

Christmas Day 10AM Service

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Date: 25 December 2023

Preacher: Willie Shain-Ross

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, and I'd like to add Merry Christmas as well to all of you. My name is Willie Shane Ross. I'm a minister here on staff at St. John's, and it's an absolute pleasure to be here with you.

By the way, if you're new or visiting, let me just begin by saying we're so glad you're here with us. Our text this morning is both familiar and famous.

It's the birth of Jesus Christ, and it's the announcement of who this child is to an unlikely group of people, shepherds. And this text is so familiar to us that some of us can forget how shocking, awe-inspiring, and wonderful this good news is.

You see, the text not only changed the world, but it changes who we are today as well. And so what I hope to do with you briefly this morning is to celebrate and rejoice at this wonderful birth.

And I hope to do that by looking at exactly who this child is that is born. And so what I'm going to do is we'll look at him as our humble king, our promised savior, and as our glorious Lord this morning.

[1 : 05] And so if you have your Bibles with you, if you'll step into the passage with me, Luke here is drawing our attention to two different kings in this passage. I don't know if you noticed that. But there are two men in this passage who will change the course of history.

But these two men, these two kings will look vastly different, and their reign could not be more divergent. You see, if you look at verse 1, Luke mentions this first king.

His name is Caesar Augustus, and he's the most powerful man at the time of Jesus' birth. You see, Augustus became the first emperor of Rome, and he became so powerful that he was viewed as the son of divinity.

And in fact, there's even an inscription that we have that calls him the savior of the world. That's Caesar Augustus. And Rome revered Augustus because he brought peace and stability to an empire that had been suffering from decades and decades of civil war.

But that peace that the savior supposedly brought was achieved and came through military occupation and subjugation. He brought a ceasefire, if you will, but that was about it.

[2 : 14] He couldn't bring peace from fever, from tragedy, from economic misfortune, or even death. And that peace of Rome was for some, but it was not for all.

Rome may have prospered, but it only prospered because other people, such as Israel, were subjugated and enslaved. So the best that this king can offer is a ceasefire, prosperity for some, but adversity for others.

Yet, thank goodness, we have another king here in this passage. And we see in verse 7 that that king was born in a manger. That king isn't born in a palace flanked by ambassadors and dignitaries. He's not born in the capital of Jerusalem with throngs of people waiting outside with bated breath. He's born in a manger where animals feed. His birth is humble, it's lowly, and it's meek.

And those are characteristics that will mark this king's life from beginning to end. Born in a manger surrounded by farm animals, he will die on a cross flanked by criminals.

[3 : 19] And in between, in his life, he will heal those riddled with disease, offer rest to all who are heavy and weary laden, and befriend outcasts and sinners. You see, this king came to suffer and to minister to those suffering.

He came to bring a peace that's not simply an absence or ceasefire of war. But he came to bring a peace that is relationship with God, that is grace and goodness and love and compassion and mercy.

It's an everlasting peace that surpasses understanding. And that peace isn't on offer to some at expense of others, but it's on offer to all.

And that's the good news. His reign, his rule is for all people. Not just people in Rome, not just people in 4 BC. It's good news for people in China and India and America. It's good news for people in 4 BC and 1000 AD, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It is good news for truly all people. And that's because he's not just a king, but he's also our savior.

[4 : 21] Which brings me to my second point. He's our promised savior. You see, if you jump down with me into the text, if you go to verse 11, the angels announce, and it's such a great line, that this child is born, for unto you a child is born, who is the savior, who is the Christ.

And that Christ is the Greek word for Messiah. And we know that through the Old Testament, the Messiah was to be the savior of Israel. You see, from the beginning, God has seen that sin has corrupted and contaminated his creation.

And so as soon as Adam and Eve fell, God says, I'm going to do something about this. Humanity, you may have fallen. But I will rescue.

That means Jesus is not plan B. He's not a last resort. He's a plan from the beginning. And so throughout the Old Testament, God promises that his servants will come from the royal line of David, and that royal savior will restore God's kingdom.

And so as Israel was waiting for the savior, they were to find that this was not the savior that they expected. For Jesus didn't come to overthrow Rome, but he came to deliver us from a much deeper tyranny.

[5 : 35] He came to save us from sin and death. He is a savior who a few verses before a chapter in chapter 1, verse 49, will give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.

He is a light in the darkness. And if I may illustrate real quickly with the text, if you return to verse 7 with me. The text tells us that Jesus was laid in a manger because there was no place for him at the inn.

Now let me just say up front, Luke doesn't give us any more information other than this, but I will say this. I've traveled a little bit. Not much, but a little. Probably not as much as you, David, but I've traveled a bit.

And I haven't traveled to a place, I've never encountered a culture or people where someone wouldn't help a woman giving birth. You see, if a woman were in the midst of labor pains, and keep in mind, this is before hospitals.

This is before you have construction and cars and white noise. I have never been to a place where there wouldn't be somebody who would stand up and say, hey, take my place. But here in Bethlehem, no one does.

[6 : 46] Now the text doesn't say anything more than that, but when we talk about darkness, and this is my point, when we talk about darkness, we talk about a world that says, never your needs before mine.

Never your needs before mine. It's a darkness of sin, of scarcity, and self-preservation over and against others.

And so it's into this darkness that a light comes and breaks through in the form of a child. You see, his life is marked not by never your needs before mine, but my life for yours.

He gives his life so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. He experiences death so that death would not have the final word in our life. And he gives this life and peace and joy not by subjugating others, but by subjugating his will to his father's.

He brings this joy and peace not by seizing the political throne, which is what the Israelites wanted, but by leaving his heavenly throne. He's a savior like no other because he is the Lord God himself.

[7 : 56] And that brings me to my third point, the Lord God. You see, when the angel says that this Christ is the Lord, Lord isn't referring to nobility or some kind of aristocratic title.

It's a reference to God himself. And it's the third time we see it in the passage. And if you have your Bibles in front of me, look with me at verses 8 to 9. There it says, quote, Let me unpack this. Look at the description. Angel of the Lord, glory of the Lord. This, and I mean it in its most literal sense, is awesome. It's awe-inspiring and it's terrifying.

But when the Old Testament talks about the glory of the Lord, it's often talking about God's special presence with his people. We see it in the pillars of fire that are with the Israelites in Exodus.

We see it come down again in fire in 2 Chronicles 7 when God inhabits the temple. And we last see it in Ezekiel 10. And there the glory of the Lord leaves Israel because of her sins and leaves the

temple.

[9 : 14] And so for 500 years, the glory of the Lord is gone. And now, suddenly, it reappears here. Not in the temple, but in an unknown field to unnamed shepherds.

As I said, the glory of the Lord indicates his special presence with people. And so God is revealing himself to his shepherds, people of low status.

He's appearing and making himself known to outcasts. Not to royalty, but to outcasts. And that's who God most often reveals himself to. People who are cast out.

People often thought of as lowly or not enough or not the right person. That is who God makes himself known to. You see, God doesn't come to us because we've got our life figured out or our ducks in a row.

He comes to us precisely because we're in need and we're lowly. And the amazing thing about this announcement to the shepherds is that God has come to dwell with his people.

[10 : 17] Not as a pillar of fire. Not something terrifying. But as a child. As a human. Somebody to bring joy. Not fear. That's awe-inspiring.

The fact that the God, the creator of the universe, became like us. Not just for a season, but completely changed who he is for eternity.

You see, throughout his life then, he also experiences rejection, hatred, beatings. And he died in the most excruciating way possible. God experienced our pain and frailty.

So that we could experience his joy, his goodness, his grace, his love, and his peace. When God became human, and this is the good news, friends.

When God became human, he achieved victory. And he didn't become another Caesar. He became a servant. And he did that so we could be with him forever. And so, friends, let me conclude here this morning.

[11 : 20] The story of Christianity is one of good news. It's one of joy. It's good news that God has become like us and put an end to sin and death and evil.

You see it in how the shepherds respond to this news. You see the joy that they have. They run to investigate and find out who this child is. They tell everyone they saw about what they experienced. And they return giving praise and glory to God. Their actions are full of joy and wonder. For they have received the good news.

And so, friends, as we come to our communion table this morning, I invite you to reflect on the goodness of this news. And if you're somebody who's checking out Christianity and doesn't understand all this stuff, come investigate it.

Come talk to David or myself. And if you're somebody for whom Christ is your savior, come and rejoice at the goodness of his love and mercy. Amen. Amen.

[12 : 17] There, good.