

CHRISTMAS DAY - News of Great Joy

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[0 : 0 0] can i start off by saying uh merry christmas thank you all two of you that was fantastic you loved try that again merry christmas it's very kind i don't know how early you got woken up this morning i got tapped on the shoulder and then my little daughter did a dance it's christmas it's christmas i hope you had a good morning uh let me pray for us before we look at the bible together let's pray heavenly father we do thank you for this great time of year and we thank you particularly for this day for christmas day the day we remember where you sent your son into the world and father we pray that as we look at this account in your word the bible that you might help us to understand it and give us hearts that will rejoice afresh in it and we ask it in jesus name amen well i thought i'd start with some announcements that i've picked up from other churches uh these are actual announcements that they've made without thinking um and uh they'll come up on the screen so the first one uh the pastor will preach his farewell message after which the choir will sing break forth into joy this is not my farewell message there's no choir here fortunately uh the next one was the stewardship offertory song jesus paid it all some plate comes around no jesus paid it all um next one's my favorite uh the sermon this morning jesus walks on the water the sermon tonight searching for jesus still makes me smile now this morning as we uh heard luke read for us we actually heard three other announcements i don't know if you noticed uh it'd be great if you had your bibles there and you could follow along with me it's page 1026 uh page 1026 uh the first announcement we read here is by the roman emperor himself the roman emperor who was uh caesar at the time which is point one uh verse one so page 1026 luke chapter two sentence number one 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 corinnus was governor of syria and everyone went to their own town to register it says the roman emperor announces a census but by the way luke records his announcement the roman emperor's announcement it actually tells us a few things at first it tells us that this is historical fact we're dealing with notice here we've got the historical details of people of the time so for example luke names who the emperor was it was caesar augustus also known as octavian who was known for his administrative organization of the empire like having a census and so on he also names the person who was at least governor by the end of the census corinnus and these men are in roman history books they are real men they're part of history uh luke in fact has already told us at the beginning of his book that he is basing his account on eyewitnesses he's done research to give an orderly account of what had happened so that we can have certainty you see what we're looking at this morning is not historical fiction in fact that form of genre historical fiction did not exist anywhere in the world for another 1700 years no no luke is telling us that this is historical fact that we're dealing with but i wonder if by the way that luke records the emperor's announcement we learn something else here you see god had promised that he would send a king who would rule forever and this king would be a descendant of king david israel's greatest king and this promised king would be born in david's hometown of bethlehem to show that he was indeed david's descendant and so just before mary is about to give birth to jesus what happens this caesar just so happens to announce a census which sends joseph and joseph and mary back to where bethlehem it's as though luke is subtly telling us that behind the roman emperor and his announcement is an even greater emperor god working to make things happen working to fulfill his promises which brings us to our second announcement luke's own announcement point to verse number four have a look there at sentence number four or verse number four so joseph also went up from the town of nazareth to in galilee to judea to bethlehem the town of david because he belonged to the house and line of david he went there to register with mary who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child while they were there the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her firstborn a son she wrapped him in

cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them. Jesus is born and by the way Luke announces or describes the birth of Jesus. We learn two things at first. It seems that Luke is telling us, announcing to us that Jesus really is that promised king. Notice verse number four again. Luke mentions David twice. Doesn't he just so we don't miss out or get miss the point that Jesus is from the line of David. He is this promised king who is going to come from David's line. Now most children think they're kings. Don't they? Uh, they want to watch TV. Now they want something to eat. Now I asked one of my daughters to go to bed. Uh, the other night and she replied, "No, you go to your bed." Needless to say that conversation didn't end well for her, but their manner often suggests that they think they're kings or queens and that the world revolves around them. But for this child Jesus, he is the king. The world does revolve around him. But notice what sort of king Luke announces him to be. For how does Luke describe his birthplace? You see it's not a palace, is it not a guest room or in an inn, but it's a manger, presumably in a stable which was probably underneath the inn. Now over the years, society has kind of made the manger into a fluffy straw mattress. It has become almost idyllic, a kind of pleasant and peaceful cradle. But this manger was a feeding trough for animals and if it had straw in it, it would have been whatever they could find, dirty and possibly even had remnants of animal saliva on it. This maternity ward for Jesus was not a white, sterile environment. You see it was not the usual place for a king to be born. I mean, can you imagine Prince William, Duchess Kate, they've announced their pregnancy and imagine the baby is born and then they say, "I'll just place him in the feeding bowl of the queen's corgis. He'll be right. Just put him in the dog bowl." It'd be extraordinarily unthinkable, wouldn't it? Yet here is Jesus in the feeding trough. You see Luke's description of Jesus's birthplace in Bethlehem not only announces him as the king, the promised king, it also announces Jesus to be an extraordinarily humble king, one born in humble circumstances, who would rule as a humble king, seeking the welfare of others over himself, even to the point of dying for us. And in case we haven't picked up just who Jesus is from Luke's announcement, it's unmistakable from the angel's announcement. Our point number three, verse number eight. Have a look there in your Bibles at verse number eight 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, understandably. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." He said, "See, an angel appears to some shepherds." Working the Christmas Eve shift, not that they would have known that at the time, and the word angel just means messenger and that's exactly what he has for these shepherds, a message, an announcement, good news. Well, what is this good news that will cause great joy? Verse number 11: "Today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you and he is the Messiah, the Lord. You see the good news is that a savior has been born to you or for you. What's more, this savior is also the long-awaited king. He's born in the town of David and he's called the Messiah or Christ. Both are titles which simply mean king. Anointed king. You see the angels couldn't be clearer. Jesus is the savior, king. But why would this cause great joy to all the people? Well, in verse number 10, where it says, "All the people," the people refers primarily, well, in the first place, at least to the Jews, they were the ones who had been waiting for this promised king who would save them from their enemies, save them from people like the Romans who were ruling over them at the time and oppress them and make them conduct silly, censor-like things, tax them and much worse. In fact, if you look in your Bibles at the bottom left hand corner of the page, so page 10, 26, bottom left hand corner, under the title Zechariah's song, this is what Zechariah sang from verse number 68. It said, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn which from the footnote means a strong king of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he said through his prophets long ago, 'salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.' You see the Jews had been waiting for a savior, king, to save them from their enemies and establish peace for them. That's what we heard about in our first Bible reading. They rejoiced that the day that God would bring about peace and peace would come through a child born unto us. It said, "and the good news here is he is here, the savior, king, has been born. That's why it is cause for great joy. But as Jesus would later make clear, he has come to save them not so much from Roman rule and oppression, but from what put them under it in the first place, that is sin. Now I don't know if you heard about this, but uh, Jesus was supposed to return last Friday. I don't know if you got the memo, the world was supposed to end last Friday. I think you would have heard about that. Of course, the Bible says that no one knows when Jesus will return, but when he does return to judge the world, he will end all physical suffering and oppression, then but not now. You see he's holding off his return, giving people

more time to turn to him uh to find salvation from sin of course this does not mean that we should stop trying to end oppression and suffering now no we should help people as much as we can but these things you see are consequences of living in a fallen world a sinful world you see sin is the real problem and so jesus came first of all to save the jews and indeed all people from sin you see sin is ignoring god and doing what we want instead of what he wants even though he knows what's best for us and we have done that time and time again our kids have this nativity set here it is i think there's a slide on it on the screen so you can get a better look um and uh they love it we pull it out each christmas uh you hit the angel on the head and it makes a nice tune oh that's lovely isn't it let's turn that up i dropped jesus last night too anyway i didn't know not for this morning but anyway and then we get it out at christmas time brings joy to the kids then we pack it away again uh after christmas and i wonder if that's a little bit how we treat god you know uh when we need him when it's convenient we bring out jesus and god we pray to them and then when it doesn't suit we put them back away again or ignore them or do our own thing uh do you think god is going to be okay with that i mean do we think it's okay to ignore god for most of the year and then turn up to church at christmas time and pay our respects do you think he'd be all right with that do we really think that he ought to work according to our timetable what's convenient for us and you know so that we can only do what he says when it suits us even though he's god and we're not do you think he'd be okay with that the bible says he's not in fact the bible tells us that by ignoring god and mistreating him and others we make ourselves god's enemies but but because he still loves us and wants us back as his people he gave his son jesus born at christmas as the savior king born to bring us forgiveness and peace as i said that's what we heard in our first reading for unto us a child is born and he is called the prince of peace in fact that's what the angels sing about in verse number 13 and 14 in your bibles have a look there verse number 13 and 14 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 see jesus was born to bring peace and not a political peace yet but a peace between god and sinners by dying on a cross you see we rightly remember his birth today a humble birth in a feeding trough but his humble birth points to his humble death for he did not die in a clean hospital surrounded by family and friends no he died alone on a rugged cross between two criminals and he did that to pay for our sin you see so that we could have forgiveness and peace you see he came to save people from being god's enemies he came to save ordinary people like these shepherds ordinary people like us he was born to reconcile us to god you see now in a few minutes we'll sing another carol which is hark the herald angels sing most of you will know it i'm sure it was written by a man called charles wesley and the first verse starts off like this i'm not going to sing it for your sake trust me it says hark the herald angels sing glory to the newborn king peace on earth and mercy mild god and sinners reconciled you see charles wesley got it didn't he he understood what christmas was about this savior king you see has come into the world to bring peace between god and us between god and sinners reconciled but how can the shepherds be sure about all this well says the angel in verse number 12 look for a sign the angel says look for a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger and then then you'll know it's true and so that's just what they do have a look at verse number 15 when the angels had left them the shepherds and had 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 and now the town of bethlehem perhaps wouldn't been too far from the fields where the shepherds were perhaps they could have even seen the the glow of the lights of the distance either way the shepherds go to the town and find things just as they were told it says it is true in other words their savior king had arrived and it was and still is jesus and so the shepherds respond by spreading the word and glorifying god and praising him for my 18th birthday my parents announced that they would give me a car that i've been begging for now no need to tell you this was great news of great joy for me uh so when my birthday came my parents presented me with a small box which i thought was the key to my new car i tore off the paper and it was a box but inside was a toy matchbox car it was a joke my dad thought it was hilarious i did not but this announcement recorded here in luke is no joke you see is based on historical fact luke has not

written historical fiction but historical fact you see jesus truly is the promised king which means he is king of us whether we realize it or not and it means that we'll all have to give an account to him one day for how we have lived for how we have treated him and how we've treated others but jesus is also the savior king born to die for us to pay for our sins so that we could be at peace with god which is very good news for being at peace with god means being right with god now and certain of heaven later it means being accepted as part of god's family now and forever it means having god with us now and whatever happens in this relatively short life we have the guarantee of an even fuller life in the next forever this announcement is truly good news which can bring great joy if we believe in jesus for it's only when we believe in jesus that verse 14 god's favor rests on us it's only by believing in jesus verse 14 that we have peace so i can ask you this morning do you believe in jesus do you believe he is real that he really did die for you and rise again have you made him your king put your trust in him for life for those of you who have then you have peace with god now and forever and all those other things i just mentioned but the question then becomes are we who've already trusted in jesus believed in jesus same thing are we responding as the shepherds responded are we doing what we can to spread the word and to glorify god in our lives you know to glorify god by living for our savior king rather than ourselves and does this announcement that the angel made on that very first christmas still bring us great joy more than holidays more than family and food more than whatever it is you were hoping to get this christmas and may or may not have received does it bring you great joy because those sorts of things do bring great joy but none of them can save us from sin and give us peace with god now and forever so can i encourage you as you sit down for lunch in a little while uh to pause for a moment before you eat and as you say grace uh thank god with your mouth as you say grace for jesus and perhaps pause and ponder in your heart rejoice in your heart that because of jesus we can have peace with god we can have certainty of eternity let me finish with a story zach is the name of a little boy i used to teach cre2 uh school scripture that is um he was in prep at the time and i was teaching him scripture for a little while and he started coming to our church and he even dragged his non-christian uh mother along uh his mother didn't go to church and it was towards the end of the year and i was talking with his mother about christmas and she said to me this she said zach is actually more excited about going to church at christmas to learn about jesus than getting any presents i don't understand it here is this six-year-old little boy who's not blinded by the trimmings of christmas good as they are but he was most excited about jesus because he

[20 : 16] knew jesus had been born to die for him six years old his mother actually later became a christian and then she understood it too the humble birth life death and resurrection of our savior king you see is truly good news which brings great joy i pray it will be so for you this christmas let's pray our great god and heavenly father we do thank you for jesus and we thank you that he was born to bring us peace we thank you that this is good news of great joy father we pray that you would help us to remember it this christmas and to rejoice afresh we pray in jesus name amen we're going to sing that carol i mentioned hark the herald angels sing