

Celebrate Christmas, part 2

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 2, verses 1-20.

Would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together. A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

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

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

[1 : 19] And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly, with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he has pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, and 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. And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger.

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen as it had been told to them. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word.

[2 : 34] Would you please be seated? Amen. You've probably noticed that important people spend a lot of their lives behind barricades.

There are barricades that set them from the public as they enter into buildings. They often barricade themselves with bodyguards.

Their homes are often surrounded by large walls with security cameras and security guards as a way to keep themselves barricaded in and a comfortable distance from other people.

Why do they do that? Well, in a way, they sort of have to do that. Because otherwise, they would be bombarded and crushed, potentially even, by people who want to interact with them, want to talk with them.

Some people who just want to touch them. Maybe even hurt them. So our access to them, because of that, is limited.

[3 : 48] There's great potential for them to be seriously hurt. Of all people of importance, there is no one greater than the Son of God.

You can't get more important than that, can you? Who wouldn't want to have access to such a very important person?

However, this very important person didn't keep himself safely behind any such barricade.

Jesus Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the second person of the Trinity, was willing to step beyond the barricade of heaven and earth.

Willing to leave the glories of heaven and enter our sinful and fallen world. He walked and he dwelt among us. He became a man.

[4 : 53] He was accessible and vulnerable. And eventually, we crucified him. Now we know from Scripture that this happened according to God's divine redemptive plan to save sinners.

He had to step across the barricade. And Jesus did so willingly, knowing fully what would happen. But I wonder, what if he hadn't? What if he'd stayed securely behind the barricade?

Well, for one thing, there'd be no Christmas for us to celebrate. Now I understand that a lot of people already do that. They celebrate Christmas without acknowledging Christ in any way.

But I believe that there are still, even in that, undertones of the gospel when they celebrate.

Undertones of peace and of goodwill towards men and giving generously to others.

All these are attitudes that reflect God and his graciously giving his son to men. Offering us peace with him through his sacrifice on the cross and eternal life through his resurrection.

[6 : 07] Without Christ's coming, there'd be no Christmas and we'd be eternally hopeless. Left to face the eternal consequences of God's divine judgment against the sins that we have committed against him.

But Christ did come. He did step down. He did come out from behind the barricade that separates holiness from sinfulness.

And this gives us great reason to celebrate Christmas. This morning we celebrate the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The birth of God's Son. This gives us reason to celebrate not just during this time of year, but always and forever.

So the main idea for this morning's message is this. At the incarnation, Christ's deity and humanity were joined.

[7 : 18] One person with two natures. The eternal word became flesh, God and man, in one beautiful and glorious person.

Knowing Christ ensures our being changed by him, giving us reason to celebrate Christmas and enjoy him forever. At Christmas, Christians celebrate more than a birth.

We celebrate an incarnation. We celebrate a God who stepped out from behind the barricade, so to speak, of heaven, leaving behind his divine prerogatives in order to dwell amongst us.

What does incarnation mean? Well, it means a coming in the flesh. And when we were in John chapter 1, 1 through 5, we went through what all of this meant.

And let's go back there for context sake. Verses 1 through 4. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[8 : 23] He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

In this somewhat complicated introductory statement, we are presented with a paradox. The Word is first distinguished from God.

In the beginning was the Word. Then, in the next statement, it identifies the Word with God. And the Word was with God, it says. And the Word was God.

Then at the end of John's prologue, in chapter 1, verse 14, he says, And this Word, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us.

So at the incarnation, the eternal second person of the Trinity took upon himself a human nature, and he joined it with his divine nature.

[9 : 26] This was not a subtraction, nor was it an exchange of natures, but an addition. God and man fully together in one person. So here's your fancy-pants theological term for today to impress your friends with.

Hypostatic union. Hypostatic union. That refers to the union of Christ's human and divine natures together in one glorious person who was Jesus Christ.

And as we've already sung, Charles Wesley, in his well-known and well-loved hymn, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, he refers to that very thing in one of those verses.

He says, Veiled in flesh, the Godhead, see. Hail the incarnate deity. Pleased as man with men to dwell. Jesus, Jesus our Emmanuel, which that word literally means Emmanuel.

God with us. God with us. God living for us. God dying in our place.

[10 : 39] This is the truth that we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus incarnation. Jesus our Emmanuel. And so from this text, I want us to see three truths about the incarnation that give us reason to

celebrate Christmas.

And the first is this. The incarnation makes sense of Scripture. The incarnation makes sense of Scripture.

Without the incarnation, the Bible would be an incomplete book. Prophecies would be yet to be fulfilled. Giving us reason potentially to doubt them and the truth and veracity of the claims of the Bible.

But because Christ has come, because he has been incarnated, because he has lived and died and he has rose again, the incarnation makes the truths contained within the book of the Bible verifiable and true.

We can trust God's Word because it is God's Word. The incarnation proves its truthfulness and the author of its truth by linking the Old Testament prophecies of old to the prophecies that had yet to have been fulfilled, but one day would be, one day will be.

[12:00] Jesus came just as the Old Testament had predicted and just as the New Testament reveals. And we can trust that just as it promised that he would one day come, and he did, so it promises that one day he will come again, and he will.

Verses one through five again. Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken by Quirinius, who was the governor of Syria, and everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, in order to register with Mary, who was engaged to him and was with child. Now, on the Ides of March, 44 B.C., Julius Caesar died at the hands of his friends and his close associates.

Caesar's power had grown beyond their ability to control, and so, motivated by fear of him and his increasing authority, Caesar's trusted allies became his greatest enemies.

What makes the story even more ironic is that two years prior to this event, these same men had declared him to be a god and worshipped him as such.

[13:30] Caesar's wealth and power after his assassination then transferred over to his 19-year-old nephew and adopted son, Gaius Octavius. Then over the next 20 years, Octavius became the unrivaled, unmatched, undisputed leader of the Roman Empire.

Over the course of that time, he would bestow upon himself different titles. At first, he took upon the title of princeps, which means leading citizen.

Later, he added another one, pontifex maximus, which means high priest. And then finally, Augustus, which means supreme ruler.

Then in the fall of 12 BC, Caesar Augustus looked up into the fall sky, and he saw Halley's Comet lighting up the night.

And he attributed that wonder to Julius, his adopted father, saying that the comet was his spirit, and it was entering the heavens as proof that he truly was a god, which got Augustus thinking.

[14:50] If my father is a god, then I must be too. And so such was the state of things when the true son of God entered this world.

Augustus had ordered a census to maintain and extend his power over the world that he controlled. However, there was a much greater God-ordained purpose behind all of it.

Over 700 years before the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the prophet Micah prophesied that the birth of the Messiah would occur, and that it would occur in the little, tiny, insignificant town of Bethlehem.

Micah 5, 2 through 4. But you, O Bethlehem, Ephrata, 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.

Therefore, he shall live, or he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. Then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel, and he shall stand, and he shall shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

[16:11] And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. So you see, Augustus, as powerful as he was, he was simply an errand boy for God when he had that census ordered.

The prophecy in Micah said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Every part of Jesus' birth was premeditated. It was by God's plan that Mary and Joseph ended up in Bethlehem when they did, at that precise time and in that precise location, proving again that his word is true, that it's

Verses 6 and 7, And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and lied him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.

In the Old Testament, God was accessible only through the mediation and intervention of prophets and priests who served in the tabernacle and later in the temple. No Israelite could properly see God.

[22 : 56] The veil of the temple separated God's presence, if you remember, from the holy of holies from his sinful people. But now at the incarnation, his deity was veiled in flesh.

Flesh that would one day be pierced by nails. Flesh that would be torn. Flesh that would bleed. Flesh that would suffer. Flesh that would die. A body that served as a sacrifice.

A sacrifice that resulted with the veil of the temple at Jesus' crucifixion being ripped completely in two. Granting us access to God forever through Jesus Christ, our great high priest, whose sacrifice mediated a new covenant for us.

A covenant of grace. A salvation that we could not earn but is freely given to all who believe. We celebrate Christmas because God is accessible.

He has made himself accessible to us by lowering himself. He wasn't born in a prominent place to a people of nobility.

[24 : 08] He was born in a manger to an impoverished teenage mother and a lowly carpenter and this was intentional. It was foreshadowing the reality that Jesus did not come to earth to experience the comforts of life on earth nor did he come to create heaven on earth for his followers.

No. The manger established his path that would lead to Calvary and the borrowed tomb where his body would be laid.

Jesus did not live to make every day seem like a Friday. He did not live for himself. He lived to accomplish his Father's will to bring pleasure and honor to his name.

He lived to die for sins that he did not commit granting us access to the Father by absorbing them, taking them from us. He didn't put up a fight when he was ridiculed, when he was spat upon, when he was slapped, when he was whipped, when he was crucified.

He didn't come to be served but to serve. His humility was on full display from manger to cross to tomb. His incarnation began in humility and it ended in the same way as he became obedient to the point of death, even the shameful and excruciating death on a cross.

[25 : 40] He became accessible. How do we know what God is like? Jesus tells us.

He's loving. He's forgiving. He's merciful. He's wonderful. He's friendly. There's a thought.

He's friendly. Jesus was a friend of sinners. Jesus made friends. Jesus surrounded himself with friends.

These weren't mere acquaintances. These were friends whom he knew, whom he loved, and whom he served. If you remember, with his disciples, he stooped down to the ground.

He got on their hands, he got on his hands and knees and he washed their filthy feet, serving them, taking a humble form and position before them, stooping down to wash their feet, just as he stooped down from heaven to take our sins upon himself and to cleanse us of our sins.

[27 : 01] You have access to God because of the incarnation. This should make a big difference for you in your life. It means that you should pray frequently because you have access to God who hears.

Such access was purchased with a great price. And if you know what Christ has done for you through his incarnation, it can't help but change your life.

In fact, if you truly know Christ, it must change your life. It has to. The Holy Spirit indwelling you produces fruit that reveals this very truth.

But if that fruit isn't there, then you aren't saved. But you can be. Christ has made a way for you to be saved.

And so I ask you, is God calling you today? He's made himself accessible to you. Is he speaking to you through the example of his son?

[28 : 09] Do you see that Christ has made a way for your sins to be forgiven? For those of you who believe, there should be no doubt in anyone's mind who it is whom you serve.

Just as our Lord told us in Matthew 16, 24 through 25. Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. People need to know what God is really like.

And the more that you live like Christ, the more you'll be able to demonstrate that to them. the incarnation compels us to godly living.

We celebrate Christmas because it makes sense of scripture. We celebrate Christmas and the incarnation because it reveals the accessibility of God. And finally, the incarnation brings salvation for all people.

[29 : 17] Not all people, literally, but all kinds of people. If you remember in verses 18 through 14, it's the shepherds who first hear this news from angels.

And they are quick to leave their flocks and to go and to find him and to worship. Back in seminary, I had an Old Testament survey professor.

And when we would go through different books of the Bible where different battles had taken place or significant events had happened in the Old Testament, he would show us pictures of where these things really happened.

And I'll never forget one of the pictures that he showed us was of a shepherd, a shepherd boy who was shepherding his flocks in present day time. And he was dirty.

You could tell by the pictures. Kid who hadn't had a shower or a bath in a very long time. He was, he had a grim expression for a kid who was so young because he'd probably seen a lot of things and he'd worked really hard.

[30 : 30] And from our professor's other details that he added was that he smelt horribly because he's out in the fields. He's taking care of sheep and they stink and so did he.

And because of those things, shepherds were often viewed as outcasts of society. They were viewed as being on the bottom of the sociological totem pole.

And yet the angels appeared to them. Not to Caesar. Not to Herod. Not to anyone else whose society viewed as important.

Those people who had been barricaded from commoners but to shepherds. Imagine being a shepherd and hearing that finally a king had been born whose palace was a stable and whose cradle was a trough.

They would have thought finally here is a king who is willing to share in our lowly station who will care about us.

[31 : 48] Here is a king that they could identify with because he was willing to identify with them. He would not subject them in labor for the acquisition of greater wealth for himself.

Instead this king would subject himself to the tortures of the cross to atone for their sins. He'd give his life for theirs. When the angel had gone away into heaven the shepherds began to say to one another let us go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing.

So they came in a hurry and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby. When they had seen this they made known the statement which had been told to them about this child and all who heard it wondered about all these things.

But Mary treasured them up in her heart pondering them. The Bible says that everyone was in a state of wonder but that Mary was treasuring these things and pondering them in her heart.

the Greek word for ponder literally means to throw together to bring together much like how you would take a jigsaw puzzle and you'd dump out the pieces and you'd separate them and you'd start to try to see how they came together or could come together.

[33 : 10] Everything that had happened to Mary the angelic announcement from Gabriel that we talked about last week that she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit the crisis that this caused Joseph the timing of the census the birth of God in the flesh and a stable of all places the worship of shepherds the message that the angels spoke to them and so in her mind as she's pondering the pieces of the puzzle are forming together.

Let me tell you that we are tremendously blessed blessed to have all of the pieces of the puzzle pieced together for us in the Bible.

We see how God intended to deliver us from our sins as early as Genesis chapter 3 and then how he weaved every moment of history and every person and every nation to come to this point when the time was right to send forth his son.

For what purpose? Galatians chapter 4 4-5 But when the fullness of time came God sent his son born of a woman born under the law so that he might redeem those who are under the law that we

might receive adoption as sons.

Why? To redeem us from our sins by dying for them on the cross and resurrecting from the dead as proof that the wrath of God towards the sins that we've committed had been satisfied in his flesh and that he in fact Jesus was the son of God.

[34 : 55] He lived sinlessly he obeyed perfectly and by putting our faith in him as Lord and Savior our sins are imputed they're transferred over to his account and God imputes his righteousness to us and as a result we have peace with God.

We have peace with men because we know God personally as the gracious and loving father that he truly is. We celebrate the incarnation at Christmas because it makes sense of God's word it makes God accessible and is a message of salvation that is for everyone.

So what do we do with this? First of all trust in God's promises his word is true. Now listen sometimes the way we feel is right sometimes our opinions are correct sometimes our feelings are right and our opinions but not all the time and I can tell you my wife can testify to that not all the time but let me tell you God's word is true all the time and we can always trust and in an age of fake news in an age where the people whom you should be able to trust you can't trust we should be so thankful that we have God's word that we have its truth that we have its light and that if we walk in it we'll be protected we'll be safe and we'll know why we have reason to hope in this dark world.

secondly approach God daily daily you have access to God freely at any point at any time during the day you can pray you have access to him and thankfully even in our nation we have access to his word seek him every day don't waste or take for granted the access that you have to God then third share the gospel everywhere this is the news for everybody there's no person whom we should not seek to share this message with this is a message that everybody needs to hear and God has called you to be his messenger to share it so share it with everyone and finally I want to close with a poem written by

Charles Spurgeon called Emmanuel when once I mourned a load of sin when conscious felt a wound within when all my works were thrown away when on my knees I knelt to pray then blissful hour remembered well I learned thy love Emmanuel when storms of sorrow toss my soul when waves of care around me roll when comfort seek when joys shall flee when hopeless griefs shall gape for me one word the tempest rage shall quell that word thy name Emmanuel when for the truth I suffer shame when foes pour scandal on my name when cruel taunts and jeers abound when bulls of Bashan gird me round secure within thy tower

[38 : 44] I'll dwell that tower thy grace Emmanuel when hell and rage lifts up her roar when Satan stops my path before when fields rejoice and wait my end when legions host their arrows send fear not my soul but hurl at hell thy battle cry Emmanuel when down the hill of life I go when o'er my feet death's waters flow when in the deepening flood I sink when friends stand weeping on the brink I'll mingle with my last farewell thy lovely name Emmanuel when tears are banished from mine eye when fairer worlds than these are nigh when heaven shall fill my ravished sight when I shall bathe in sweet delight one joy all joys shall far excel to see thy face Emmanuel let's pray

Lord God forgive us that so often we have come to this text and we have read the story of your incarnation and we can get to the point where we feel like we've heard it enough and we know enough about it all that there is to know and so we hear these words and we don't spend or think or ponder over them as Mary did and we get so caught up in all the other things that we think are necessary in order for us to celebrate Christmas taking our eyes off the fact that Emmanuel God with us God for us has come in your son Jesus Christ that Lord of all people in this world we should be the most joyful we should celebrate with the most gladness knowing that you have come knowing that you have taken our place on the cross for our sins knowing that you have rose from the dead that you have granted us eternal life through putting our faith in you as a result of your grace that no matter what happens to us in this world that that truth and that hope can never be taken away from us that we are just merely passing through this world coming to yours our true home when we shall bathe in sweet delight in that one joy of all joys that far excel to see your face Emmanuel and so God I pray that we as your people would celebrate this time of year in a way that reflects the awesome gift that we have received in your son Jesus Christ in a way that will astound the world and that they would know that God has come that Jesus has come that he stepped behind the barricade that he took on our sin dying in our place that we will have eternal life what more reason could we need to celebrate Christmas than this in Jesus name we pray amen