

Christmas Eve 5PM 2020

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[0:01] Well, we've just heard the classic Christmas story from Luke 2. Like a train building up speed, the first chapter of Luke builds momentum with prophecies and promises about the coming Savior.

And you'd think that the great shining moment in this story would be the birth of Jesus, right? But it's not. The climax of this story actually comes in verse 10, when an angel appears to humble shepherds outside of Bethlehem.

Fear not, for behold, I bring 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.

Christmas is about the announcement of this good news. Our Savior has come, and he is Christ the Lord.

And we're going to consider three things about this good news together. The reality of this good news, the meaning of this good news, and our response to this good news.

[1:17] If you have a Bible, it would be great to follow along in Luke 2. So first, the reality of the good news. This story from Luke is so real.

It's so real. Kids, I need your help for a sec here. I'm sure a lot of you have read lots of fairy tales, right? Fairy tales are make-believe stories that often have some kind of moral or lesson to them.

Now, do you remember how fairy tales usually start? You can just shout it out, if you know. Once upon a time. Once upon a time. That's right.

Once upon a time. Well, this story from Luke's Gospel is not a fairy tale. It's not a once upon a time kind of story.

And we know this because Luke gives us all these interesting little details about Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, of places like Nazareth and Bethlehem.

[2:22] Luke is writing for us history. And friends, our faith as Christians rests on public events. Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection.

Events that happen to real people in real places at real times in history. This is another way of saying that Jesus is a real person.

But here's the problem. Sometimes the down-to-earth reality of the Christmas story can sometimes get a bit lost in our sentimental feelings about Christmas.

We love the Christmas spirit, don't we? And don't get me wrong, I'm all for Christmas lights and cookie decorating and Christmas music.

But we really cherish this idea that Christmas will make everyone set aside their selfishness, their pride, their conflicts, to embrace generosity, love, and peace.

[3:27] And there's nothing wrong with this, of course, except that deep down we know that it's not really real. It doesn't reflect life in our broken world.

The Christmas spirit won't end oppression or injustice. It won't heal the divisions that are tearing our societies apart. It won't bring hope to the hopeless, life to the weary, or joy to those living in the darkness of depression or discouragement.

Sometimes it can actually make those things worse and harder to deal with. The Christmas spirit can't address our deepest needs and longings as people living in a broken world.

But if we can wrestle our imaginations away for just a moment from Hallmark cards and nativity stories, the real story of Jesus just might do all of that.

You see, Jesus is not some otherworldly hero. He knows what it's like to be hungry, homeless, despised, discouraged, rejected.

[4 : 41] Just look at the Christmas story. Jesus was born to an oppressed and weary people. He was born into scandal, poverty, and real hardship.

The shepherds, and our master shepherd tonight was a sharp-looking guy, but they were a little rough around the edges. Working class, disrespected people.

And following Jesus' birth, an insecure king committed terrible, terrible evils to try to cling to his worldly power.

All of this sounds a lot like the real world, doesn't it? The world that we live in. The Hallmark card Jesus can't be really good news for us because deep down we know that he reflects a world that's too sheltered, too safe, too simple to be real.

Our weary and hurting world needs the real Jesus. A great Savior who knows our sorrows and our weakness and has overcome them.

[5 : 50] A good king who loves this world, this real world which he made, and who came to make it new. That brings us to the second point, the meaning of this good news.

What does it mean that Jesus is our Savior and our Lord? Well, if we need a Savior, it means that we need to be saved from something.

We've kind of already talked about this. Whether you're a Christian or not, whether you're an adult or even a little child, you probably feel at times like the world is not the way that it should be, right?

That there's something wrong in our lives and in our world. And the Bible says that this is because of sin. This is because of sin. Now, sin is not just a name for the bad things that we do.

It actually describes the attitude of our hearts towards God and to the world. You see, we were made to love God and to serve the world that he made.

[6 : 59] But all of us have bent our hearts in toward ourselves. We want to control our lives. We want to control the world.

And from this root, if we can think of it that way, injustice and sadness and sickness and even death grow and multiply in the world.

If sin was pretty much a problem with our behavior, all we would need was someone to show us a different way to live. And that's what pretty much every other religion in the world offers.

But if sin is something that has really grabbed hold of our hearts, we don't just need advice. We need someone to come and save us. We need Jesus.

And the good news of Christmas is that in the womb of Mary and that manger in Bethlehem, God in his infinite, amazing love and mercy became one of us.

[8 : 07] He became a little baby. Just think about this. The one true God who created all things, who angels in heaven praise day and night, came down to be with us.

With us in our pain, with us in our despair, with us in our weakness. With us in everything that makes life in this world what it is.

So that he could save us and give us new life. And this means we don't need to be ruled by sin and death anymore. We can follow our true Lord, our good King, Jesus, and receive his peace as a gift and join him in bringing this gift of peace to the world.

And this brings us to our third and final point. In our reading, there are three responses to the good news of Jesus. The shepherds go to Jesus.

The angels rejoice in Jesus. And Mary treasures all these things in her heart. The good news that God has come to be with us, to save us from sin, to bring us into his kingdom, is so good, it's difficult to even know how to begin to respond to it.

[9:31] But I think we are called to respond like the shepherds, like the angels, and like Mary. The good news calls us to go to Jesus in faith, because he will forgive our sins and give us a safe place to rest in this difficult world.

The good news calls us to rejoice in Jesus, because in him, God has kept all of his promises to save the world he loves. And the good news calls us to treasure Jesus, to ponder his birth, life, death, and resurrection in our hearts, turning the story over and over again like a precious family heirloom, until we know it so well, so deeply that it becomes our story as well.

And as we do this over days and months and years, our joy will increase, and we'll love more deeply the God who gave himself completely for us so that we could belong completely to him.

Amen.