

Christmas Day Family Service

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Date: 25 December 2005

Preacher: Rev. Sean Love

- [0 : 0 0] As we stand, let us pray together. Heavenly Father, from your fullness, we have all received grace upon grace.
- We have received the magnificent gift of your Son, our Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. And we ask that you would give us all that we need to receive him deeply in our hearts.
- We pray that you would open our hearts to your word as well. And we ask this for your glory in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down. A blessed Christmas to you all.
- It's great to be here this morning and celebrating with you the birth of Jesus. I would like to go on for quite a bit of time and talk about what I got in my stocking this morning.
- But you can come and ask me later about that. It's probably... I won't do that right now. I'm wondering if you'd open your pew Bibles to Luke chapter 2.
- [1 : 1 0] And it's on page 55 of the New Testament section at the back of your Bibles. Page 55, Luke chapter 2. And I'm going to start by rereading verses 6 and 7 to you.
- While they were there, the time came for Mary to be delivered. These two verses are the event that we celebrate on Christmas Day.
- The birth of an infant in a small town just south of Jerusalem. In humble surroundings. And Luke pinpoints for us the time, the location, and the circumstances of Jesus' birth with a fair bit of accuracy.
- But interestingly, it's only a very brief account of the birth itself. The actual entrance of God into humanity as a human is only given two verses in this passage.
- But what Luke is doing in this text is showing us the significance of this event. The fulfillment of God's purposes and plan to save people from the consequences of their sin.
- [2 : 4 6] Everything leads up to this. All of salvation history focuses in on the human being who is also God.
- In chapter 1 of Luke, one of the longest chapters in the Bible, Luke prepares for the entrance of Christ into our world with several speeches which frame the picture of who Jesus is and what he has come to do.
- And I just want to focus in on one thing that Dan read for us at the beginning of the service. If you look at the previous page, page 54, and right up at the top left corner, you'll see verses 32 and 33 of chapter 1.
- And this is the angel speaking to Mary. The angel says, Now it strikes me that in those two verses there are four very significant words that help us to understand who Jesus is and why he's come.
- In verse 32, he will be great. He will be Lord, so he will be on a throne. In verse 33, he will reign and he has a kingdom.
- [4 : 2 2] And so there's no doubt in Luke's mind about who this child is. And that's part of the background that we come to at the beginning of chapter 2.

This is a fulfillment of God's promise to King David that his house, his descendants, would rule forever on the throne. So that's a bit of the backdrop that we come to at the first part of chapter 2.

The first three words of chapter 2 in verse 1 says, In those days. And what days? What days were these? These were the days of John the Baptist.

These were days that God, not Caesar, had decided was the right time. The fulfillment of God's promise is not random or impulsive or last minute.

I did a little bit of research, and according to Canadian credit card records, December 23rd is the busiest shopping day of the year.

[5 : 29] 607 transactions per second happen across Canada. To me, that sounds like last-minute gift buying. But the gift of God to us in Christ is according to promise.

All the way back to Genesis 3, when God told the serpent that he would be crushed by the seed of the woman. That seed is Christ.

God's action is decisive, and it happens in his timing. Caesar, the census which Joseph and Mary were being enrolled for, the city of Jesus' birth, Bethlehem, David's city.

All of that tells us of God's control over history. Even the emperor of Rome was like Pharaoh in Egypt, used as an instrument in the hand of God for the glory of God to fulfill God's purposes.

It's quite incredible to think about that, that we are in the hands of this kind of God that has that kind of magisterial control and oversight over all of human history and our lives.

[6 : 46] So to celebrate the gift of Christ this day is to celebrate the fact of his faithfulness to us, his faithfulness to his promises, his love for us, and also his management of history.

But there's something else that we celebrate today. And Luke makes it clear to us that we're celebrating the salvation of God. I want to look back once more at chapter 1.

In the column on page 55, that's just above where chapter 2 begins, I want to point out for you four, sorry, five occurrences of the same word.

Look in verse 69. God has, previous verse, he's visited and redeemed his people. Verse 69, he's raised up a horn of salvation for us.

This is the issue that Luke is pointing to. Verse 71, that we should be saved from our enemies. Verse 74, sorry, 70, yep, 74, and to grant us that we being delivered or saved from the hand of our enemies again.

[8 : 06] And in verse 77, John the Baptist is giving knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins. So the key issue here is salvation.

And it's not salvation of the nation of Israel. It's internalized for Luke. It's salvation from our sins. I was reading that the organizer of the Atheist Club of Boston in Massachusetts, he said, he said, I'm just as, he's taking ownership of Christmas.

It was quite interesting. He said, I'm happy to take ownership of this time of year and to lay claim to the sense of goodwill and say that you don't need to be operating in a religious tradition to take part and celebrate.

And I see more and more of that going on. People that aren't Christians are taking on Christmas to mean their own thing. It's their own kind of celebration. But this person who claims not to believe in God and much of our culture around us doesn't see that there's no basis for goodwill among people without Christ.

And there's no basis for goodwill between God and humanity without Christ. Let's look at verses 8 and 9. I'll just recap what Rowena read for us.

[9 : 37] An angel shows up to the shepherds bringing good news. The glory of the Lord shone around these shepherds as it did in another time with another shepherd.

If you think back, Moses sees the glory of God in the burning bush way back in Exodus chapter 3. And Moses hears God's promise to bring his people out of slavery in Egypt.

And that event is a prototype for this event. A Savior, who is Christ the Lord, is born in Bethlehem. We look at this in verse 11.

For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. According to plan, the Savior is born. And according to God's character and his desire to save his people.

He is Christ the Lord. He is the Savior. He is God himself. And what Luke is doing here is he's actually proclaiming the gospel in very clear terms right at the moment of Jesus' birth.

[10 : 49] Think about it. This is a demonstration of God's desire to be known by us through Jesus Christ and to relate to us through Jesus Christ.

But God isn't only revealed in the flesh, in Jesus Christ. He's not just the perfect representation of God, fully divine, yet fully human.

But he's come as God in flesh to save us. This is a key point that Luke is making. He has come to us because we could never hope to come to God on our own merit.

This is God reaching down to us. This is the gospel. What is unique about Christianity is not what we do that secures us with God, but what he does for us.

He does it by being the perfect human and becoming the perfect sacrifice for sins. Christ is, as God in the flesh, he's always looking towards the cross.

[12 : 02] He was born to die and in dying to save those who would die to themselves and obey and love him. That's why verse 14 is there.

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. The better way of understanding that is that peace between God and man is brought around because of God's favor upon us, not because of our merit.

So I want to finish by saying that Jesus' birth, if you think back to the shepherds, was not announced to kings and rulers or priests and Pharisees, but to those who had ears to hear the announcement.

Jesus was born in humble circumstances and these reflect what he has come to do to save us. He humiliates himself and he's bought for us a title to glory that we could not attain on our own efforts.

By his poverty, we are made rich. And this is the true gift that we have to receive today. Amen.