

## The Gifts of Christmas: Good News of Great Joy

### Luke 2:1-20<sup>i</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you this morning. For those of you that are guests, my name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are certainly glad you are with us today. And on behalf of our church family, we welcome you.

We would love the opportunity to get to connect with you. If you would, simply text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to 94-000. You will then be prompted to click on a link that will provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you. And here's our promise to you... we promise not to bombard your inbox. Again, we would love the opportunity to connect with you and to pray for you.

#### SERIES OVERVIEW:

Last Sunday, Pastor Jeff kicked off the sermon series that we are continuing today, "The Gifts of Christmas." He did a great job of teaching the The Gift Promised. The awaiting of a Savior, the anticipation of the coming Messiah. Today, we continue by building upon that in a message I have entitled, "Good News of Great Joy."

I want to invite you to take your bibles and turn with me to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2 as we zoom in on verses 1-20.

#### **OPENING ILLUSTRATION: News**

Now, I don't know if it was because I was a kid and oblivious, but I remember the day and time when the news was just that, reporting important information about what was going on in the world. For example, I don't remember knowing how Ted Koppel, Andy Rooney or Connie Chung would have voted in a presidential election.

But it is now apparent to me that news outlets are all about ratings. Headlines are tossed out to grab our attention and to gain viewership. They all seem to report bias and promote a certain agenda. And it doesn't matter which side of the political aisle you land, there is bias news pumping us full of a certain

agenda. In fact, I've kinda given up on watching the news. News today seems to only serve as a tool of division among us.

Now, I'm certain there are still some great journalists out there, but in a lot of ways news has become another avenue of propaganda.

Well, when it comes to announcing the news of the very first Christmas, there is anything but fanfare. The birth of our Lord would not have made it on the 10 o'clock news teaser video, wouldn't be a trending tweet on Twitter, nor featured in an Instagram reel. But, as we will see this morning, it is good news of great joy.

#### MESSAGE:

I want to examine three aspects to this good news of great joy and then draw a couple application points in our time together. First, it's...

#### **1) Not Headline but Historical News**

The announcement of Jesus' birth may not have registered as a headline news story, but it is very much so historical news. Let's look at it. Luke 2, verses 1 through 7.

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And 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, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And 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.*

The birth of Christ is historical news for a couple reasons. First, it is an actual historical event. Verses 1 and 2 of Luke chapter 2 mentions key leaders and an event that can be cross checked with extra biblical texts. However, there is a problem that is presented in the text. Skeptics have pointed to this very passage to try to highlight contradictions in the biblical record. I do not see a contradiction here, but I do want to mention it to you and how the apparent contradiction is resolved.

Caesar Augustus, is an actual person. His actual given name is Octavian Caesar. He was given the title, “Augustus” by the Roman senate. Augustus means the majestic one, the honored one. This man ruled Rome from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D.<sup>ii</sup>

Likewise, Quirinius is an actual person. But this is where the contradiction seems to occur. Now, we know that Jesus’ birth occurred between 6 and 4 B.C. Quirinius didn’t become Governor of Syria until 5 or 6 A.D.<sup>iii</sup> Since Jesus’ birth is tied to the census with Quirinius, there is seemingly a contradiction.

Look again at verse 2. <sup>2</sup> *This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.* Now, the word that is translated “when” in my translation can also be translated “before.”<sup>iv</sup> Perhaps that is the better translation which would reconcile the order of events. It would read, <sup>2</sup> *This was the first registration before Quirinius was governor of Syria.*” This makes perfect sense to me highlighting the impeccability of the Scriptures.

Another reason we can point to the birth of Christ being an actual historical event is by considering our dating system. The history of the world is divided by B.C., before Christ, and A.D., anno domini, the year of our Lord. This dating system hinges around what? The birth of Jesus.

Now, I know that there are academics that are suggesting that the terms for this dating system be changed to B.C.E., before common era, and C.E., common era. Now, in my view, it does not matter what terminology you use, the dating system still hinges on the birth of Christ. That’s because it was an actual historical event. It may not have been headline news, but it is historical news.

Secondly, the announcement of Christ’s birth was historical news because it was the fulfilment of ancient prophecy. Some 700 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet, Micah, made a very specific prophecy.

Look at it with me. Micah 5:1-2. *“Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. <sup>2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”*

And we learn in Luke 2:4 that Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to take part in the census. Bethlehem was the hometown of King David. It was also prophesied that the Messiah would be born in the lineage of David.

So, consider all the ways that God had to orchestrate events in order to fulfill prophecy<sup>v</sup>. Caesar Augustus, who knew absolutely nothing about Old Testament prophecy, or Micah, or the Messiah, just so happened to decree a census be taken across the entire Roman empire.

Now, Octavian probably couldn’t care less how the census was performed but that it happened. And because of Jewish tradition, the Jews insisted that the census had to take place in people’s hometowns. That’s because they are big into genealogies. And here the prophecies of the Messiah being of the lineage of David and being born in Bethlehem merge together.

Now, just like April 15 is a deadline for our taxes, there most likely was a deadline for registration to take place. That would have required Mary and Joseph to be in Bethlehem by a certain date. Otherwise, they would have just filed an extension for after the birth of the baby. But that’s not the case. It just so happen to coincide with the timeframe for Jesus to be born. God is orchestrating these events. Caesar may be ruling, but God is the One that is in control.

Now, because of the need to ensure the census was done correctly, there had to have been a strong presence of Roman soldiers. Where do you think the soldiers would stay while in Bethlehem on business? The inn! So, with the soldier presence and the number of people coming to a small village, all the rooms in Bethlehem were occupied. No vacancy.

As a result, the only place available to Joseph and Mary was a little lean to or maybe a small cave. And the only thing available to lay the newly born Jesus in was an animal feeding trough, a manger.

And while the world at that time was preoccupied by a census, all the buzz was about the census, the Savior of the world was born in obscurity. And it needed to happen that way. Can you imagine if the distraction of the census wasn’t going on and news of a King being born made the headlines? There would be no Jesus, no cross, no forgiveness of sin.

How do we know that would have been the case? Well, when the news did break to Herod, do you remember his response? Go throughout the area and kill firstborn males two years and under. But Jesus was born without fanfare, in Bethlehem just like the prophecies foretold.

It wasn't headline news, but it was historical news. Secondly, ...

## 2) Not Prominent but Powerful News

The news of Jesus' birth may not have been prominent news in that day, but it was powerful news.

Read with me Luke 2:8-12. *<sup>8</sup> And in the same region [the same region of Bethlehem] there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.<sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."*

Now, if we had news to share today, and we went to a Public Relations firm and hired them to help us develop a publicity strategy, this would not be the strategy we employ. We would launch a social media campaign, consider product placement opportunities, and design billboards. But God doesn't work the way we work, does He?

Instead, God chose to make the announcement of the greatest news the world has ever heard to shepherds, out in a field, watching over flocks of sheep. Shepherds in this day and time were considered to be the lowliest of all people. From April to November, shepherds lived among sheep in a field. They were basically homeless. They were uneducated. They were always dirty and smelled nasty. They were considered by the religious elite of the day to be unclean because they had to work 7 days a week and couldn't go to the temple to be ceremonially cleansed. The testimony of shepherds was not even accepted in court.<sup>vi</sup>

This is who God announced the coming of the Savior to. Not the prominent, but this announcement was very powerful. Look at the effects of the news.

Verses 13 and 14 of Luke 2. *<sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host **praising God** and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* The news of Jesus' birth moved the angels to worship.

Not only did the angels praise God, but the shepherds that heard the news praised God. Look at verses 15-18. *<sup>15</sup> When 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." <sup>16</sup> And **they went with haste** [By the way, the shepherds were never commanded by the angels to go and see Jesus. They were just filled with such excitement that their response was that of going immediately to see the news.] and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it **wondered** at what the shepherds told them.* Skip down to verse 20. *"And the shepherds returned, **glorifying and praising God** for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."*

Worship continued beyond the angels and the shepherds. Mary praised God. Look at verse 19. *"But Mary **treasured** up all these things, pondering them in her heart."*

But then when the wise men show up delivering gifts, we will get to that next week, but what did they do? They worshiped God. Powerful news.

The announcement of Jesus' birth wasn't headline or prominent news, but it was historical and powerful news. Thirdly, the news of Jesus' coming was...

## 3) Not Broadcast but Broad

The angel, which many scholars believe the angel is Gabriel<sup>vii</sup>, the same angel that appeared to Mary and Joseph to tell them that Mary would give birth to Jesus. Gabriel says in verse 10 of Luke 2, *"<sup>10</sup> 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.**'* This good news of great joy is widespread.

Now, the word translated, "people," is a word that primarily refers to Israel. Luke uses it a number of times to refer to the Jews.<sup>viii</sup> Why would the announcement be for the Jews? Well, it was to fulfill two covenants God made with people in the Old Testament. First, like Pastor Jeff pointed out last week,

God told Abraham that He would make him into a great nation. The Messiah coming to redeem God's people would fulfill that promise. Secondly, it fulfills the Davidic Covenant. This is where God promises that a descendant of King David would reign on the throne over the people of God forever. Jesus is that King of kings and Lord of lords.

While it came to fulfill these two covenants, it doesn't stop with the Jews. Look at verses 30 through 32 for just a moment. When Jesus is presented in the Temple, Simeon sees Jesus and builds on the angel's announcement by saying, *"for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples [plural], <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."*

So, the gift of the Savior, the greatest news the world has ever heard, in news that wasn't broadcast but it is broad. It was to fulfill a promise made by God to the Jews but it was a gift for the whole world. And that is also a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah 60, verses 1 through 3 says, *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."*

God's plan has always been to redeem all people. To make atonement for all sin through the sacrifice of His one and only Son upon the cross at Calvary. The most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

This good news of great joy was not headline news, not prominent news, and not broadcast news, but it was historical news, powerful news, and all-encompassing news.

#### **APPLICATION:**

Now, in the time we have left, I want to talk through, quickly, two application points. How does this good news of great joy apply to us today? Two things.

#### **1) God Reveals Himself**

Think back to the field where the shepherds were keeping their sheep. I don't know about you, but I can identify with these lowly shepherds. Can you?

They were not the super religious. They were not the most intelligent. They were definitely not people that had it all together. They were not the influential people of the day. They were the outcast of society. And I think that the shepherds came into the very first Christmas not feeling like their life was great. But listen, that's to whom the Christmas message came. And that is to whom the Christmas message is still for. God says, "the broken, the downcast, the marginalized, the lowly, the lonely, the hurting, the sinner, those are the ones to whom I want to reveal myself."

And this very approach is the way Jesus approached His ministry. In Mark 2:17, Jesus says, *"And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* This is Jesus' response to criticism that He hung out with sinners and tax collectors. I don't know about you, but I can relate to that.

The good news of great joy is that God loves you and me so very much that He moved Heaven and earth, He revealed Himself, that we might find forgiveness of our sin and a restored relationship with Almighty God. Good news of great joy!

I can promise you that God wants to reveal Himself to you this Christmas. If He visited the shepherds He wants to visit you. Are you listening or has God's news to you been buried in the busyness and other happenings in your life? In Bethlehem that first Christmas, the world was preoccupied with a census and taxes that the Savior of the world was born in obscurity.

Beloved, don't miss Christmas. Don't allow the happenings surrounding your life, the circumstance in which you find yourself, to overshadow God's revealing Himself to you.

The second application point I want to talk through today is that...

#### **2) God Works**

The story of Christmas is proof that God is at work on the earth. But not only is He at work on the earth, He's at work in our lives on a personal level.

Maybe the circumstances surrounding your life is not what you would want or maybe what you would have planned. But if Christmas tells us anything, it's that God works in the midst of the unplanned and unexpected.

Can you imagine what ran through Mary's mind as she anticipated Jesus' arrival? Do you think when she was a little girl, she planned on carrying a baby prior to marriage? Do you think she would have to give birth in a stable? Probably not at all what she had imagined. But God used it.

God does that. Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" What is the chaos in your life that you are praying God works together for good? Is it a relationship that is severed? Is it an outlook that seems abysmal? Is it a provision that you are wondering about? Is it a circumstance that has you down because it is not what you imagined? God works. Christmas is proof that God works.

Think about this for a moment. Caesar thinks that he is running the show. He may be ruling, but God is overruling<sup>x</sup>. God is orchestrating, even Caesar's decree, to bring about the fulfillment of His promise.

God still works that way. It's called the sovereignty of God. I don't fully understand it, but I trust it. God is revealing Himself and God is at work. Good news of great joy.

### **CONCLUSION:**

I want to invite the band to come back up and lead us in a time of response. How is it that God is stirring in your heart? What is it about this good news of great joy that that God is revealing in you today?

Perhaps you are here this morning, or you have joined us online, and you have never come to a point in your life where you have bowed the knee to Jesus as the Lord and Savior of your life. Listen, Christmas is all about salvation in Jesus as Lord.

The Bible says that we are all sinners and we have fallen short of the glory of God. And that falling short, that missing the mark, that sinfulness of our hearts has welled up in eternal death. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, BUT the GIFT of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

Have you trusted Jesus as Lord? Have you placed your faith in Him for the forgiveness of your sin? If not, you can today. Simply come, our elders will be at the front ready to receive you, and surrender your life to Jesus as Lord.

Perhaps you are here today, and your response is different. Christmas for you highlights hurt and pain, loss and imperfection. God wants to reveal Himself to you in the midst of that. He wants to take what is broken in your life and work it together for good. Maybe your response is simply to come and allow us to pray with you and over you. We would love to do that this morning.

Whatever it is that The Lord is laying on your heart, that's what I want you to be obedient to. Maybe you don't fully know what it is that God is laying on your heart, you just feel the tug on your heart, you come and we will walk through it with you.

I'm going to pray, we are going to sing, and I simply want you to respond to Jesus' working in your life. [Pray]

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<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation of this sermon: John MacArthur, “The Announcement of Jesus’ Birth, Part 1”; Skip Heitzig, Expound, “Luke 2.”; as well as previous sermons I’ve preached on this text.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/augustus.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/C/cyrenius.html>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://defendinginerrancy.com/bible-solutions/Luke\\_2.2.php](https://defendinginerrancy.com/bible-solutions/Luke_2.2.php)

<sup>v</sup> This section was adapted from John MacArthur’s sermon on Luke 2:8-11, “The Announcement of Jesus’ Birth, Part 1.”

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.christianity.com/jesus/birth-of-jesus/shepherds-and-angels/shepherds-the-right-choice.html>

<sup>vii</sup> Good discussion on this can be found here:

[https://www.harvestbiblechurch.net/content.cfm?page\\_content=blogs\\_include.cfm&friendly\\_name=angels-appear-to-shepherds](https://www.harvestbiblechurch.net/content.cfm?page_content=blogs_include.cfm&friendly_name=angels-appear-to-shepherds)

<sup>viii</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/2992.htm>

<sup>ix</sup> Got this little quip from Skip Heitzig’s message on Luke 2.