

ADVENT 2021

5. Good News of Great Joy for All People

Luke 2:1-21

These past two years have forced us to take an honest look at ourselves and at the world around us. People from every philosophical and ideological bent are having to admit that **despite** all the amazing advances in the sciences and technology that have made our lives so comfortable and beautiful there is still something **deeply wrong** in the **fabric** of mankind!

Truth be told — the smartest people in the world — the ones who are the innovators and developers of medical and technological advances — are aware of how easily and how frequently their technology can be perverted! They are afraid of nuclear, biological, and cyber-warfare! They are afraid that man will **pervert** that technology and unleash nuclear, biological and cyber weapons of mass destruction.

What they rarely admit is that the source of terror isn't in the technology itself — the source of terror is the heart of man! Better technology does not change the heart. Why are there so many stories and films depicting a post-apocalyptic, dystopian world? Because man knows, man fears, and man anticipates such a future.

The same problem of heart that wreaks political, military and social havoc in the world is also at work in the life of every individual relationship. It's what's in the heart of man that makes life broken on the personal level — and the world is filled with such person!

WE DON'T NEED a nice story to bring a little good cheer for a season. We don't need a nice story to inspire us to try harder. Christmas is FILLED with HOPE because it is the celebration of how the Creator joined the creation — how He broke into our world to rescue and restore those made in his image and ultimately to renew everything He had made.

Dave Guzik — *Jesus meets us in our sin, but His purpose is to save us from our sins. He saves us first from the penalty of sin, then from the power of sin, and **finally** from **the presence of sin***

In **Luke 2** we have the record of **WHEN** — **HOW** and **WHY** God broken into humanity!

WHEN

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

The **KJV** begins it with — *And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.*

Caesar Augustus was the 2nd and the most powerful of all the Caesars. His name was Gaius Octavian. His uncle was Julius Caesar, who pulled together the Roman Empire — and was assassinated in 44 BC. The empire fell to three men — Marc Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian. Lepidus was driven into exile — Mark Anthony formed a revolt against Rome with Cleopatra of Egypt and they were soundly defeated by Octavian. The whole of the empire came under his rule. When it did he took the title Caesar and the name Augustus — which means of the gods.

He ruled as emperor from 27BC to 14AD. He was a brilliant military strategist — a brilliant architect — a brilliant administrator.

There was no power greater than Rome. Whatever Rome decided was the rule of the day — with no appeal. Augustus Caesar ruled the world. At one point he made a decree that the world needed to be enrolled for taxation. So, Luke begins with Augustus Caesar and the world — then he narrows it to the Roman province of Syria which included Judea.

Luke moves from Caesar Augustus and the world — to the province of Syria — to Bethlehem in Judea. Rome ruled the world — or so it appeared. Rome spoke and everyone moved. But Caesar was not on the throne — God was!

The same is true in the 21st century. Yes, we should vote. Yes, we should be good stewards over that privilege. But when the ruling powers move in a

direction that unsettles us — **we** need to remember that Caesar is not on the throne! God is on the throne — and **He** decides what's going to happen. It was **not** because of Caesar Augustus that the whole world had to move! But there was a carpenter named Joseph whose espoused wife was in her third trimester! She was pregnant with God's Son.

QUOTE: Weirsbe — *God had promised that the Savior would be a human, not an angel (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:16), and a Jew, not a Gentile (Gen. 12:1–3; Num. 24:17). He would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and the family of David (2 Sam. 7:1–17), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14)*¹

God needed to get Mary from Nazareth (in the north of Israel) to Bethlehem (in the south of Israel) — and Joseph wasn't going to be able to do that on his own. Ultimately, their journey to Bethlehem to be registered for taxation had nothing to do with Caesar. It had everything to do with a parchment laying in the Temple in Jerusalem that was written by a man named Micah some 500 years earlier that said —

***Micah 5:2 KJV** But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

THIS IS SO HUGE! The events in **Luke 2** *came to pass in those days* — but those events were decided before the world was made. The entire Roman world was revolving around this teenage woman and the child in her womb! It had nothing to do with Rome and everything God was going to do to rescue and redeem this fallen, broken world. By the way — the redeeming plans and purposes of God have nothing to do with the governing powers of the world today! The Child whose birth is recorded in **Luke 2** is going to come a second time! And all of the nations of the world are moving towards the accomplishing of that single fact!

***Jeremiah 1:12 NASB** I am watching over My word to perform it," promises the Lord.*

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 175). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THAT is GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY for ALL PEOPLE!

Caesar Augustus thought he had the world on a string. He makes a decree and the world moved! Rome was a huge inconvenience to this couple in Nazareth and there was no appeal — there was no recourse. But God was on the throne in those days — even as He is in our day — and ever more will be. He transcends the laws and governments of man and He always accomplishes His plans. The power of Rome was nothing before God. Heaven was going to open up over the shepherd fields of Bethlehem and Caesar on his throne wasn't going to stop that.

THAT is GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY for ALL PEOPLE!

That was the **WHEN** God broken into humanity!

Here's the HOW

³And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

Against all common sense —

⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

It was against all common sense for a pregnant woman in her third trimester to make a journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. So God had the original “Little Caesar” issue a decree because that journey made perfect sense in light of Micah 5.

What a scene it must have been. They get to Bethlehem — there would be family there. But they never end up staying with family. Remember, Mary was espoused to Joseph — but not yet married — and she's pregnant.

In two verses Luke tells HOW God came into the world.

⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman....

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.

This was not a Holiday Inn! The word is Kataluma. It was a large open courtyard with small stables around the perimeter. On any regular day the kataluma in Bethlehem would have been crowded with people travelling to and from Egypt. But on top of *that* regular crowd would have been the people coming to be enrolled for this Roman tax. No accommodations from relatives. No room in the kataluma. So, the Son of God was essentially born in a dark alley and laid in a stone feeding trough.

⁷And she gave birth — Luke tells us that MARY did this! She was a 14-15 year old girl, screaming with every contraction, giving birth to the Son of God in an alley in 1st century Bethlehem! No light. Nothing clean.

wrapped him in swaddling cloths — wrapped him tightly in strips of cloth.

and laid him in a manger — It was a filthy stone feeding trough. Luke — the man obsessed with detail — makes no mention of a stable — he just lets us know that there was a feeding trough to lay Jesus in, **because** there was no room for them in the kataluma.

And the same is true today. There's no room for Jesus in the lives of men and women. There might be room for pornography — but no room for Jesus. There might be room for pride — but no room for the One who stooped down out of eternity to come into our fallen world.

THIS IS SO HUGE — God broke into the world that had no room for Him.

*We weren't expecting.
We weren't interested.
We weren't involved.*

*We didn't ask.
We didn't deserve.
We didn't help.
We didn't even imagine.*

And yet: "To us a child is born; to us a son is given."

THAT is GOOD news of GREAT joy for ALL people!

I have to confess that there can be days in my own life, too many of them, when I have room for the things I do **for** Him, but no room for Him!

We have the WHEN.
We have the HOW.

And as Luke tells us about the scene surrounding all of that — **we discover the WHY.**

⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

When we think of shepherds in the times of the Bible, we generally think of them as good men, brave men. We think of Moses who tended his flocks on the backside of the desert. We think of David — the shepherd king of Israel. And then — there is Jesus — who called Himself “the Good Shepherd.” But as a rule, shepherds were among the lowest of the low in Jewish culture — a notch above tax collectors. The only people lower than shepherds at that particular time in Jewish history were lepers.²

So here were these men — they were out in the fields in the dark of night. And all of a sudden

² Hughes, R. K. (1998). [*Luke: that you may know the truth*](#) (p. 87). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and **the glory of the Lord** shone around them, and **they were filled with fear**. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, “Fear not, **for** behold, I bring you **good news of a great joy that will be for all the people**. ¹¹**FOR** unto you is born this day in the city of David....

a Savior — who is Christ — the Lord.

Note the three terms

The child born is a **savior**. His birth tells us we need saving!

The savior **is Christ**. Christos is the Greek word for Messiah. The child born to be savior is MESSIAH

Isaiah 9:7 (ESV) Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The child born a savior is Messiah **the Lord**.

the Lord = Kurios. Luke used that term 16 times up to this point in his account of the Gospel. Up to this point he’s used it to speak about YHWH — the True and Living God of Israel. Now he uses it to identify the baby that was born.

All Christian theology has its origin in the wonder of all wonders: that God became human.

Jesus is SAVIOR — MESSIAH and LORD — born of a virgin in **that** very time; born in some dark alley in Bethlehem and laid in a stone feeding trough. In writing to a young man named Timothy, Paul the apostle wrote

*1 Timothy 3:16 (KJV) And **without controversy** great is the mystery of godliness: God was **manifest in the flesh.....seen of angels***

What was it like for the angels to see the Living God break into our world through the womb of this teenage girl in some dark alley in Bethlehem, wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a stone feeding trough? It's no wonder the angel said FEAR NOT!

FEAR NOT — *Don't be afraid — look at the lengths to which God has gone to rescue you!*

QUESTION — Should we **ever** be afraid of God when we see the lengths to which He went to rescue us? And yet — even as Christians we can find ourselves afraid of what our lives might look like if we fully yielded ourselves to Him — afraid of what He might want of us or ask of us! God born into this world **IS** the expression of His perfect love. And the Bible tells us ([1 John 4:18](#)) that perfect love casts out all fear!

THIS IS SO AWESOME — The glory of God didn't break in on Caesar back in Rome. It was the fields outside of Bethlehem that were lit up with His glory. The glory of the Lord shined out of heaven on men who were the lowest of the low in Jewish culture — and the voice of this angel said those men

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord

Human history had been (and still is) filled with philosophers, generals, kings and rulers! None of them have been able to change what is really broken in this world. Here's the GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY for ALL PEOPLE:

— **unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord**

The one who is **Messiah** — the King — **has come to SAVE**. The true and forever King was born into this world to save the very ones who have rebelled against His rule; save the very ones who wanted their own kingdoms to come rather than His; save the very ones who lived for their

will to be done rather than His will; save the very ones who chose to live for their own glory rather than His!

About 30 years after the angel made this announcement a man named Paul wrote a letter to the community of believers living in the city of Colossae. Paul's words echo what the angel said about who this child IS and they unpack HOW this child would SAVE

Colossians 1:19-22 (NLT) ¹⁹For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, ²⁰and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. ²¹This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²²Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

Paul Tripp — *The birth of Jesus was all about thrones. He left his throne in glory and was laid in a manger to rescue those who presumed to put themselves on the throne. He came to dethrone us and enthrone himself in our hearts and lives forever.*

¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

They would find **Savior — Messiah — Lord** in a feeding trough! Unless the angel told them *where* to look for **Savior — Messiah — Lord** they would have looked in palaces — they would have looked in every place of human glory and power to find Him.

WHY did He come in such weakness? WHY didn't He come with a scepter to destroy all evil? I think it was C.S. Lewis who said that *"If Jesus Christ, in His first coming, had come destroy everything evil there wouldn't have been any of us left."* Anyone who thinks that's an exaggeration of the how lost man is — doesn't know their own heart!

The One who is **Savior — Messiah — Lord** came the first time to this world to be rejected, not to be accepted. He didn't come to *bring* judgment; He came to *bear* judgment. He came to take the rejection we deserve for our rejection of God. He came to SAVE us from the power and penalty of sin — so that one day He could return and put an end to the presence of sin and evil without putting an end to us.

The baby wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a filthy feeding trough was born with a mission. He is LORD; He possessed ultimate authority to condemn us. But His mission was not to condemn rebels, it was to redeem and rescue rebels.

¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

The birth of Savior — Messiah — Lord was announced, not to Caesar, not to Rome. Caesar and Rome thought they were everything glorious and powerful. But they knew nothing of real glory; they knew nothing of real power. The center of human glory and power was **clueless** as to what the God of glory was doing at that time and that place — just as the centers of human glory and power are today.

This same Jesus still chooses to be born in the most obscure, unlikely places — born into hearts like yours and mine!

THAT is GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY!

CLOSE WITH THIS

¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

They didn't say, *Let's see if this thing has really happened.* They knew it had happened — God had made it known to them! They just wanted to see it!

16And they went with haste — When heaven finally makes it clear to you that Jesus is Savior, Messiah and Lord there is only one way to respond to that news: With haste! When God’s love breaks in on your life — run to Him with haste!

16And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

QUOTE: Dietrich Bonhoeffer — “No priest, no theologian stood at the manger of Bethlehem.”

17And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

Shepherds — not rabbis. Shepherds — not scholars of the Scriptures. Shepherds — who were considered unreliable witnesses — were the first to see the **Savior who is Messiah and Lord** — and they were first to testify of His birth!

They wondered at what the lowest of the low had told them!

AGAIN — the birth of Jesus and the proclamation of these angels shapes and informs our mission!

The Good News is still **for** the common man. The Good News is still **made known by** the common man.

19But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Imagine Mary — Gabriel had told her who this child is. She had to be wondering if she had failed in some way because she gave birth to the Son of God in a dark alley— **until** these guys came along and told her that heaven had opened up to them and told them that **Savior — Messiah — Lord** had been born and they would recognize Him because He would be laid in a feeding trough.

²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

CLOSE

God is the same today! He stoops to us today.

The Good News is still the same today: Don't be afraid. There's a SAVIOR who is MESSIAH and LORD.

Beginning in Genesis 3 all the way out to this morning the world is a mess because man's existence has been wrapped up in. *"Look at what I can do!"* **That** is what is at the core of everything broken in the heart of fallen man. There is no human fix for that. Every religious effort of man to fix himself results in man saying *"Look at what I've done!"* — proving that nothing's been fixed!

Christmas says — *"Look at what God has done!"* When Caesar Augustus ruled in Rome, when Quirinius was governing in Syria, God did something! God broke into our broken world through the womb of 15 year old Jewish girl. He broke into our world to reclaim and restore the very ones who had rebelled against Him.

Look at the book ends of the life of the Savior King. When He was born He was wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a rough feeding trough. When He grew up He would be stripped naked and nailed to a Roman cross while men would gamble over his clothes.

He was out in the cold at His birth so you and I could dwell in His house and His Kingdom forever. When he grew up He would be left out in the cold — deserted — despised and rejected — so you and I could become the adopted children of God so you and I could accepted into His Kingdom. a