

# A Historic Birth

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**Bible Text:** Luke 2:1-11  
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Well, today we remember, as we do each year about this time, a historic birth, historic in the sense of its great significance, yes, but today we remember a historic birth that occurred in time and place in history. We celebrate and remember not myths or stories or mere moral principles, we remember the coming of a real Lord who came in real human flesh in real time and in a place of real geography. So we come to remember a historic birth in that sense this morning and I would hasten to say not through our cultural traditions but simply through the eyes of Scripture. In the simplicity of the word of God, we open Scripture to see what God did in time past in order to save sinners like you and me.

Turn, if you would, back to the Gospel of Luke in your Bibles to Luke 2 and as you read this, you are struck by the simple history, the reality of real-world history and real-world geography. Christ came in real flesh to a real place to achieve a real salvation for real sinners just like you and in Luke 2:1-7 we read the account of the birth of our great and gracious Lord. Chapter 2:1,

1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now, beloved, and friends and visitors here with us this morning, there is something that you should realize and remember about the Gospel of Luke that affects the perspective through which you hear and read this passage. Go back to the very beginning of the Gospel of Luke in Luke 1 and realize that it was the purpose of Luke, it was his human intention that was guided and superintended by the Holy Spirit as he wrote this magnificent Gospel, it was the intention of Luke to write a Gospel that was historically

accurate and he makes this very plain from the very beginning. In chapter 1, verse 1, he says, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

Beloved, every time that we come to Scripture and every time we speak about the Lord Jesus Christ, it is imperative for you, it is imperative for the well-being of your soul, it is imperative for your spiritual confidence and your trust in the things that are revealed in the Bible, to realize that they are accurate; that they are true; that they conform to what really actually happened. Luke says from the very beginning that that was his purpose in writing and unlike some perhaps in our day who treat spiritual truth and the truth of Scripture in a haphazard way without real regard for defending it or proclaiming it, Luke said that his intention was to write something accurate and that it wasn't simply a matter of historical curiosity to him, that he did it for his readers so that you would know with certainty that what you are reading is the exact way that it happened.

So we have the privilege some 2,000 years later to be able to read an account of the time when God became flesh in the form of a baby in Bethlehem and to know exactly what happened. We are not left in a fog of history that covers it up and makes it opaque to us as if we can't know what really happened. We utterly reject those scholars and writers which would diminish the historical accuracy of the Scripture. We gladly stand against them and oppose them because we believe what God has said in his word and we trust it. And not only that, it's not just that we have a word from God on the written page in front of us, beloved, it is certified to us by the testimony of the Holy Spirit to our hearts that what we are reading is true. So we are in a position of great privilege to remember the greatest event that has ever happened in the course of the universe when God stepped down from heaven to walk on earth, and to have the privilege of remembering and understanding why he did that, that he did it because men and women, boys and girls like you and me, were sinful, separated from him, under judgment, and in desperate danger of eternal perdition. And that what we read about here is not simply a story of a baby being born, what we read about is the profound outworking of an eternal plan of God to send his own Son into the world to save sinners like you and me from that very perdition of which we were most deserving. Isn't it a wonderful thing to be gathered together as believers on Christmas Day? To be able to remember things like this and to know that we are hearing and seeing the truth laid out as God has recorded for us in the Scriptures?

And there is something about the nature of the narrative, there is something about the historical detail that Luke gives us that lends authenticity to it; that testifies to us that we are reading things that really happened and therefore our salvation is rooted in things that are real, not in our own imagination. Our salvation is based on that which actually has happened in time and space, not a story that someone told just to entertain people around the campfire.

And for those of you that are here that are not in Christ, and I know that in a room of this size there is bound to be some, would you please, I beg you, would you please recognize today that God in his great mercy has brought you into this room so that you could hear the very words of truth that are necessary for the salvation of your soul. So that you would not go to hell when you die; so that you would be prepared to meet a holy God when the time of your departure from this life comes; that in his death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ has made a way for you to be clothed in perfect righteousness, not of your own but of his, that you might be reconciled to a holy God. These are the most wonderful words of all. These are the wonderful words of life from Scripture. This is the greatest thing that we could contemplate on a Christmas morning. What a blessing it is for us to be able to contemplate it together as we come together this morning.

Well, Luke describes our Lord's birth and sets it in a very particular historical context. Look at Luke 2:1 and what we're going to do this morning is just kind of walk through this historical narrative and just draw a couple of principles for our hearts at the end. Luke 2:1 says, "Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth." Now, right from the beginning, perhaps if you're new to Scripture and you're perhaps used to only modern writings, one thing might stand out to you is that Luke dates and places his story in a historical context not in the same way that we would today. We would date things by referring to a number on a calendar. That wasn't the way that they did it in ancient days. Luke, following the practice of the day, established the time of our Lord's birth not by referring to a calendar but by referring to the reign of a political leader. And his reference is to Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor from approximately 29 BC to A.D. 14, reigning for a period of over 40 years, one of the great Roman emperors of all time, and it was into that realm of his reign that our Lord Jesus Christ was born. And it's very interesting when you think about the historical nature of it as I like to say, to put ourselves in the sandals of those who were there at the time, there would have been no greater man on the face of the earth than Caesar Augustus. But as you follow through the course of the history that followed, as you follow the revelation of God, a baby born in humble circumstances to displaced Jews was actually the greater one on the face of the earth at that time. Now, today, we realize the greatness of Christ, we see the greatness of God Incarnate and by comparison to perspective that we have now, Christ is high and lofty and exalted. Caesar Augustus is not much more than a footnote in history and yet at the time it was completely reversed.

Now, there is uncertainty regarding the precise year of Christ's birth. It is generally, it's kind of funny, you think of BC being before Christ, the birth of Christ, historians are generally placing in the range of the year 6 to the year 4 BC. That was because of some calendar changes and recalculations that were made in subsequent centuries after the dates were initially established. But we know that Christ was born, we know the general timeframe based on a certain eclipse that occurred and by the fact that Herod died at a particular time; we are able to narrow the window of the time where Christ was born to about that particular time. There is a little bit of uncertainty about the year that he was born.

Let me say something about the day in which he was born as we are gathered here on December 25th: if, beloved, the year of Christ's birth is somewhat uncertain, not with the usual measure of precision that we might like, if the year is uncertain, then it's not surprising to us as you study it more closely, that the day of Christ's birth is also a little bit uncertain. One source says that of those that have tried to determine the day of Christ's birth, says that there are advocates for almost every month of the year to determine...who make different cases for different months of the year in which our Lord may have been born.

Now, some, and I want to kind of maybe put your heart to rest on something that sometimes troubles people: some people speculate that December 25<sup>th</sup> comes from a Roman pagan holiday that was established in the third century. I'm not going to go into a lot of explanation about this. If that's something that you're interested in, I have a number of sources that I'd be happy to share with you. Just email me and I'll be glad to let you know that and share those things with you. But what you need to know as you hear those stories so that you're not overwhelmed by stuff that doesn't need to disturb your soul at all, there is actually even earlier Christian tradition that would attribute the December 25<sup>th</sup> date to the birth of Christ that precedes these Roman pagan holidays that some people like to whip up a storm over.

So what we need to realize is that there is a little bit of uncertainty on the exact dates on which things happened but to realize this: that Scripture itself doesn't make a big deal about a precise year or a precise date. Scripture is doing something different, dating it by the historical method that was used at the time. For us, I think the best way for us to think about it is this: December 25<sup>th</sup> is the date that we inherited from long history and it's a good opportunity year by year for us to preach and to remember the birth of Christ without getting hung up on dates and numbers and unavoidable chronological uncertainty with the passage of such time.

So with those things said, with that little bit of disclaimer, we gladly return to the biblical text to see what God has given for us and look back to Luke 2, if you would. Luke tells us that at some point during the course of his reign, Caesar Augustus established a system of taking a census for the entire Empire. It was an advance in the operation and the administration of the Empire, a census that would provide a basis for subsequent taxing and raising revenue for the Empire. And Luke further specifies the timeframe of the census in verse 2 when he says, "This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria." So, Syria being another region in the area, a smaller subunit of the Empire, and there was a time when critics accused Luke of historical inaccuracy in his reference to Quirinius saying that Quirinius couldn't have been the governor at this time because he didn't come until later, until after this time.

Now, in like manner, we are not going to go into this controversy except to say this and I say this simply to kind of give you some protection as you do maybe future reading or things that you have questioned in the past. We're not going to go into this controversy except that I want you to understand that the questions that people raise and that scholars attack Scripture with on these two verses of Scripture have been more than adequately

answered. And sure, we could spend an hour going through a lot of dry history, in one sense dry, going through to establish the point, but I don't think that's necessary for today. There is reason to believe that Quirinius served at two different times and that perhaps Luke is referring to an earlier time than what the critics have in mind. You could also take the language of Luke 2:2 to indicate that this census preceded, came first before Quirinius was governor in Syria.

Whatever the case may be, my only point in even raising this and saying these brief statements to you is that if you ever come across those kinds of attacks on God's word and start to wonder, "I wonder what's really going on here," you just need to know that many godly men over many years have answered these questions to more than a satisfactory conclusion. So don't let, the whole point of this is not really when did So-and-so reign in such-and-such a time, my point here this morning is to just give you a measure of protection, you might say, that when you read things for the first time that you've never heard before that make you question things that you didn't question before, just know that there are answers to these things that are there for the finding and if ever I have opportunity to share those things with you, you want me to share something with you, I am delighted to do that for you to be able to pursue things at a depth that would satisfy your own heart.

The point in understanding Luke's narrative, going back to his opening statement at the very start of the Gospel, was that he wanted his readers to know with precision the truth about Christ that they had been taught. And understand this, oh, please understand this. These kinds of things are just so very vital, basic fundamentals to understanding the Scripture: while it might seem odd to us here in the 21st century, it might seem weird to us to set time by referring to a political leader, you know, for us to say, you know, we don't talk that way. We wouldn't say, "Well, you know, it was during the time of the 10th president of the United States, John Tyler, that such-and-such happened." We don't talk that way. We just say, "Well, it was in 1842. Tyler was president but that was the time when this happened." We don't do it that way. We don't do it this way by referring to prior leaders. Here's the thing that you need to understand and there is a point of understanding Scripture that is at stake here and this is why I belabor the point a little bit: when Luke wrote his Gospel, this would have made perfect sense to the people that received it. When Luke said Caesar Augustus and Quirinius was governor of Caesar, his readers would have known instantly. It would have placed the time instantly and they say, "Okay, yes, I'm perfectly oriented to what's happening." The fact that now 2,000 years removed we're a little bit more distant, it's a little bit more hazy to us, doesn't say anything about Luke's accuracy or about the historical method with which he wrote, it says something about us, that we don't have the information that they did, that we don't have the perspective they did and so what do we do? What do we do? You do what you should do every time you come before Scripture: you adopt a position of humility and you say, "Let this word teach me," rather than sitting in judgment on it. That's how you approach the Bible and that's why we dwell on these historical things for just a moment, that we would have a heart of reverence toward God's word that is reflected even in the way that we try to understand the history of God's word, that it refers to. We bow before this word. We bow before the God who gave us this word and we receive it as truth even

if there are sometimes questions that we don't have full and complete answers to that we might like.

Well, Caesar's census required extensive travel by the population. Look at verse 3 as Luke tells us and recounts the outworking of the census. He says, "everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city." It would seem as though people went back to their ancestral homes even if that was a distance away from where they were presently living. This would have the effect of making it easier to group people by families. Those of you that have ever done any kind of interest in genealogical research into the past of your family, realize that when people move away from their homeland, it becomes more difficult to find them in subsequent records. You know, you have a group of family that all lived in one area and then suddenly one guy moved away for reasons unknown to us now, hard to find that guy. So it becomes much easier if the census requires everyone to go back to their home area where their family found its source and origin and thereby being able to more closely group people and account for where they came from. It all makes perfect sense even if it's different than the way we do things today.

I'll say it again, beloved. There is just something really important you need to realize. There is a very real and difficult presupposition that you don't even think about when you come to God's word. You come to God's word thinking that, you just assume that the way that you are used to things being done is either the way that they always have been done or that they always should be done. In our day, the census is taken in a completely different fashion and we don't move. Well, that doesn't mean that they had to do it that way back then. That doesn't mean that they did do it that way back then. That doesn't mean that it was a bad way to do it back then. The only reason we would think such things is because we are not recognizing the presuppositions and even a little bit of pride with which we say the way we do it is the best. So we put all of that aside and we just bow our knee before Scripture and say, "What happened? Give us understanding. Help us to know what happened." And not pollute our understanding of the Scripture by imposing our modern day thought and processes on simple things of administrative politics on the way that we read the Scripture. So Luke says, "everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city." You see, we are not just looking at the history of what happened, are we? This text gives us a great opportunity to think about the way that we read God's word and the way that we regard God's word.

Beloved, if I did nothing else in my ministry, if there was no other accomplishment from all of my years at Truth Community Church, however many the Lord would give me, if there was a people that went out from the ministry of Truth Community Church humble before God's word, revering it, respecting it, and honoring it as the true, inerrant, authoritative word of God, if we had a group of people like that that came out of Truth Community Church, that would be great. That would be reason enough to give thanks and praise to God because if you regard and you revere the word of God, you're going to want to read it and to know it. If you revere and regard the word of God, what's going to happen is it's going to sink into your heart. You're going to learn from it. It's going to shape you. Those of you who are not Christians, it will convert you because the word of

God is perfect, converting the soul. Those of you who are Christians and love God's word, maybe having your confidence strengthened in God's word in this way, the more that you humble yourself, the more that you read God's word, the more that you study God's word, the more it is going to shape you and change you and make you like Christ.

Beloved, these are the most important things in the world. When all of your labors are done, when all of your families have come and gone, you raise your family, they scatter to the winds maybe, when the flower of health starts to fade and wither, you lose the use of your limbs or lose the use of your lips as just happened to me, beloved, don't you understand, especially on a day like this, that everything that we give our lives to, everything that we give our hearts to in this life is ultimately passing? Oh, we cherish it, we love it, we thank God and we enjoy it all as a gift from God, maybe we enjoy our work, we enjoy our families, we have great opportunities and relationships that the Lord has given us but at the end of the day, beloved, you have to realize and remember that these things are passing, that this life is temporary and there will come a time where it's your opportunity to exit stage right. Do you know what's going to matter to you then? Do you know what the only thing that is going to be the anchor for your soul is going to be what God has revealed in his word and how it has testified to the Lord Jesus Christ and how he saves people like you who believe in him, and just as he passed through death into eternal life with his resurrection, so those who long to him, he will take and bring them safely through because they are united to him in Christ. So what we remember on a day like this as we remember on Christmas Day and the coming of our Lord, is that a transcendent God entered into time and space in a way that is going to enable us who believe in him to transcend time and space and to return to heaven with him. This is what we remember and only when you have a settled confidence in God's word are you anchored in these kinds of truths. That's why we take our time on these things.

Now, with all of these things said, go back to Luke 2 again here in verse 4. Luke has set the context through the political events of the day, the administrative orders of the day, to help us know how it is that Joseph and Mary ended up in Bethlehem for the birth of the Messiah. Look at verses 4 and 5 with me, "Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to," here's the purpose, "in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child." Joseph and Mary were under the authority of the order to report for that census. And look at what God did. Proverbs 21:1 says that the heart of the king is like water in the hands of the Lord, he directs it wherever he wishes, and what God did overruling and superintending the purposes of the heart of the great Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, moved and worked in his heart like he did with Cyrus in the Old Testament, to issue a decree that would have effect on the people under his authority and Joseph and Mary being under the authority of that reign, under the authority of that order, had to do something and in compliance with an order that they had nothing to do with, made their way to the city of Bethlehem because that's where their family was from.

And yet, if you were with us on Tuesday and as you remember Micah 5:2 in the Old Testament 700 years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Micah said that the Christ, the

Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Do you realize something really profound? That Caesar Augustus had no clue, no concept of the purposes of God when he issued this order for the census to be taken and yet he was simply a tool, a hand in a sovereign God, and his census which seemed like the big political event of the day, his census and the goals that he had for that census were actually utterly incidental to what was really going on. What was really going on was that God was orchestrating events so that the words of the prophets would be fulfilled and that Christ would be born in Bethlehem at exactly the right time. The census was incidental to a greater goal, the greater goal being the out workings of the purposes of God.

Do you realize that you and I as we live under a transition of leadership in our own country, as we live under a number of different leaders with a lot of different laws, beloved, don't you understand that as much as we can get sucked into the vortex of political things that are going on today, don't you realize that we should always step back and say, "There are purposes of God being worked out through the things that are happening that I can't see or understand. That I don't know exactly what's going on but I know that even the greatest of leaders are merely instruments of God working out his purposes over time." And that that gives us another source of stability in our soul. Caesar Augustus orders a census in order to be able to tax people in the future and to run his government, good for him. I've got nothing against Caesar Augustus, I'm just saying that that man and his administration were utterly incidental to the much greater eternal purpose of God. In their sandals at the time, Caesar Augustus, a baby born in Bethlehem. True reality: baby in Bethlehem, Caesar Augustus. We have to view the world through the lens of truth.

Now, what did they do? They went up to Bethlehem, went up from Galilee to Bethlehem. Now, when we say somebody goes up, I often think anyway, of going north, you know, because north seems to be up some reason for that point of reference, but here Galilee is a region north of Jerusalem and yet they were going south in order to get to Bethlehem. Why are you calling it to go up? Well, it's just a question of elevation, Bethlehem being at a higher elevation than the region of Galilee so that they literally physically went up. It's a geographic elevation reference, not a directional reference that is being made here.

So they went up and they got to Bethlehem and Mary is with child, engaged to Joseph and in verse 6 we read what happens when they got there. Luke tells the story with characteristic understatement. Thinking about the magnitude of what happened and what the culmination of centuries of prophecy were and the fact that God's redemptive plan is being advanced, it's remarkable that Luke simply tells the story without embellishment, isn't it? Luke 2:6, it says, "While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Now, as a passing matter, perhaps those of you that have been under the influence of Roman Catholicism over the course of your life, maybe in younger days, notice what it says. Notice that it says that this child that was born was her firstborn son, her firstborn son, naturally meaning that Mary later had other children contrary to the false doctrine



that says that she was a perpetual virgin. She had other children. Mark 6:3 speaks to this very clearly, that he had brothers and sisters. In fact, they didn't even believe in him for the longest period of time until they came around after his resurrection. So even these passing words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit give us protection, give us a guard against wrong views that are propagated by men. No matter how rich and wealthy and how long they have been saying these lies, Scripture simply says things in passing that give you all the discernment you need to know so that you're not led into a false worship, a false adoration of Mary. Mary was greatly blessed by God to bear the Messiah, yes, but she said and gave praise to God her Savior. Who needs a Savior except somebody who is a sinner? There you go. And so we follow the words of Scripture and are protected from foolish myths that others propagate.

She laid him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. It's possible that our Lord was born outdoors, maybe in a cave. Some have speculated that maybe there was a stable that was attached to a house and that it was an arrangement like that. Not too long ago I would have thought, "That sounds weird," again with my 21st-century presuppositions, but do you know what? This is totally irrelevant in one sense but it just shows the way things can be done. Do you know what? My grandfather lived in a house just like that. It's in New Hampshire. It's still standing. They have the house and then there is this long passageway connected to the barn. Why would they do that? I don't think we do that much around here. Well, the winters are too severe to be able to go out and so they build these passageways and they connect the barn with the house and it's all under one roof and you can take care of the animals that way. Was it something like that for our Lord? Don't know. We just know that our Lord was born in humble circumstances; that the Son of God was born in such humility that his crib was a trough for animals, that his mother had no place else to take him, and his father.

Step back and see the perspective from God's viewpoint. See the situation for what it really is. Think about the pomp and circumstance that will accompany the inauguration of our next president on January 20th, bands and parades and all of that, and this is what we do for our leaders, right? In times of war, great men will have their viewing stand and their armies will march by in perfect formation in front of them and all of the circumstance saying something great is going on here and this man who is at the head of this military is somebody of significance. In an earthly sense, sure, but doesn't it strike you afresh this morning to step back and to realize that when the one who is truly great came to earth, he didn't orchestrate a parade, a procession to acknowledge his birth. He came in simplicity. There was no desire, there was no need to impress the masses when Christ came. True greatness doesn't need the pomp and circumstance to vindicate and justify itself.

Beloved, someone greater than Caesar had arrived but you'd never know it from the circumstances of birth. He is Lord of heaven and yet he is born to displaced Jews. He is the Lord of creation, Incarnate in human flesh. Surely he must have a palace waiting for him. He's got a feeding trough to greet his arrival.

What can we take from this familiar account? What kind of principles could we take that would make us think rightly as we walk out this morning in addition to the things that we've already said? Beloved, I want you to anchor something else deeply into your mind which will protect you from a whole other realm of spiritual nonsense, those who long for, pretend to conduct signs and miracles and that is the proof of a work of God. Beloved, look back at the manger and realize, first of all, that God often works through ordinary means; that the work of God is not often something that is spectacular as if fireworks were going off and laser shows were going off. Sometimes the work of God is done through very ordinary means and for people like you and me in the day and age in which we live in the evangelical church where the measure of a church is measured maybe by the size of which its attendance is measured, or in more extreme examples, by the seeming great signs that they can do when they blow on people and they fall over or they pretend to heal everybody that comes in sick and lame and maimed, some of you wishing that you could have a great healing and you wonder because you've been told so many times that if only you trusted God enough, he would heal you' it must be a lack of faith on your part that you're still in your condition. None of that is true. It's all a lie designed to manipulate you and make you feel guilty and make you reach into your wallet. You see, we are conditioned to think that God is only at work when something spectacular or miraculous happens but that is entirely the wrong way to think. God works even through a secular ruler's administrative decision to take a census. Nothing spectacular. No fireworks going off. No lasers announcing the order of the census. No fog machines going off to call attention to it, artificially creating an environment that would say, "Oh, God is at work here. Look at all the fog machines." Good grief. God have mercy on us. God have mercy on this whole degraded thing that is called the evangelical church, that that's what people do and think. No. No, God is so great that he can work through ordinary things that people simply overlook; work through that ruler's decision.

And, beloved, think about something else and think about this in the midst of your very seemingly ordinary life, that no one would write a story about, that no one would make a TV show or a movie of, as you're just faithfully going through day-to-day life being faithful in your marriage, faithful to your parents, faithful to your church and no one seems to notice, notice this: look at Joseph and Mary trudging as she is heavy with child, trudging their way to Bethlehem in obedience to an order that they didn't ask for and the discomfort of ancient travel and yet what was God doing? In their simple trudging lives, God was accomplishing a great purpose in order to bring them to Bethlehem so that the Messiah would be born in the right place. You realize, right, you understand, don't you, Christian, brother and sister in Christ, you understand, don't you, that God is working out great eternal purposes even through your simple and trudging life? Of course he is if you believe the Gospel. Of course he is. Isn't God, my friends, those of you who are Christians, isn't God preparing you for eternal glory? Isn't God working through life with an ultimate destination that you would be face-to-face with Christ and see the wounds of Christ that he bore for the salvation of your soul? Aren't you headed toward a spectacular display of something still future that belongs to another realm and another world? And it's through your simple trudging life that God is preparing you for that, through your simple faithfulness.

God works through ordinary means. Beloved, here again is the point: don't despise your ordinary life. Don't despise the difficulties that attend older age. Don't despise the isolation that sometimes faithfulness to Christ calls you to. Life in Christ was never intended to be a spectacular show of fireworks 365 a year. The greater display of the power and the glory of God is when you are following him without that because that says that there is such inherent worth in Christ that you are devoted to him even when there doesn't seem to be any earthly attraction to do so; when there is no show to put on and yet you sit down and quietly open your Bible and read another passage again, maybe you've read it a lot of times but you say, "This is God's word and I love it and this is how he shapes me and makes me and I want to know him better." Then you pray, offer your thanksgiving to God for the day and trust yourself to his care and you go out and you work in a secular job with very few Christians around and you wonder, "What's the point?" Do you know what the point is? The point is that a great eternal God has appointed you for that and is working out purposes that far exceed anything that you could ask or think. Maybe when your hands are giving care to the needs of your children. Care to strangers who come in through the door. When your hands are caring for woodwork and machines and cars and printers and technology.

Do you realize, beloved, that when we look deeply at the way that God brought about the birth of Christ, that we see something, second, going on here. It's not just that God identifies, works through, I should say, ordinary means. God works through ordinary means, it's not just that, there is something else greatly important for you today, greatly important for me. Secondly, and this is precious, is that Jesus Christ identifies with the lowly. Jesus Christ identifies with the lowly, people just like you who maybe are just struggling to pay your bills and you just live paycheck to paycheck, hanging by a thread, it seems. And because you've heard so many echoes of health, wealth and prosperity, you wonder, "What is wrong with me? Why doesn't God provide? Why doesn't God give me the miracle that others seem to talk about?" Well, if he did that and he always did that, where would people of lowly means be? Where would people of humility, of humble circumstances like almost every one of you, where would we be in the plan of God then?

Do you see, beloved, the depth of the humility of Christ in his birth? Do you see the eternal Son of God who was involved in the intra-Trinitarian councils before the beginning of time, of incalculable infinite worth, a self-existent God coming down like this? Coming down in a birth to two forgotten Jews in a small unimportant city so that he might be laid in a manger? What is this? Do you know what this is in part? This is the Lord Jesus Christ identifying with the lowest of us, those who have no account, who have no reputation, who have no connections with people of so-called importance, and this is Christ in utter humility identifying with people like you and me. Do you know why this is so sweet and precious in a world that loves fame, that loves Hollywood, the loves power, that loves wealth? Do you know why this is so precious? Do you? Do you know why this matters? Do you know why Christ is so, so great? It's because as infinitely great as he is, you don't have to be noble and mighty to have access to him. He came down and identified with people just like you and me. He identifies with your anonymity. He identifies with your poverty. He identifies with your isolation.

Look over at Isaiah 57. God has made this clear all along, that all of our earthly thinking about pride and prominence and prosperity is upside down in his kingdom. Isaiah 57:15, not specifically a prophecy of the birth of Christ but certainly the spirit that brought this to pass is embodied in this verse. Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.'" Are you low today, feeling the weight of your sin? Maybe just discouraged by the humdrum boring nature of life? Do you realize that in the most precious person in the universe, the Lord Jesus Christ, you have someone who not only has been there but shares in it with you? That though you may not be able to put your finger on the money and the methods of this world to make your circumstances change, that in Christ you have something far transcendent to all of that, even if your circumstances never change. If you have Christ, you have all. If you have Christ, you have everything that you need. Let this world pass away if it must, I have Christ. I have it all. Yes, beloved, Christ lowered himself not to save an elite but to save all sorts of men just like you.

The angels drew attention to the birth. Look at Luke 2 as we wrap this up. Oh, there was a supernatural announcement about the birth of Christ but it wasn't to the men in power as Herod, as Caesar dwelt in their palaces with all kinds of people to attend them and boasted, no doubt, in their hearts of the prominence that they enjoyed and their authority. They missed the whole meaning of what was happening in their very day. Verse 8,

8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

Shepherds. This was the low class of society at the time. Verse 9,

9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

All of them. All of them. I love that.

11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

On that great night, the angels certified the birth to the shepherds. On this great morning, December 25, 2016 in Cincinnati, Ohio, God certifies the truth of these things to you afresh, certifies them through the Scripture, certifies them through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. You have it on the highest authority that a Savior has come for you who is Christ the Lord. Those of you who know him, rejoice afresh even in your simple, trudging, grief-filled lives. Christ came for you. Those of you who have never been born again, Christ offers himself to you right now, right today. As the world goes about its

madness just like Caesar and Herod were going about their madness and building their stuff and missed it all, right now, today, piercing through the fog of all of the stuff of life, my unsaved friend, Christ speaks a word to your heart and says in John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Do you believe? Do you have eternal life? Have you passed out of death into life? Don't miss it because nothing else matters.

Let's pray together.

*There is so much about you, O Christ, that is beyond our comprehension. How can you be infinite? How can you have no beginning? How can you be all that you are? And yet this morning as we remember your greatness, your immutable character, your infinite nature, and we look at your birth, the high and lofty nature of who you are and we look at the circumstances in which you gladly and willingly brought yourself into, subjected yourself to, Lord, we don't understand that kind of humility. We don't understand that kind of condescension. We don't understand that kind of self-emptying that though you existed in the nature of God, in the form of God, you took on the form of a bondservant and were made in the likeness of men. Why would you do that? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life." Somehow your humility is a reflection of the greatness of your love for sinners. Somehow your humility is a reflection of the greatness of your grace toward us. And somehow your humble life helps us to see that you identify with nobodies like us so that we could identify with a supremely great one like you. We thank you that deity and humanity intersected in that manger. We thank you that great glory intersected with great humility. We thank you for the purpose that lay behind it all, that you were sent into this world in order to save sinners like us. We embrace you in all of your majestic glory. We embrace you in your humility. We embrace you in the cross. We embrace you in the resurrection, the ascension, your intercession at the throne of God. We embrace you in your coming again. We embrace you for all eternity, Lord Jesus. There is no one and nothing more precious to us than you and we gladly give of ourselves to you today. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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