
“The Birth of the Saviour”

Luke 2:1-21

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(Luke 2:1-21)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

²¹On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Let’s do an exercise in imagination. Imagine that you didn’t grow up in a Christian family. In fact you’ve never even attended church. More than that, imagine you had never even heard of the name of Jesus or of the religion called Christianity. To further paint this imaginary picture, let’s also include that the world around you, the culture, the society, had no evidences of Christian influence. There was no such thing as the Protestant work ethic, or biblical standards of morality—of what is right or what is wrong, you had never heard of the Golden Rule, that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. People were treated unkindly, even brutally.

Unwanted children were discarded and thrown into garbage piles to die of exposure. For the most part, the rule of life was, 'every man for himself.' Corruption was rampant. Kings and leaders ruled with an iron fist. Their word was law. They considered themselves gods and demanded absolute obedience and even worship. They acted capriciously and without mercy. Government, as an institution, offered very little, if any social services. The only glimmer of hope for the people was when the king died. And maybe, just maybe, his successor would be kinder leader.

There was no such thing as climbing up the social ladder. If you were born into poverty, you remained in poverty. If your father was a farmer, well, then you were a farmer. Women, this imaginary society you grew up in, well, you essentially had no rights. You were considered property. You too could be discarded if you, for any reason, grew out of favor with your husband. Men, it wasn't much better. If you were a man, there was a good chance of being recruited into endless wars, but this is the only world you know. This experience is not unique to you; it's everyone's experience. And as you look at the society around you, and as you look within yourself, you know that something has gone terribly wrong. You know in your heart, that people shouldn't treat each other this way. You know that leaders shouldn't act the way they were acting. At the same time, in a moment of clarity, you realize that the problem isn't just out there, with nations and governments and society, but the problem is equality within yourself, and within every person.

As you lay down to sleep for the night, you're kept up, contemplating what the solution might be. You come up with all sorts of ideas. What if we could have a society-wide educational plan. If only we could teach good morals to every person in our society, then most of our problems would go away. Another idea you have is better government. If only we could reform government, that might solve our problems. Or, maybe the solution lies in giving more power to the people and have less government influence in our lives, but as you think about these things, you realize that these are all temporary solutions. As well, these ideas address the problems out there, but they don't really address the problem in here, in my heart. You conclude that that's where the real problem is, it's in your heart. And before you drift off to sleep, your final thought is, who is able to bring about such a change?

This imaginary world I just spoke about was actually not imaginary at all. It was the world into which the Saviour, Jesus Christ, was born.

Let's continue this exercise in imagination. If it were up to you, what would the Saviour be like? What qualities would he possess? More than that, what would he be saving us from? Now, in one sense, this part of the exercise is kind of foolish. It's like a sick person trying to self-diagnose his ailment. Yeah, you know something's not right, but you have no way of knowing what exactly is going on with your body. You need to see a physician. So, if you think the main problem is physical, then your idea of a Saviour would be someone who's a scientist or researcher or a doctor, but if you know that something is off, regarding your mental state—your thinking and your feeling is off, if you think there is something going on mentally, it becomes even more difficult to self-diagnose. That's when we go and see a therapist or a life coach, a counselor or psychologist. If that's the big problem within me, then that's the type of saviour we will look for. Someone who has incredible insight into the mind and human psyche, but what if the problem is even deeper than that? What if the problem is not in the physical realm of your being, and it's not in the mental realm of your being, but in the spiritual realm of your being? To whom would you go for spiritual unrest and spiritual problems.

How do you even begin? How do you even know you have a spiritual problem? How do you know what that problem might be? You may go to a religious center and find a religious leader, a priest or priestess of some kind. Perhaps they have the answer.

Our idea of a Saviour is often times fashioned by what we believe is the greatest problem. If it's political, then it must be a political Saviour. If it's disease, then it must be a healer. If it's financial, then we need a generous Saviour. If it's education, then we need the Saviour to be a great teacher. You see?

Now what does the bible say our greatest problem is? Well, you may not care what the bible says. That's fine, but bear with me, for just a moment. You see, the bible presents a unique worldview. A worldview is a view of the world—no duh! A worldview is the lens through which we view the world, especially in answering the big questions of life. Who am I? Why am I here? What's my purpose? Where am I going? And what has gone wrong? Those are some of life's big questions, aren't they? It's our worldview, whichever one you may hold, that attempts to answer those questions. Everyone has a worldview. So, what's the Christian worldview? How does the Bible answer these questions? I don't have the time today to answer all these questions, but I can answer one of them. What has gone wrong? Here's the bible's answer. The greatest problem with the world, in nations and individuals, in leaders and in common folk, in men, women, and children, is that they are not in a right relationship with God. That means that your greatest problem, greater than any other problem you might have, is not being rightly related to God. We don't want to know God. We don't want to submit to God. We don't want to listen to God. We don't want God to tell us who we are or how we should run our lives. We don't want to love God. That's what it looks like when we are not rightly relating to God. Does that describe you? If it does, then that is your greatest problem.

How did that happen? It can be described in a word—sin. Sin is rebellion. Sin says to God, I want no part of you, or I only want the parts of you that I want, and I get to choose what those are. Sin is like a virus of the soul, that's infected the entire race. Here's what sin does, and we learn this from the very sin that was first committed against God, by Eve and Adam, our first parents. Sin resulted in alienation. Alienation means a broken relationship, distance, the absence of peace. There's alienation with God. Sin caused a deep divide in our relationship with God. Sin also resulted in alienation with others; it caused a relational divide with other people. Just consider the numerous sins we can commit against each other, from lying to murder, from gossip to genocide. Sin also resulted in alienation with ourselves. We wrongly relate to ourselves. We don't know who we are anymore. Two ways this is expressed is, we think too highly of ourselves, what we call pride. Or we think too lowly of ourselves, call it low self-esteem or low self-worth and often we struggle with both. Sin also resulted in alienation with the created world. Before sin came into the world, nature was at peace with humanity, but after sin entered, man and woman were in hostility with the earth.

This is Christianity's answer to the question, "What's our greatest problem? What's gone wrong with me and with the world in which I live?" The answer is that I and the world are not rightly related to God because of sin.

If it is true that this is our greatest problem, and I believe it to be true, then we need a pretty unique Saviour and that's exactly what God provides for us, in Jesus Christ.

From the passage we read today, we first discover that the Saviour was humble. Just consider all the details in this story that describe his humble birth.

His parents were poor. When we compare them to the people of their day, they were poor. How do we know that? Well, the most obvious detail was the kind of offering they gave at the temple, when they dedicated their child to God. They offered a pair of doves or two young pigeons. That was the offering of the poor. The normal offering was to be a lamb, but as a concession for those who couldn't afford to bring a lamb, they could bring two doves or pigeons. Being born into a poor family was part of his humility.

He wasn't born in Rome or Jerusalem or a major city like Ephesus or Athens. He wasn't born in a commercial center or political center or a center for the arts. It wasn't a religious center either. Bethlehem was more like a little hamlet, off the beat and path, it was a village of no great significance.

When He was born, He wasn't born in a hospital, nor was he born in a palace. He was born in a stable and placed in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Now in many homes, back in those times, the place where animals lived was not far from where the family lived. In some cases, both animals and humans shared the same space. So in the place in which they were staying, there was no spare room, so they resorted to giving birth where the animals were. Surely, this too, signifies the humility of the Saviour.

The first people to hear the birth announcement given by the holy angels were commoners, simple shepherds who were keeping their sheep by night. It wasn't announced among the rich and powerful. You have to wonder if this was intentional, in order to say to the world, that the child who was born will also be a kind of shepherd, leading his people, caring for them, protecting them, and even giving his life for them. This too is sign of the Saviour's humility, but there's an even greater example of his humility, what the bible describes as a condescension, a lowering, of infinite proportions. Regarding Jesus, the Apostle Paul wrote,

Philippians 2:6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

This was his greatest act of humility. He was God, and yet he humbled himself in becoming like us. If an adult stoops down to the level of a child, that's humility. If a volunteer at a homeless shelter performs foot care for a homeless person—washes their feet, clips their nails, bandages any blisters, puts on a new, fresh pair of socks, we would call that humility. But what if God took on human flesh and blood? What if God in the perfections of heaven entered the broken and tattered world of men? Surely, that would be the greatest example of humility and that's what Jesus did.

Why is it so important that the Saviour be humble? Have you ever wondered that? Why did the Saviour need to be a humble Saviour? Because this Saviour came to serve us. The bible tells us that he didn't come to be served like all other leaders, but to serve. Compare this earth-shattering description of God compared to the competing gods of the day. All the gods of the day said and demanded to be served, even the Christian God, but none of them had servicing as their sole purpose in entering our world. None of them. When you think of who Jesus was, there was never a leader, a God, a king, who deserved to be served by all of us, more than him. Yet, instead of demanding service, he served us. Thus, no one can say, "He strongarmed us. He forced us. He overpowered us." No, he won us by humbly serving us. He showed us that this is the kind of Saviour we not only need, but the kind of Saviour we would want most of all

In addition to Jesus being a humble Saviour, he was a glorious Saviour—meaning he was a marvelous saviour, a royal Saviour, a powerful Saviour, a Saviour worthy of all the accolades and worship and praise of both heaven and earth and this is exactly what we see in the birth of Jesus Christ.

He came from God's chosen kingly line, the line of the ancient King David, to whom was promised that a "forever- king" who would rule on a "forever throne" would come. This would make him a glorious Saviour.

Moreover, at his birth was a symphony of angelic beings declaring his praises. For no other birth was there ever the gathering of angelic voices to declare the glory of the one who was born. This had never happened before or since or ever again. Here's how Luke describes it. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Finally, the Saviour would be glorious, which is seen in the titles given to him.

He will be a Saviour. Yes, he will save us from all that sin does to us—from all the different kinds of alienation, but primarily, from our alienation with God. He will save us to be in the relationship we need the most, the one with God.

He will be the Messiah. The word Messiah is the Hebrew form of the Greek word Christ. So, every time we say Jesus Christ, we mean Jesus the Messiah. The Messiah was God's specially chosen and anointed leader and king. He's the fulfillment of the one who was promised to come in the Old Testament. He is the one who alone has earned the right to rule over us.

He will be the Lord. Lord is a title used of God. This humble Saviour, born in a stable and laid in a manger, is also the Lord, He is God. How can that be? How can the divine be enclosed in the body of a man, let alone a baby, let alone an embryo. It's a mystery. This child is the Lord.

Now, look at the progression of these titles. He will be to us a Saviour, meaning each person must come to Jesus alone. Each person has to consciously decide to receive him and believe on him as their Saviour. Then he is the Messiah. That means he's our king. It's collective, it's corporate. He's making the individuals that he's saved into a people, a nation. And finally, as Lord he will rule the cosmos.

Creation will be reset and placed back in order. The titles go from individual to national to universal. That's who Jesus is. What a mighty Saviour.

Lastly, in the birth of Jesus is the good news. Maybe we can say, the "goodest" news that will bring great joy. If there's something we need to hear in a time like this, it's good news. Yeah, we're sick and tired of hearing about case numbers going up. We wonder if the vaccine will be the solution to this pandemic. Day after day, what we hear is bad news. But in the coming of Jesus, we have good news. And the better the news, the greater the joy; isn't that true? Joy is not ultimately found in a change in circumstances. True joy is found in a person and that is what Jesus brings. If your most important relationship with God is restored, you'll have joy. If your greatest ailment, sin, is healed, you'll have joy. If your heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh, you'll have joy. If you escape an eternity in hell and are invited into an eternal heaven, you will have joy. Happiness is what people mostly look for, but joy is what we really need; and this joy is what only Jesus can bring.

Jonathan Edwards describes Jesus this way. He was infinitely high and glorious for he is God. But he is also infinitely low and humble because he became man. Infinite highness and infinite lowness, captured in one being, Jesus Christ. This Jesus came to the world for you, to be your Saviour. If he's not your Saviour yet, he can be. Repent of your sin, repent of your rebellion against God, and give yourself to Jesus. Believe in your heart that he died for your sins and rose again from the dead. Believe that he did it for you.

Let's pray.