

The Birth Day of Jesus

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[0 : 00] God add his blessing to these readings from his holy word as we consider together Christ's birthday. As you see in the points to follow, we're going to look at the worldwide importance of Jesus' birth. We're going to look at the importance of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, what importance that has, not just for ourselves here, but for the whole world. And the wonder, the wonder of God's purpose, sovereign purpose in sending the Lord Jesus for us. And then, finally, the work of salvation, even seen in that manger there in Bethlehem, Christ's birthday.

And let it never be the case that, you know, the story of the birth of Jesus, let's never be the case that we just somehow take it for granted. You know, we've heard it so often year after year, but let it never be said that we're simply, you know, coming before this part of Scripture, the story of the birth of Jesus, without a true and sincere praise in our hearts. Praise to God for his intervention. Praise God for his rescuing and delivering his people.

And I mean, as we're going to see later on this evening in our Zoom service, if the shepherds who saw Jesus, if they responded by glorifying and praising God for, as we're told in Luke 2, for all that they'd heard and seen us that had been told them, if they glorified and praised God for the good news of salvation in Jesus. Then you who have heard and have seen the good news, you've seen by faith Jesus.

Well, it's for you and for each one of us to come before God with praise in our hearts. Thanksgiving for the gift of the Lord Jesus. Because however many times we hear and read of the birth of Jesus, we should never cease to marvel at the grace of God, the grace of God and sending his Son, God the Father sending his Son to rescue lost sinners such as ourselves. Jesus came from heaven to earth. He came from heaven to the sin-stained world. He came to be the Savior of the world. He came to be born for us, to live for us, to die for us, and to be raised for us. And we will use this time of year as again an opportunity to focus on that first advent of the Savior. And there's no doubt at all that Jesus' birth day was certainly not December the 25th. In fact, the evidence that we, if we look at the various accounts of Jesus' birth, we look at what Scripture tells us, the evidence would suggest, in fact, that Jesus was born at some date in our own autumn time. But we use the opportunities that God gives us, even at this time of year, to remember Jesus' birth and to proclaim Jesus' birth.

And we'll do what the great French reformer, John Calvin, did when he wrote this. He said, I have pursued the moderate course of keeping Christ's birthday. So we're going to take the moderate course of keeping Christ's birthday. We'll do it, I pray, in reverence and joy and seeking God's enabling to really to see wonderful things from God's Word, to encourage your faith in the sovereign God, to encourage your love for God who's first loved you. And yes, as we look again at the birth of Jesus, to encourage you to do so so that your walk with the Lord Jesus, well, is strengthened.

[4 : 06] Because you and I, we're to give ourselves to him who first gave himself for us. So let's turn, first of all, to this great section of Luke's Gospel and see the importance of Christ's birthday, as we notice in the headings, the worldwide importance of Jesus' birth, certainly in the first five verses that we read there. As we said, Jesus' birthday, the actual birthday of Jesus, well, it's not been revealed in Scripture, but certainly the place of his birth is mentioned on a number of occasions, Bethlehem. And that little town of Bethlehem, well, it was in a fairly remote part of the Roman Empire, but it had worldwide importance because it's the place where Jesus was born, and we can't overlook that fact. And look at how Luke sets the scene for us there, even right at the start of chapter two, because Luke sets the scene for us in the context of the Roman Empire, the great empire under the great ruler Caesar Augustus. And that's important to get the context right, because when we think of the timing of Jesus' birth and the importance of Jesus' birth, this happens at a time when this man Caesar Augustus ruled in the Roman Empire. You say, well, what's the

significance? Well, here's this man. He's a man, Caesar Augustus. He's the person that founded the Roman Empire. He's established power for himself. People regard him more as a god than a human being. He was even described as the savior of the whole world. And humanly speaking, at that time, there was no one more powerful than Caesar Augustus. He defeated enemies outside of Rome and inside of Rome. He's got a powerful power base. He's got a strong army. He's built roads across his empire. There's peace within the empire. Trade flourishes. Safe travel across the empire. He's a man of great power. He's even organized this great movement of people so that everyone goes to their hometown in order to be counted, a census, so that the emperor can work out how much tax he's going to raise for his empire, for his army, for his self. I mean, even his name tells of, you know, human-centered majesty, Augustus, an august, a great leader, but yet infinitely greater than Augustus, ruling in his

Roman palace across a vast empire, infinitely greater than that man, is the savior. Born in humble circumstances there in a small town, a little town, to a young, a relatively poor young country girl. And in that little town of Bethlehem, just a few hundred people there in Judea. Judea was considered just one of the outposts of the empire. But there in that little outpost of the empire, our great savior is born. The Lord of lords. The King of kings. The Caesar of Caesars, if you like. So in contrast to that empire, that Roman empire of a limited time span, in contrast to that empire, in contrast to that Caesar, Jesus, the savior of the world, has come to bring in his eternal kingdom. A kingdom in which peoples from all nations, all tribes, all languages, come in by faith in Jesus. See, the birth of Jesus has worldwide importance.

[8 : 01] As John tells us in John 3, verse 16, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. I mean, we're told here in verse 1 that all the world should be registered. The world is mentioned in verse 1.

But that entire Roman world is just a drop in the ocean compared to the kingdom that Jesus brought in by his birth. I mean, the very mention of the world there in the context of the Roman world, we might say is just a backdrop to the infinitely great, greater universal scope of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

People from all over the world coming into his kingdom by faith in the savior of the world. And that's a truth that's so worth celebrating this time of year.

Jesus has come to bring light to the nations of the world. Jesus has come to rescue peoples from all nations, to bring peoples from all nations into his kingdom of light.

Yes, we speak about the joy of Christmas being the joy of giving, and that's very important. But above all, true joy, the true joy of Christmas is seen in the giving, the giving of the Lord Jesus.

[9 : 24] Giving of him for us, for you. So rejoice that we can truly say that he has the whole world in his hands. And yes, rejoice if you know that you're safe in the hands of Jesus.

But if at this moment you can't say, I'm his and he's mine. If you can't say that you're in his hands, you can't say that I have faith to believe in him.

Well, listen again with fresh ears, as it were, to hear of the birth of Jesus. And remember this, that he came for you. He came to give himself for you.

He came to save you from a lost eternity. He came to bring his light into darkness, even the darkness of your own soul. And I pray that this time of year, this time, even this moment, that there'll be a sinner maybe watching the service, even in this building itself.

That you'll come to faith in the Lord Jesus. And that you will give your life to him. The worldwide importance, the birth of Jesus.

[10 : 31] But secondly, the wonder of the sovereign purposes of God. It sounds a bit of a mouthful, but let's just look at the details. See, there's something else to consider in Luke's account of even mentioning Caesar Augustus here.

And that's this. It's the sovereign purposes of God. God ruling and God overruling in the events of the world. Even the events that surrounded the birth of Jesus.

And let's look again at the details. Because here's this great emperor, Caesar Augustus. And he's really establishing his power. First emperor of Rome, the Roman Empire.

He wants to strengthen his power. He wants to establish this empire. He wants to give it a sound financial basis. He's giving commands that's going to affect the whole empire.

And one such command, of course, is for all the peoples to go to their hometowns to be taxed. And he wants to know exactly how many people are in his empire. He wants to tax his people to the hilt.

[11:38] Now, some people say at that time there were around about 45 million people in the Roman Empire. At that particular time. And there's Caesar controlling that large number of people. 45 million people. He's going to control that number for his sake. For the sake of his power. For the sake of his own self-glory. For his empire.

But God is sovereign. God is supreme in his rule and power over all the nations of the world. And God's going to use even that Caesar.

Even that pagan Caesar. Even that act of self-interest that Augustus had planned for his own sake. And his own power. And the power of his empire.

God's going to use even these decisions of the emperor. To happen at a particular time. And a particular location. For Jesus.

[12:38] To come into the world. For. Not for Caesar's glory. But for the glory of God. And for our good. You see. You see what's happening here.

The great purposes of God are working hand in hand. With the plans of man. Even this sinner man. Even this pagan man. But God working out his purposes.

For his son to be born. For his son to be born. To draw all peoples to himself. As we said. From all tribes. All nations. All backgrounds. And that eternal plan of God.

Fulfilled even. There in the Roman Empire. In the first century AD. Even the very details of the plan. Of God's plan fulfilled. Through what would have appeared.

Out of the 45 million people. This obscure carpenter from Nazareth. Along with his pregnant fiancée. This couple from that backwater in Judea.

[13:38] That place that Emperor Caesar hardly knew. And yet. There's one man Joseph from Nazareth. And his pregnant. Betrothed.

Completely and fully within the great purposes of God. Joseph responding to that. Caesar's command. To leave Nazareth. And go to.

To his hometown. As it were. The town of David. King David. Of course. David was. Joseph's ancestor. Unknown to Caesar Augustus.

Caesar's decree. For this worldwide. Census. That decree set in motion. Humanly speaking anyway. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

So unknown to Caesar Augustus. He's actually instrumental in that journey. That journey taking place. Between Nazareth and Bethlehem. For the saviour of the world to be born.

[14:36] In that little town. And always remember this. That you know. And all the things that this time of year brings. To your heart.

To your mind. But the most important things to remember. Even at this time of year. Is that our God reigns. He's the one who sets up kings.

He's the one that removes kings. God is Lord. And God's working out all his purposes. For his glory. He's in control. In every detail.

Of every aspect. Of every life. Of every land. Of every nation. Even. Even non-believing rulers. Non-believing authorities. Overruled.

Because God reigns. You see. When Augustus set in plan. Set in motion. His plan to. Tax the world. The Roman world. Was to benefit himself.

[15:32] And his empire. But God was overruling. In that decision. To ensure that. God the Son was born. In exactly the place. Where God had. Had intended.

Scripture fulfilled. That the Christ child. The Messiah. Born in Bethlehem. And even bring this. Even to our current circumstances. Of the time.

That we're living in. Even these. Strange times. Even. You know. Even yesterday. That really stunned. So many of us. And all the. New restrictions. Renewed constrictions.

Let's be absolutely. Clear. And remember this. That we've even been given. These. These times. To reflect. On what truly matters.

Even to think. What truly matters. In the. In God sending. His Son for us. And let's be thankful. That God has given us. Even these times. Even these difficult times.

[16:28] That he's given us. The space. If you like. Even this. Distancing. From. So much. That we might. Say is. Immoderate. Remembering. Celebrating.

Of the birth. Of Christ. That God's given us. Even this space. Away from these excesses. To focus our hearts. On the one true. Savior. God's decreed.

Even the very events. That we're living through. For his great purpose. Let's not abuse. The privilege. That God has given us. You know. To. Focus. On the one thing. Needful. Let's be done. With lesser things. And turn your eyes. To Bethlehem. And see the Christ child. Born for us. Born for you. For that great purpose. Of salvation. That work. Of salvation. That we see finally. In the manger there. In Bethlehem. That we're told of. In verses six to seven. In.

[17 : 24] You know. There's something truly majestic. In seeing the birth of the Lord Jesus. Seeing the coming of Christ the King. He's come to bring in his reign.

His reign of peace. His reign of power. He is the Lord of Lords. He is the King of Kings. As we were told by Jim. On Wednesday evening. In the prophecy. That Isaiah gave. Of the coming of the Lord Jesus. As prophesied. As the Prince of Peace. He came. As that Prince of Peace. But to effect. Peace. Peace between God and man. Jesus had to come. And he had to come. And to live. In full obedience. To God the Father. He came. As a representative. In his human nature. He's our representative. And as a representative. He had to obey the law fully. He had to do as the law required. And to. To pay the price.

[18 : 21] The penalty for sin. He had to come. To give his life. Even in death. And you know. That's something. That we so often miss. At this time of year.

When we. When we remember. The birth of Jesus. You see. The world outside of Christ. The world without Christ. Even if it makes. A cursory glance. At the story. Of the birth of Jesus. The world without Christ. Will keep Jesus. In the manger. All the various. Christmas card scenes. That we see. Of the manger. For so many. That's the end. Of the matter. But even in Luke's account. Of the birth of Jesus. We're actually seeing. A glimpse. Of his death. Someone's put it like this. The shadow of his death. Is present already. In the description. Of the details.

[19 : 14] Of his birth. I'll say that again. The shadow of his death. Is present already. Even. In the description. Of the details. Of his birth. And you'll say. Well how does that figure out.

How do we see that. Well. Look again at the manger. By faith. Look at that manger. And look at the language. That Luke uses here. When he writes. Of the first moments. Of Jesus there. And becoming man for us. Let's read these words again. Of verse 7. And after we've read these words. We're going to jump to the passage. We read in Luke chapter 23. But let's look. To verse 7. And she gave birth. Our firstborn son. And wrapped. Keep that word before you. Wrapped him. In swaddling cloths. And laid him in a manger. Okay. Wrapped him in swaddling cloths. Laid him in a manger. Now compare these words. With what Luke records. Of the burial of Jesus. Verse 53.

[20 : 07] Luke 23. Joseph of Arimathea. Went to Pilate. Okay. He asked for the body of Jesus. Then these words. Then he took it down. And wrapped it in a linen shroud.

And laid him in a tomb. Cut in stone. Where no one had ever been laid. And it's no coincidence. That Luke uses the same language. Of the birth of Jesus. And the burial of Jesus. The beginning of Jesus' life. The end of Jesus' life. Before Jesus' resurrection. Jesus begins his life. As it were. Wrapped in swaddling cloths. At the end of his life. Before his resurrection. He's wrapped in linen cloths. At the beginning of Jesus' life. He's laid in a manger. A manger in which no human had ever been placed. At the end of his life. He's laid in a tomb. In which no one had been placed before. You see. The Savior who was born.

[21 : 05] In all the weakness of a newborn child. We might say this. And with reverence. He dies. In all the weakness of human flesh. But again we have to say this.

The same Savior who was born in weakness. And yes. In the weakness of human flesh. Died. At the same time. He dies in strength. He dies. Because of his strength of love. For you. The strength of will. To do what his father had. Sent him to do. He dies in strength. That strength of purpose. Purpose. A purpose that took him from heaven to earth. That took him. Yes. From Bethlehem to Calvary. From the manger. To the cross. And when you see again.

The Christ child in the manger. You're seeing that love. You're seeing the same love. That took Jesus from that wooden manger. To the wooden cross. You're seeing the strength of love.
[22 : 04] That took Jesus from heaven to earth. You're seeing the love that took him. To be born for us. That strength of love. That the same love that took Jesus to the cross.

For you. This is the famous carol. Charles Wesley's carol. Tells us. Born that man no more may die. Born to raise the sons of earth.

Born to give them second birth. You know the birthday of Jesus. Actually tells of the promise. Of the birthday of sinners.

For whom Jesus came to give his life. The birthday of sinners that we speak of. As the second birth. Born again. Born again in Jesus. Born again.

Born to be. To be freed from the dominion of sin. And to come under the dominion of Jesus. Jesus the King of Kings. I mean you can't not think of the birthday of Jesus.

[23 : 02] Without seeing the promise. Of that second. The second birth of the believer. For all. For whom Jesus came to give his life. So what's your response.

To the birthday. To the birthday. Of Jesus. Is it just to have your senses stirred a little. The story that you're hearing again. Of the birth of Jesus. All the various parts of the story.

That you become so familiar with. And well let's just leave it till another Christmas time. What is your response. Going to be. That of Mary's.

As we're again going to look at further this evening. When Mary was told by the shepherds of the news that. Well that they'd received from the angel. Regarding Jesus' birth. Were told.

That Mary treasured these things in her heart. She pondered them. She thought on them deeply. Is that your response? To think on this story of Jesus deeply. To think of the importance of his birth.

[24 : 03] You're going to treasure the story of Jesus in your heart. What do you even think on the worldwide importance of Jesus' birth. For the saving of souls.

From every generation. From every land. From east to west to north to south. What do you even ponder the sovereign purposes of God? That God should step into space and time.

That space and time that God created. So that God the Son would come. To form his church. Into a new creation of believers. When you think deeply about the salvation that God offers.

Through Christ. Even that work of salvation that you see there in the manger. Much, much more than simply a primitive animals feeding trough.

And then looking to the manger. Look beyond the manger even. To the cross. The cross. The cross on which Jesus fulfilled. His purpose for which he came from heaven to earth.

[25 : 10] And won't you give your life. To the Lord Jesus. Jesus who came to. To give you the greatest gift of all. The greatest gift of all of course himself.

There is that free offer of salvation. And that offer is made possible. Because Jesus paid for your salvation with his life.

Well, with all these thoughts. I pray that God will bless his word. Will have blessed his word. And that he will convict you. In fact, convict each one of us. In all our weaknesses.

In all our failures. That he will convict us. So that we truly will come before our Savior. And yes, worship him. Come before him. Christ the Lord.

And yes, in our hearts. That each one of us. Bows. Towards the Savior. Amen. Let us pray. Lord our God.

[26 : 08] Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father. You. Who did not forget. Your people. But sent your one and only Son for us. Lord, may we see Jesus.

See him. With eyes of faith. And in seeing Jesus. Put our trust in him. Knowing. That you have promised. Salvation.

Eternal life. For all. Who believe in the Lord Jesus. By faith. Hear us Lord. As we continue before you in praise. And we pray these things in Jesus name.

Amen.