

Christ's Coming Fulfilled

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[0 : 00] Our scripture lesson today is taken from the Gospel of Luke chapter 2 verses 1 through 20.

! Luke 2, 1 through 20.! In those days, the decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

[1 : 17] And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, and the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told to them concerning this child.

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasures up all those things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told to them.

[2 : 29] And this is the end of our scripture reading for today. Thank you very much, David. It's a joy for us to be together this morning on this fourth and final Sunday of Advent.

And three days from Christmas, I think it is fitting that this morning's sermon should direct our attention to the biblical account of the Savior's birth.

But from the outset, I must say that I have a difficulty. And it's a difficulty that theologian Michael Wilcock insightfully explains in his preface to his commentary on the Gospel of Luke.

Here's what he writes. If there's one thing harder than to chart a region where the foot of man has seldom trod, it is to produce a worthwhile guidebook to a place that everyone knows already.

I think Mr. Wilcock's words are especially applicable for this familiar account of the birth of Jesus that we come to this morning. I think it's fair to say that all of us have heard it again and again.

[4 : 01] We know it very well. We've heard sermons on it. We've read it ourselves. And so clearly, I need the Spirit's help to say something that would be useful and helpful to us this morning.

So let's take a moment to pray and ask for his help. And specifically asking him to make this old story fresh in our hearts.

that he would give us fresh eyes and open hearts to hear what he would say to us this morning. Father, we bow our hearts this morning and we ask that you would help us to do what we just sang.

Help us to marvel and be amazed afresh at the Son of God who came down in human flesh to walk this earth to live a perfect life that none of us could live than to die a substitutionary death the death that we all deserve to die.

Lord, would you help us to posture our hearts to hear this old story afresh this morning?

[5 : 34] Would you guard us from the temptation of drifting and the temptation of not being attentive? And would you help us, Lord, to do that?

And Lord, I ask that you would help me to bring your word to your people that we would again be reminded of your faithfulness in fulfilling what you have promised by sending the Savior into the world.

Would you speak to all of our hearts now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. For the next few moments, I want us to consider from this account of the Savior's birth three particular aspects.

I want to consider them under three headings. The first is the certainty of Christ's birth. Throughout his gospel, Luke goes to painstaking ends to give certainty about the Lord Jesus Christ so that no one would think for a moment that he was recording fiction.

And Luke, in doing so, shows himself to be a very careful historian in documenting the details of the life of Christ, but in particular, he does so when it comes to the birth of Christ.

[7 : 12] He tells us when Christ was born, he tells us where Christ was born, and he tells us the human circumstances under which Christ was born. Look again at what he writes in verses one to three.

In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and all went to be registered, each to his own town.

So we know that Christ was born during the time of Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor who ruled over much of the world, which included the land of Israel.

We also know that Quirinius was governor of Syria when Christ was born. and biblical historians of those ancient times tell us that this kind of census, this is what the registration was, this type of census, took place about every seven or so years.

And so under this census order of Caesar Augustus, Joseph leaves Nazareth in Galilee, and he travels to Bethlehem and Judea, and he does so because he is of the house of David.

[8 : 37] He takes his betrothed, not his wife yet, but his betrothed. And a betrothal was an ancient practice that was a legal engagement.

You weren't married yet, but it was a legal engagement to be married and so strong that to get out of it, a divorce proceeding had to happen. And here again, Luke is being careful to remind us that Mary was not yet the wife of Joseph.

He does this in verse, in chapter one, I'm sorry, chapter one, where he explains how Mary was betrothed only to Joseph and how her conception was of the Holy Spirit.

It was not by human conception. In verse seven, Luke tells us that when they were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to a child, to a son.

She wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no room in the inn. Now that's the human explanation for why Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

[9 : 54] It was the order of a king that took his mother and father there and why he was born in a manger because there was no room in the inn.

But what happened in Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago, friends, was not just because of human interactions and happenstance.

What happened in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago was by divine initiative. It was by divine design that Christ was born in a manger and in Bethlehem.

Here's the prophecy of Christ's birth in Bethlehem by the prophet Micah in Micah 5, verse 2. Given some 700 years before its fulfillment.

But you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me, one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days.

[11 : 15] So through the prophet Micah, the Lord prophesied that a ruler would come, his ruler was going to come from this little known district, this little known town of Bethlehem.

And by reference, these words that he was from origin of old and ancient days, it's not so much about the person of the one, the word who became flesh, because we know that he is from all eternity, but it's speaking about the promise of the Messiah that was an age-old promise that the faithful saints had looked for and waited for.

And so Christ was not born in Bethlehem because of the census decree of a world leader. Instead, Christ was born in Bethlehem by divine decree of the sovereign God of the universe, who sovereignly worked and caused the human king to order a census to cause his son to be born in Bethlehem.

That is the, that is divine outworking of the sovereign purposes of a sovereign God. That's the ultimate reason that Christ was born in Bethlehem.

and Christ being born in a stable and being laid in a manger was not merely because there was no room in the inn for them.

[13 : 00] It was by divine design. The God of the universe, the one who spoke it into being, the one who is all-powerful and knows no limitation, could have spoken and Christ would have been born in a palace.

He could have created room in the inn if that's where he wanted him to be born. The unlimited God of the universe could have decreed it that Christ would be born wherever he wanted him to be born and he was born where he wanted him to be born.

The sovereign God of the universe determined that when his son was coming into the world that he would be born in a manger, he would be born in a stable and laid in a manger.

And it doesn't take much imagination to take in what that circumstance would have been like. It was the place where they kept the animals.

And we can imagine what the smell of it was, the smell of manure, the smell of urine, the squalor of the place. And Christ was born in that circumstance and Christ was laid in a manger, in a squalid stable, in a smelly manger.

- [14 : 34] and why would the sovereign God of the universe determine that his son coming into the world would be born in those circumstances? Friends, I believe it's because it's a picture of the world that he came into.

And it's a picture of the condition of the people to whom he came. That the most apt circumstance, the most apt description of the world in which he came was one that had the sight and the smell of the squalor of sin.

And Christ came as our substitute. Christ came to identify with us just as we were. And he came in that smelly stable, in that squalid manger where the animals would come and eat their food.

By divine design. Not by human circumstance. And if we think about it, if we were to find ourselves in that circumstance, how difficult that must be, think about the sinless God God, the son, who left glory, who left power with the father to come to the earth willingly and be born in such circumstances.

it helps us to see our condition and helps us to see the extent of the love of God to come to us in the person of his son.

- [16 : 40] And so Luke is careful to give us these particular details. but why is he careful to do so?

Why does he go to such great lengths to starting in chapter 1 where he tells us three times in about five verses that Mary was a virgin?

Why does he go to great lengths to tell us that she was conceived? the conception that took place in a womb was of the Holy Spirit.

The reason is that Luke wants us to have certainty about Christ's birth, that it was a divine act and not a human fiction.

Luke wanted us to have certainty. And yet there are people today who question whether Jesus was a real historical figure.

- [17 : 51] There are those who say that he is a fiction of our imagination. They do not believe that he existed, but Luke has written this account for us so that we might have certainty about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he was a real person who walked the face of the earth, that he was in fact born in Bethlehem.

Luke wants us to have certainty. Do you have certainty this morning? Do you have certainty that by divine design, Christ was born in a nondescript town of Bethlehem in fulfillment of Micah's 700-year prophecy?

Do you believe that he was born of a virgin in a squalid stable and laid in an animal's feeding box? I pray you have this certainty, but if you don't, I pray that you will come to have this certainty because it changes everything.

So we see these specific details of the birth of Christ in verses 1-7 and we see that Luke gives them to us so that we can be very certain about the birth of Christ.

But what does it all mean? When you read these verses just on the face of them, verses 1-7, they just give an account of a child that was born, a child that was born to this woman named Mary.

- [19 : 46] What does it all mean? We find the meaning of Christ's birth in the message of Christ's birth, which is my second point.

The message of Christ's birth was given by an angel. This is now the third time that we see the appearance of an angel in this drama of God coming down in human flesh.

First, the angel appears to Zechariah as he is serving at the temple, telling him, you and your wife who could not have children, you're going to have a son in your old age.

And then an angel appears to Mary and tells her, you are going to have God's son by the power of the Holy Spirit. And now we have an angel coming to shepherds.

Look at what it says in verse 10, starting in verse 10. And the angel said to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

[21 : 05] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. That's the message that the angel gave to the shepherds.

His birth, the angel said, is good news of great joy for all the people. The message is that he is the Savior. He is Christ the Lord.

And the word Christ is not Jesus' last name. The word Christ means Messiah or anointed king. This was the anointed king.

This was the promised one. The long promised, the long awaited Messiah who was to be born. And he's now born in Bethlehem and the angel goes to these shepherds and tells them this good news of great joy.

And then in verse 13, the angel was joined by a multitude of other angels. Look again at what it says. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

[22 : 35] It is quite surprising that the first people to hear this message of good news were shepherds.

And to appreciate how surprising it was, you have to understand about the place of shepherds in Jewish society. Shepherds were considered the lowest class of people in Jewish society.

The only group that was below them was lepers who were outcasts and separated from society because of their disease.

Shepherds by Jewish law couldn't give testimony in court because they were considered to be liars and thieves. They were just branded wholesale of you were a shepherd, you were a liar, you were a thief.

And this is largely because of the life that they lived. They were hired, they didn't own the sheep. And when danger would come and the sheep would need their protection, if their lives were threatened, they would run off and they would leave the sheep.

[23 : 49] And so they were not considered dependable, they weren't considered trustworthy. And the nature of their work was such that it did not allow them to attend the temple or synagogue in any regular way.

They were not religious people. And so they were outcasts, they were the nobodies of that day. And yet, when the sovereign God of the universe decided to have the good news of the birth of the Savior announced, he directed an angel to go to these outcasts, to go to these ones who were on the outskirts of Jewish society, these nobodies, he said to the angels, you go and you tell these shepherds of this good news of a Savior who has been born, a Savior who is the Messiah, the long-awaited deliverer of Israel.

the sovereign Lord chose to send the message to these outcasts, not to the innkeeper, not to the people who were in the rooms that Mary and Joseph could not get into, not to Caesar Augustus and those in his household, but to these outcasts.

And what it helps us to see is a display of the nature of the grace of God. It helps us to see that God's grace comes to the humble and the undeserving.

And I know this morning, I don't think any of us would identify with shepherds and the class of people that they were. But even though we don't identify as shepherds, to receive the grace of God, we must consider ourselves as shepherds.

[26 : 15] That we have nothing to offer, that we are undeserving, and indeed we must see ourselves as we truly are. because even though we may have the outward trappings of shepherds, that we would not be in that outward class as they are, we are all in one class.

We are all in that one class that aptly fit in that scene in which the city was born, that scene of the squalor of sin.

We all find ourselves there, regardless of what we look like on the outside. and it is only when we come to terms with that reality that that is who we are, that we are then able to be recipients of the grace of God.

The apostle Paul said, I know that there is no good thing that dwells in me. And if we understand ourselves and we are honest with ourselves, we'd say the same thing.

No matter what I look like on the outside, no matter how I appear to the world, I know within me there is no good thing, and I am in desperate need of the mercy and the grace of God.

[27 : 32] We must see ourselves as those shepherds were seen. We must humble ourselves if we will receive the grace of God.

The grace of God comes to the undeserving. God will be! God is to God in song. In verse 13, the angel was joined by the multitude of angels, and in verse 14, they praised God in song, in a song which has come to be called the Gloria in Altissimus.

Look again at the song. They sang glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

The words of the angel song again accent the grace of God. And in these words what we see is divine initiative. We see the divine initiative not just with shepherds but towards all those with whom he is pleased.

God's peace comes to those with whom he is pleased. And the implication is clear. He's not pleased with everyone. If he's pleased with everyone, there's no need to say anything in the way that this is said by the angel.

[29 : 04] His peace comes among those with whom he is pleased. God's peace comes to and among those who are the recipients of his grace.

And here we must remember that no amount of human effort, our best efforts cannot please a holy perfect God.

it is only by grace that we can be pleasing in his sight. Only by the sheer grace of God that we can be pleasing in his sight.

And so friends, God displayed grace to the shepherds and it should remind us that no one is beyond the reach of the grace of God.

no matter who they are, no matter how sinful, no matter how shameful, no matter how horrid we and our sins may be, God's grace can reach us and God's grace can forgive us, abundantly pardon us.

[30 : 31] And that's the message and the meaning of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. It's not left up to us to determine what it is, that is what it is.

That God's grace will come to us, no matter who we are, no matter what we have done. He doesn't send for us, he comes to us.

He's come to us in the person of his son, born in the circumstances in which we're in, and he's come to us in the message of the gospel, telling us a Savior has been born, who's Christ the Lord.

God sent. God sent us a We got to see our need in who the Lord sent. God sent us a Savior, he didn't send us a counselor, he didn't send us a teacher to fill our heads with knowledge, but he sent us a Savior, because our souls are in need of saving.

But in the concluding verses, in verses 15 to 20, Luke records the response to Christ's birth. And this is my third and final point. Luke records the response of the shepherds in verse 15.

[32 : 12] Look again at what it says. When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

The shepherds responds to the message was they believed it. They believed it, so they went to see what the Lord had made known to them.

And note carefully what it says says in verse 15. It doesn't say they went to see if those things were true. They believed they were true. The shepherds went to see what the Lord had made known to them.

They believed the message of Christ's birth. And they went and they saw that it was exactly as the angel told them. And in verse 20 we see that the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen as it had been told to them.

Again, the shepherd believed the good news of the birth of Christ and what it meant and they acted upon it and they glorified and praised God for what he had done and what they saw.

[33 : 39] My question this morning is what about you? In particular it's to those who would have heard this story again and again but you've not yet responded like the shepherds did.

You've not yet believed and you have not demonstrated your belief and see this is this is where as we say the rubber meets the road.

The shepherds could have said oh yeah we believe and they could have stayed right there tending to their flock at night but they acted upon their belief. They demonstrated that they truly believed.

To say I believe the message, to say I believe that Jesus came and was born in Bethlehem and that he is the savior of the world. And we have not staked our lives on that.

And that has made no difference in our lives. Friends I'm saying that's not belief, that's not biblical belief. Biblical belief causes us to respond, biblical belief causes us to lay our lives before the one whom we say we believe in.

[35 : 07] We must act upon it. If we truly believe we will act upon this good news that is for all people and we will do so by surrendering our lives to this one who is savior and who is lord.

lord means that we become his servants. Lord means that we live in his service. My prayer for all of us this morning is that we will do this.

Those of you who have done it, you have every reason to be rejoicing in this Christmas season because you have believed that the savior has come into the world and you know the full pardon of your sins.

But for those who have not yet believed, I pray that you will believe. I pray that you will see that you are in need of saving and Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and he makes this promise that all who come to him, he will never cast out, never turn away.

He will receive and he will abundantly pardon. And I pray that if you have not yet done that, that you would do that today. And if you do, like the shepherds, you will be exceedingly glad and you will rejoice in God who has caused you to come to hear and believe this message of good news and of great joy.

[37 : 01] Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for sending your son. We thank you for the grace that is the portion of all those who believe.

Once again, I pray that those of us who do believe will rejoice with great joy and those who have not, oh Lord, have mercy on them. Open their hearts to believe the truth of the gospel.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.