

CHRISTMAS DAY - The Birth of the Messiah

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00] Please sit down, friends. Now, in order for this particular Bible talk to function properly, I really need a whole set of props, but I'm only going to use one.

I dragged out this particular hat. So, okay. And then I want you to imagine that not only have I got the hat, but I've got the red garb to go with it.

Then I've also got a scroll that unrolls like this. And I also have a bell which I can't ring at the end of this, but you'll get the idea, okay? So here we go.

Oh, yay, oh, yay, oh, yay. On this day, the 22nd of July in the year 2013, we welcome with humble duty a future king, the firstborn of their Royal Highness, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, the third in line to the throne.

And our new prince is the third great-grandchild of Her Majesty the Queen and the grandchild of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. May he be long-lived, happy and glorious, and one day reign over us.

[1 : 17] God save the Queen. It was an impromptu and unofficial announcement by a man decked out as an ancient town crier.

He did exactly that. He just took it upon himself to do it. He rang his bell loudly. He proclaimed boldly. And, of course, the official announcement had actually been made just a little bit earlier. A notice was by email, and a notice was placed on an easel in the forecourt of Buckingham Palace. Of course, the details were soon released via Twitter. Photos were taken.

And before long, the whole world knew. Coins would be minted at this lad's christening. And that is how the contemporary world greets a new and future king.

Grand, isn't it? Overflowing, overwhelming, very thorough. And compare this to when God's king was born. You see, he came in God's way and by God's means, not by human ways and in human means.

[2 : 24] You all know the story, don't you? But it will do us no harm today to remember and rehearse the details in our Bible and our Bible passage for today. You might like to open it up in the newsletter there and just have the verses in front of you.

The reading that we had today comes from the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke. And I want you to look at verses 1 to 3 with me. 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 his own town to register. Now, I wonder, can you hear what is being said in these verses? We are being told of a planned and yet somewhat chance event that had been organised by a Roman governor and that affected Palestine.

And the end result is outlined in verses 4 to 7. Have a look at it. 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 the line of David.

And 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.

[3 : 41] She wrapped him in cloths, placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them. Friends, when you think about it, it is all fairly ordinary, isn't it? If we hadn't read chapter 1 of Luke's Gospel, we'd think this was even more ordinary than it actually is in the context.

But Luke has gone out of his way to indicate this ordinary and humble birth. Let me tell you, there were no town criers for this birth.

No email, no viral Twitter feeds, no photographs and no new coins were minted. Simply a couple who at the beck and call of some transitory human king who thought it was a good time to number his kingdom decided that they must go up to Bethlehem.

Actually, I'm not being quite accurate here. You see, behind these ordinary events in response to the decree of Caesar Augustus, there are some much deeper things going on here.

You see, the random decree of Caesar Augustus caused an incredible event to occur. You see, it caused this couple, Joseph and Mary, to travel from Galilee and the Gentiles up in the north down to a southern city called Bethlehem.

[5 : 01] And let me tell you, Bethlehem is the town of the great King David, Israel's greatest king. It was the place from which the prophet Micah had said future kings would come.

But we know even more than that, you see. You see, if you've been with us in the previous Sundays when we've looked at Luke 1, you would know that this baby that is born on this day is a baby planned by God.

Born at the instigation of God himself. Born of a virgin. Born to be the son of the God most high. Born to be the redeemer of the world. The one whom God called by his prophet, the rising sun from heaven.

The one through whom light will shine on those living in darkness in the shadow of death. The one who will guide, we're told, the feet of humanity into the path of peace.

Friends, I wonder if you can see what I'm saying. The first perspective on this birth given in this passage is that it is a birth in the midst of very ordinary affairs overseen by a very ordinary emperor.

[6 : 08] In one sense, it's nothing unusual. He's going about his business and as a result, this couple go about their business. It is very ordinary. But there is a second perspective here.

And that perspective is that these very ordinary decrees by a very ordinary king are actually divine events. Organised by a divine king who has been planning things from before all eternity.

And through this, he engineers for this child to be born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of future kings. God, you see, orchestrates for his ancient promises planned before the beginning of time to be put into a place on this day, at this time. So that's the second perspective.

A divine event orchestrated by a divine king. But there's more. Did you notice where God's future king is born? Well, let me tell you. He's not born in a palace.

[7 : 10] No, the associations of the words used to describe the place where he is born mean probably a cave of some sort. Or maybe it would have been a public shelter. Or maybe even a nearby animal shelter near that public shelter.

Apparently, wherever it is, there is a food trough there. And it's that that's used as a makeshift cradle by this couple. There they are. They're not surrounded by courtiers.

No, possibly, they are surrounded by animals and filthy straw and animal excrement. And there they are. Can you hear, friends? This king, planned by God, doesn't begin his life in glory, does he? He begins it in humility. A humble boy of humble parents born in a humble shelter, apparently as a result of the whim of an emperor.

But really, as the result of the eternal plan of God. And the note of humility continues. Can you see it there? Look at verses 8 to 12. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks.

[8 : 16] And 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, don't be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy to all people.

Today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He's the Messiah, the Lord. And this will be a sign to you. You'll find a baby wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger. Friends, can you hear what's being said?

Who are the ones who behold this wonder on this day? Who actually sees this? It's not the grand of the world. No, it's shepherds.

Not only is this child born in humble circumstances, he is beheld by the humble. And then again, we're led into heaven as we were with the echoes of the prophet Micah.

And we get God's perspective. You see, not town criers. No, rather, we find that heaven itself announces the glory of this child to a small audience of humble people.

[9 : 19] look at verses 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, in highest heaven and on earth,

peace to those on whom his favor rests.

And then in the closing verses, we return to the theme of humility. The shepherds hurry off. They find Mary and the baby. They spread the word, presumably among their humble kind.

And there is amazement. And Mary, well, she takes these things and she treasures them in her heart and she ponders them. And the shepherds then return full of glory and praise of God.

Let me remind you of what we found here. You see, what we see here on the first day of this child's life is what his life will be characterized for, for its rest.

On the surface, you see, we see a world go on ruled by humans who do their own thing in their own way. A world which seems shaped by great people and great events and great people, those great people apparently shape the world itself.

[10:27] But behind the scenes, God will work through this lad and God will shape this lad and he will humbly, this lad will humbly submit himself to God and his will and his word and he'll do it.

Though you see he is God in the flesh, he will humble himself as a human being and live dependent upon God. He will live his life shaped by God and shaped by God's word and that very word of God will drive this man, this adult, to be obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

His humble start, you see, will end in a much more humble end. The Son of God will be crucified by humans, by those whom he is responsible for their creation.

The created will crucify the creator, as it were. but his very humility will be welcomed in heaven.

As the Apostle Paul later on recounts it, God will exalt him to the highest place and he will give him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[11:51] Let me tell you something else. that something else is that this message will find a welcome in the strangest place or in the strangest places.

It won't be welcomed among the rich necessarily nor among the exalted in the earth nor the powerful but it will be welcomed by the humble and the poor in spirit. This apparent chance event, you see, is not chance.

it is a divine event organised by a divine king. It has a humble beginning and the birth of this baby. It has a humble end in the death of this, of the adult, the son of the most high God and it will be received by humble people who recognise God's work and receive it and it will have an exalted end as all will finally recognise that this humble one is actually God's appointed and eternal king.

So friends, I urge you this day to not be conned by the world and its view of grandeur. The truth we witness at Christmas and we see culminated at Easter is an eternal truth and will you receive it?

Will you welcome it? And will you bow before this God appointed king and humbly receive him? And will you live like him humbly dependent upon God?

[13:20] And will you receive his son and all that his humble obedience has accomplished for you? For friends, it is grand beyond measure. Let us pray.

Gracious God, we thank you that what you have planned before all eternity we celebrate this day, the coming of your son into the world.

And in a few months we will celebrate his humble end as well as he dies in order to be the saviour of the world. Father, we pray today that we would remember him, that we'd worship him, that we'd honour him and that we'd live our lives in humility before him.

Father, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.