



The Good News of Great Joy

(Luke 2:8-14)

Let us take a step back from the Christmas rush to reflect on what took place on that night when Jesus was born.

I. The obscure birthplace.

Luke, as a historian, tied the events of Jesus' birth to world history by referencing the Roman Emperor and the Regional Governor during that period. As decreed by Caesar Augustus, everyone was to register in his home town, and consequently all the nations in the Roman Empire, Jews included, were taxed by Rome. Joseph was a descendant of David and came from Bethlehem. Although Mary was going to have a baby soon, Joseph had no choice but to follow the decree to pay his taxes. He had to leave his comfort zone in Nazareth to take that long, difficult journey of 90 miles to Bethlehem (vv.1-5, ESV).

There are times in our lives when God takes us away from our comfort zone. It is hard when this happens, and we struggle and get anxious. But remember that in every happening or event, God is working His plan and purposes.

What is the significance of Bethlehem in the Christmas story?

700 years before this time, the prophet Micah had foretold that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, ESV). Ancient Jewish writings outside the bible also collaborate this messianic prophecy concerning Bethlehem. Here is an excerpt from the Jerusalem Talmud written 1,600 years ago: "The King Messiah... from where does he come forth? From the royal city of Bethlehem in Judah." - Jerusalem Talmud, Berakoth 5a.

The precise fulfillment of predictions or prophecies in the Bible such as, for example, the place where the Messiah will come from reveals:

1. The deity of Jesus. His birthplace was foretold hundreds of years earlier, and it was precise and definitive. The One who pre-existed creation, the one who is from ancient of days, would come from Bethlehem. This implies that if Jesus came from the ancient of days, if Jesus is God in the flesh, what He says matters: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3, ESV) In another passage in John's gospel, Jesus told the Samaritan woman— *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."* (John 11:25, ESV)
2. When God speaks, it will happen. In Isaiah 14:24, it is written - *"The LORD of hosts has sworn: 'As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand..."* In 55:11, it is also written - *"so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."* We live in a world that is constantly changing. But unlike the world, God's Word is unchanging. It is eternal.
3. God is sovereign and is in control. In the eyes of the Roman world, the emperor Cesar Augustus may seem to be in charge, but in fact, God purposed that His Son was to be born in Bethlehem. Everything that took place that night was in accordance with the Divine plan. Therefore remember this when you are facing hardships: At all times and in all places, God is always in control and He works His will. Therefore, you can trust Him no matter how bleak the situation.

II. The lowly "delivery room."

Upon reaching Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary could not find a place to stay, so they ended up finding shelter in the manger. The place was dark, smelly, and dirty. *"⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."* (v. 6-7)

Mathew Henry wrote – "The Lord well knew how unwilling we are to be meanly lodged, clothed, or fed; how we desire to have our children decorated and indulged; how apt the poor are to envy the rich, and how prone the rich to disdain the poor. But when we by faith view the Son of God being made man and lying in a manger, our vanity, ambition, and envy are checked. We cannot, with this object rightly before us, seek great things for ourselves or our children."

The Good News of Great Joy (continued)

III. The first recipients of the good news.

It was not to the powerful, learned or wealthy, that the angelic beings first announced the birth of the Messiah but to the shepherds, who were people held in low esteem. Later on, Mary also received the wise men from the east. One commentator said that this order pointed to the history and future of Christianity where the humble and the meek are exalted.

The shepherds were terrified when an angelic being illuminated by light suddenly appeared from out of the blue in the fields and in the darkness of the night. And the angel said to them, *"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people"*. (Luke 2:10).

IV. The substance of good news of great joy

¹¹*"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* This is the central part of the whole passage, as announced by the angels who were the bearers of good news. For a very long time, the Jews had been hoping and waiting for the Savior to come. That is why this is good news of great joy because finally, after such a very long wait, the Savior had been born to them.

Without Jesus, we are lost for all eternity because our sins separate us from God. In fact, the apostle Paul says that outside Christ, we are spiritually dead and are objects of God's wrath. When Peter and John were brought before the council and were prohibited by the religious authorities to stop telling the people about Jesus, they replied: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12, NIV)

V. The glorious proclamation of the good news.

Though God Incarnate entered the world in such humble circumstances, the proclamation of His coming was glorious. "All heavens broke loose," as John MacArthur would put it. In fact, this world had never seen such glorious proclamation as what took place on that particular night. No emperor, no king, no royal family, has received such glorious proclamation as this. What about you and me? What is our response to the coming of God in the flesh?

Application/Reflection:

The deity of Christ as God in the flesh was not just attested to by the fulfillment of several OT prophecies, but also by the witness of the angelic hosts. Later on, John the Baptist started to preach repentance and pointed to Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Then, there was the witness of the miracles performed by Jesus, His own statement concerning Himself, and of course the weightiest evidence of all – Jesus' resurrection from the dead. All of this evidence overwhelmingly points to His identity as God who became flesh and dwelt among men.

You and I only have two choices: we either accept Christ or reject Him. There is no middle ground. The nativity story is a story of God's love for those He created in His own image and likeness. Sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. But God set out to redeem the world by sending His Son Jesus Christ who was born in Bethlehem. He came because of His love for us. As John wrote - *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."* (John 3:16-17, ESV)

To believe and accept Christ means to commit your life to Him - not just to surrender your life to Him but to love and cherish Him above everything and above everyone. To believe and accept Christ is to turn away from our sins and follow Jesus as Lord of our lives. This is by faith. As the bible says, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9, ESV)

Review (Knowledge)

Please take a few minutes to read the summary above. What is the highlight of last Sunday's sermon for you and why?

B. Sharing (Practical Wisdom)

1. Mathew Henry commented that "When we by faith view the Son of God being made man and lying in a manger, our vanity, ambition, and envy are checked." Do you agree or disagree? Please explain.
2. It is said that we are easily enamored by the spectacular. What can we learn from the simplicity of our Lord's birth and what practical ways can we develop simplicity in how we live? Are we pursuing a life of simplicity? What are your temptations to do otherwise?
3. What is the difference between believing in our mind and believing with your whole being (i.e. mind and heart)?

C. Prayer

Take time to pray for one another.