**A Savior Has Been Born to You**

December 24, 2017

Luke 2:1-20

Key Verse 2:11 “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Luke, the author of this gospel was a medical doctor and a historian. Luke wasn’t an eyewitness of the life and ministry of Christ, so he interviewed the people who were the key players in this story. No doubt he sat down with Mary and heard the story from her and talked to other people who were actually there. Then he put it all together to give us an accurate record of what took place. Luke mentions Caesar Augustus, whose actual name was Caius Octavius. He was the great nephew of Julius Caesar. After Caesar died, they took the name of Caesar and turned it into a title. Caius Octavius became the Caesar of Rome, but he started calling himself Caesar Augustus. The term Augustus means to be worshiped and revered. Archaeologists have discovered an actual monument dedicated to Caesar and inscribed with the words, “Caesar Augustus, the savior of the whole world.” This makes sense when we look at the angel’s statement to the shepherds, who were keeping watch over their flocks at night: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (11-12) Effectively, God was saying, “Caesar Augustus is not the Savior; Jesus Christ is the Savior. The Savior is not wrapped in royal robes. He is wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Let’s think about Jesus, our Savior today.

700 years before Jesus was born, a Hebrew prophet named Micah was inspired by God to write that when the Messiah comes 700 years later, he would be born in of all places an obscure small town called Bethlehem, house of bread. (Micah 5:2) As we studied, Mary lived in the town of Nazareth, and she became pregnant through the Holy Spirit, and now she was in full term. Nazareth was 120 km away from Bethlehem, about 4 or 5 days journey. I don’t think that Mary said to Joseph, “You know, the Messiah must be born in Bethlehem so it is to Bethlehem we need to go.” She probably wanted to have her son in Nazareth, near her mother, near her family. Certainly the thought of a birth without medication, a birth without comfort, would be scary. But they had no choice. Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. It required all men and women to go back to their ancestral town and register in order to pay taxes. Joseph belonged to the line of David, and so he traveled to Bethlehem, the town of David. Here, God orchestrated human history, specifically the action of Caesar Augustus, to carry out his grand purpose of sending a promised Savior according to the prophecies. Caesar Augustus had his own reason for his census, namely, to consolidate his power, and yet God used it for his good purpose. This reminds us of Genesis 50:20, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Have you ever felt, like me, little and insignificant in a world of 7 billion people, where all the news is of big political and economic and social movements and of outstanding people with lots of power and prestige? If you have, don’t let that make you disheartened or unhappy. For it is implicit in the Bible that all the big political forces and all the giant industrial complexes, without their even knowing it, are being guided by God, not for their own sake but for the sake of God’s little people—the little Mary and the little Joseph who had to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Do not think, because you experience adversity, that the arm of the Lord is too short to save. It is not our prosperity and comfort but our holiness that he seeks with all his heart. And to that end, he rules the whole world. He is a big God for little people, and we have great cause to rejoice that, unknowingly, all the kings and presidents and prime ministers of the world follow the sovereign decrees of our Father in heaven, that we, the children, might be conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Now you would think that if God so rules the world as to use an empire-wide census to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, he surely could have seen to it that a room was available in the inn. Yes, he could have. And Jesus could have been born into a wealthy family. He could have turned stone into bread in the wilderness. He could have called 10,000 angels to his aid in Gethsemane. He could have come down from the cross and saved himself. The question is not what God could do, but what he willed to do. God’s will was that though Christ was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. The “No Vacancy” signs over all the motels in Bethlehem were for your sake. “For your sake he became poor.” God rules all things—even motel capacities—for the sake of his children. The way of the cross begins with a “No Vacancy” sign in Bethlehem and ends with the shameful cross in Jerusalem. And we must not forget that he said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23) To those who calls out enthusiastically: “I will follow you wherever you go!” Jesus responds, “Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20)

Now Jesus’ birth is the greatest event in human history. It divides our history into B.C., before Christ, and A.D., Anno Domini, the year of our Lord. So naturally, you want this greatest news known to the whole world. If you were planning the strategy for this PR campaign, you might have made sure that the main authorities got the message; you might want to go the high priest, you might want to go to the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel. You might want to go to the temple, and there you would surely have found Simeon and Anna and others who were looking for the salvation of Israel, waiting for the Messiah. You might have gone to some group of devout and righteous Jews who were waiting to hear this, some who might have a great measure of influence. The last people you would go to make any kind of announcement of significance would be shepherds in an open field. And that is exactly to whom God went. Shepherds were at the very bottom of the social ladder. The testimony of shepherds wasn’t even allowed in a court of law because it was assumed they would not tell the truth. They were despised by many people. One reason was that they could not observe the ceremonial hand washings that were required to approach God in the temple.

This is typical of the way God often works. After all, whom did he choose to be the mother of the Messiah? He chose a peasant girl named Mary, who was living in Nazareth, a town in the middle of nowhere. Throughout his ministry, Jesus always had time for the nobodies, the outcasts. He had time for unloved people like the despised tax collector Zacchaeus, the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, and the immoral woman at the well. Jesus always had time for the down and outers, for the outcast, for the unloved and for the unknown – people like the shepherds. The shepherds were living outside, with really no homes to speak of: “There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flock at night.” (Luke 2:8)

Look at verses 10-11. “But the angel said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” Jesus’ birth is good news of great joy. We are living in a world full of bad news. We hear news of all the threats against our nation, threats from people who want to harm us. It is a scary world we are living in. But God is saying, “Don’t be afraid. Instead rejoice, because there is a great event that has happened.” We have a Savior: The Savior, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem. He saves us from our past, our present and our future. He forgives us all the wrongs and the sins we have committed. This is the great hope that we have at Christmas. We have a Savior. Let’s think about Jesus our Savior in two aspects.

**First**, Jesus saves us from the world of ungrace. We are living in this world run by ungrace. Life is tough. Because of sin, it became corrupted. It is a dog-eat-dog world. Everything depends on what I do. We have been taught to believe that it is normal. Even from kindergarten we are tested and evaluated. From then on we receive grades denoting performance in math, science, reading, and even “social skills.” Test papers come back with errors—highlighted. All this help prepare us for the real world with its relentless ranking, a grown-up version of the playground game “king of the hill,” or “top dog.” Every institution runs on ungrace and its insistence that we earn our way. Airline frequent-flyer programs and mortgage companies cannot operate by grace. A sports team rewards those who score goals, throw strikes, or make baskets. It has no place for those who fail. Fortune magazine annually lists the 500 richest people; no one knows the names of the 500 poorest. Anorexia, the eating disorder is a direct product of ungrace: You are accepted only when you are beautiful and skinny. So teenage girls will starve themselves to death in an attempt to reach that ideal. It is a disease that is unique in Western civilization. It never occurs in places like Africa (where plumpness, not thinness, is admired).

As a result we live in constant fear of being left out, not accepted by society. We live in fear that we will never meet the approval of our parents or our boss. This mentality is also common in the church. We think we have to do something to get approval from God. When people say, “It was a good message,” I feel righteous. I am anxious for people’s praise and approval. Jesus came and saved us from this world of ungrace. He died on the cross for our sins so that we may be holy and blameless in God’s sight. We are now princes and princesses in God’s kingdom, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. All these do not depend on our performance. We do not have achieve but merely follow. Jesus has already earned for us the costly victory of God’s acceptance. In my workplace, there is no grace. If you do not publish, you don’t get any recognition. If I do not remember that I am a holy child of God, loved by God, I would live in constant fear. Praise Jesus my Savior who shows his grace.

**Second**, Jesus gives us peace. Look at verse 14. The angels praised God saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” And by peace I mean not only the absence of conflict and animosity, but also the presence of joy and richness in interpersonal relationship. There are three aspects of peace: Peace with God. Peace with your own soul. And peace with other people. The most basic need we have is peace with God. This is foundational to all our pursuits of peace. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Justified means that God declares you to be just in his sight by the righteousness of Jesus. And he does that by faith alone: Not by works. Not by tradition. Not by virtue. Not by parentage. But by faith alone. When we believe in Jesus as the Savior and the Lord, we are united to him and his righteousness is counted by God as ours. We are justified by faith. And the result is peace with God. God’s anger at us because of our sin is put away. Our rebellion against him is overcome. God adopts us into his family, and he becomes our loving Father. And from now on all his dealings with us are for our good. He will never be against us. We have peace. We don’t need to be afraid any more.

And because we have peace with God because of being justified by faith, we can begin to grow in the enjoyment of peace with ourselves, namely, free from any sense of guilt or anxiety that tends to paralyze us or make us hopeless. Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything [the opposite of anxiety is peace], but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God [in other words, roll your anxieties onto God]. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” The picture here is that our hearts and our minds are under attack. Guilt, worries, threats, confusions, uncertainties — they all threaten our peace. Paul says that God wants to “guard” your hearts and minds. He gives us inexplicable peace. And he does it when we take our anxieties to him in prayer and trust him that he will carry them for us (1 Peter 5:7) and protect us. When we do this, when we come to him--and remember we already have peace with him!-- and trust him as our loving and almighty heavenly Father to help us, his peace comes to us and steadies us, and protects us from the disabling effects of fear and anxiety and guilt. Do that this Christmas. Take your anxieties to God. Tell him about them. Ask him to help you. To protect you. To restore your peace.

The third relationship where God wants us to enjoy his peace is in our relationships with others. This is the one we have least control over. Romans 12:18 says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” For some of you when you get together with family for Christmas, there will be some awkward and painful relationships. Some of the pain is very old. And some of it is new. In some relationships you know what you have to do, no matter how hard it is. And in some of them you are baffled and don’t know what the path of peace calls for. In both cases the key is trusting the promises of God with heartfelt awareness of how he forgave you through Christ. It is very difficult. But remember Ephesians 4:31–32, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ forgave you.”

The core meaning of Christmas is that a Savior has been born to you and me. It is great news of great joy. He saves us from this world of ungrace and gives us peace.