone. But not everyone will enjoy it. It's only those who come to Christ.

Who are found in Christ. That have access to the peace with God. And peace with man. That Christ offers. This is the. Now. This is the interpretation. Of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That it is. Is it. The birth. Of. God himself. Coming into the world. To live among us. To tabernacle among us. But then.

In verse 15 to 22. We see. Some of the response. In fact. The rest of. This Luke chapter. Would give us. More response. But. In verse 15. We see the immediate response.

Of the shepherds. And. And. And. To this news. And even the response of. Of Jesus' mother Mary. So when the angels had left.

[26:07] He imagined being one of these shepherds. In the dark. Tending your sheep. Lying down. You know. You would just. You would just. The. The. The thing you can't even imagine.

Has just happened. But what did they say. To themselves. Let us go. Let us go. Over to Bethlehem. And see this thing. In fact.

The Greek word there. The thing. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is. Rema. It actually means word. This utterance. That's the word they're using. Let us go. And see this utterance. And the meaning there.

Is. Let's go and see this thing. That these. These angels. Have just. Hurted. Decared. To us. Let us go. See. That this thing. Has indeed happened.

The angel. By God's kindness. Given them a sign. By which they will know. Of this child. Right. You will find a child. Lying in a manger. Wrapped in swathed and clothes. And they did. They came upon him.

[27:04] They see the child. They see this parent. They found Mary and Joseph. And they see the child. When they saw it. Luke tells us. When they saw it.

They made known. Themselves. They themselves. These shepherds. Made known. It means they declared. These same. Again.

The word actually. Is. The same word. To say. Let us go and see this thing. This utterance. Now. The shepherds. Upon seeing. The truth of what angels have declared. They also declared.

The utterance. The same saying. That have been told them. Concerning this child. Who did they declare it to? They declared it to all. The whole village of Bethlehem. And Judea. And anyone that will hear them.

They declared. That the Savior has been born. And all who heard. Wondered. At what the shepherds told them. They wondered.

[27:59] I want to. I want to. Click. Just make a difference. A distinction here. Between. Wondering. At the hearing. Of the shepherds utterance. And. What happens in verse 19.

Mary. Treasured of all these things. Pondering them in our heart. Right. Mary. So far. Mary has been an example for us. Luke has been setting up.

Mary is an example. Of faithfulness. And faithful reception. Of God's word. Faithful acceptance. And surrender to God. This is who Mary has been to. In all of these passages. So far. And. And here as well.

Right. Because. To wonder. Are these marvelous acts. Is not sufficient. Friends. It's not. It is. I mean. You hear it. You wonder.

Wondering is good. Wondering is good. But you must go beyond. Just merely wonder. At the news. You must treasure up. Up in your heart.

[28:54] You must ponder them. You must meditate. On the words. Again. The. The. The. The significance of these things. Is that. The things that they wondered about. Are the utterance. The words.

Do you see. The similarities. Between the shepherds. And the angels. They occupy the same office. They are messengers. Of God. The utterance. Is not their utterance.

That they're. They're sending out. I mean. The shepherds. It was not the angels. It's utterance.

They didn't invent it themselves. It's a declaration. Of what God has done. God himself.

Gave them the words. To utter. The angels. And he gave it now. And the angels. Now. Passed it on. To the shepherds. In the same way. When we utter. And we speak. And we. When we.

When we speak about the gospel. Of Jesus Christ. His birth. His life. And his death. For our salvation. We are. Angels. God's messengers. To the world.

[29:50] We're uttering. We're speaking. Declaring. Making known. To the world. The words of salvation. The good news. Of the gospel. And this is what the shepherds are doing.

They've taken the mantle. From the angels. It's curious that. In most of the. The New Testament. It's. It's almost like. There's a. In. In sort of. Redemptive history. There's a.

There's a. Passing on. Of the baton. In the. All of. All of. Most of the Old Testament. When God. As. Wants to reveal something. To mankind. He sends angels. Very rarely. I think actually.

I'm not sure. But very rarely. Do you see angels. For the rest of the New Testament. The baton has been passed on. To men. Who believe. The promise of Jesus Christ. And women.

Who believe. And treasure it up. In their hearts. And ponder. And believe it. The baton has been passed on. To you and I. We are God's messengers. I want us to see that.

[30:45] This is the response. To the interpretation. Of this good news. How are we responding to it? Are we. Taking on the. The baton. Are we. Declaring the good news. To the world.

And the world needs it. Right. We just talked about. This time of year. Is celebrated. Reveling. But rarely.

Do we actually. Talk about the thing. That actually. Is most important. About it. Rarely. Do we talk about Jesus. Christ. Where do we. We proclaim. Is the gospel of Jesus. Mankind.

All of humanity. Is always. Turned to false messiahs. It's not a new thing. We've always. Turned to false messiahs. Even as the true savior.

The messiah of God. Appears. In our darkened world. Many were still looking. In futility. At pretenders. They were looking. At Augustus. They were looking.
[31 : 42] At other. People will pretend. They were proclaim. That they were the messiah of God. It is still the same today. Many are still looking around.

At false messiahs. But there is. Only one true savior. Of mankind. It's Jesus Christ. Today. Is still the time. Today. Is still the time. To turn to him.

For gracious deliverance. I beckon. I beseech you. If you're here today. And you're hearing. This news of great joy. This good news of salvation. That this God.

Who is God. And I. The creator of all things. Has come. To dwell among us. To be as one of us. To suffer. With you. To identify with you and I.

To die for your sins. So that you can. You can have peace with God. I beseech you. Come to him. Turn to him. He's the only one.

[32 : 37] Who can save. It is only through him. That you can have peace. Today. You still have to. You have time. To hear. To eckon. To the angels voices. Both heavenly.

And earthly angels. The messengers. That God has used. To bring that good news to you. Turn to him. Ye alone can save. And if you're already. In Christ.

If you know him. This time of year. Is a time to marvel. At God's great gift. I didn't.

I was intentional. When I said. This is the most important event. In all of human history. The birth of Jesus Christ. Well I know the cross is coming. But the cross will never have come.

If God himself. Had not identified. As man. Only a man can die. And bear the penalty. For our sins. But only God.

[33 : 32] Can withstand the punishment. And so God. In his mercy came. He has done it. He has accomplished it. But the salvation.

Is still available. For you and I. If you already have it. Will you look to him. Will you rest. In that work. That he has done. We are still. Even as Christians.

Tempted. To look. At false messiahs. We're tempted. To be gripped. By the news around us. As if God. Does not sit on our. Enthroned. In majesty.

As if his purposes. Are going to be dissuaded. By pretenders on earth. We know. In our. In our parish. Some of the news. That have happened. This. This past week. The loss of people.

We loved. To death. Right. This is the. Fact of life. There's the circle. Of life. In death. But. What happened. In the birth.

[34 : 25] Of this. God man. In history. Meant that death. Does not have the final word. It means. It meant. And it still means. That if you are in Christ.

You have victory. Because he has won. The victory over death. He has defeated death. He has secured. Our salvation. So that death. Does not have the final word. Disease. Does not have the final word.

Right. The circumstances. You're going through. Now. The pain. The hurt. It's not. The final. Thing that will be written about you. If you are in Christ. You have security.

You have a security. That transcends. Anything the earth. Can offer you. You have a peace. That transcends. Anything the word. Can give. So rest. In that knowledge. Rest.

In that. In that. In that peace. And salvation. That Christ has. Wrought for you. If you don't have it yet. Come. It's an open invitation. Come to Jesus. Let us pray.

[35 : 27] Lord God. We thank you. For this event in history. We thank you Lord. That. You came and tabernacled among us. Emmanuel. And because of what you've done.

We have been brought out of darkness. Into your marvelous light. because of what you've done we have peace with god because of what you've done we have eternal life thank you lord i pray lord that you will help us to rest in the knowledge of this event in history help us lord to believe it but not only to believe it lord with our words but in even the way we conduct our lives help us to believe it help us that the world will see us believe in it as the people of god and help us lord to be like the shepherds and like mary to believe it and to ponder it and to meditate on it but also to declare it as your angels as your messengers to the world around us help us by the power of the holy spirit we pray in jesus name amen