

# Christmas 2011 // Luke 2:11; John 1:12

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## **Luke 2:1–14, ESV**

*[2:1] In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. [2] This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. [3] And all went to be registered, each to his own town. [4] 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, [5] to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. [6] And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. [7] 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.*

*[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] 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. [10] 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. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

## **Meditation:**

Bow heads... close your eyes. When you read the accounts of the Christmas story in Luke 2 and Matthew 1–2 a concept that recurs over and over is "wonder;" "amazement."

One of the things I hope you won't take for granted this Christmas is the sheer wonder and mystery of this whole thing.

One of the most memorable Christmases I ever had was when I lived overseas among a people who didn't celebrate Christmas... and just explaining to them the Christmas story... when you get outside of it, and start explaining it to people who don't know it, you realize how mysterious this whole story is.

- God born as a baby;
- The baby that Mary stared at in the crib was the God who *made* her;
- He was born so poor and at such a bad time that He had to be born in a barn because there was no room in local hotels; He ended up having to flee for His life because an out of control government was trying to kill Him... yet God was so in control that He appointed a chorus of angels to serenade His birth and a star to guide wise men from thousands of miles away right to his home.

His whole life would be characterized by this kind of paradox:

- He would get hungry; yet, He could feed 5000.
- He would get thirsty; but, He could walk on water.
- He would complain of being tired; but He could heal the sick and raise the dead.
- He would die a criminal's death, yet He would triumph over death in power.

In that mystery is the story of our salvation. He was born Son of Man and Son of God.

- He was born Son of Man so that He could enter our suffering, share our pain, and bear our sin.
- He was born Son of God because only God could save us.
- As Athanasius, an African theologian said nearly 1700 years ago, said, "*He became what we are (sinful human flesh) that He might make us what He is (an eternal son of God).*"

Because He was the Son of Man, He'd have nowhere to lay His head; because He was the Son of God, He could give billions shelter beneath His wings (from Tony Evans).

Because He was the Son of Man, He would be betrayed by some of His best friends; because He was the Son of God, He would compel millions to leave everything to follow Him to the farthest corners of the globe.

***O come, let us adore Him!***

Here's another mystery: ***The announcement of His birth was made to shepherds.*** Of all the people in the world, God sent the angelic messengers to shepherds!

You see, shepherds were the lowest class in Israel. They were considered poor; uneducated; dirty. They were so despised that Jewish law said their testimony wouldn't even count in court. They were outcasts; they had no future prospects, and no hope. Yet God made the announcement to them. Here's why: God was declaring that He came not for those who have a proud sense of accomplishment, but for those who have an acute sense of their need.

That means that Christmas has a special message in it for those whose lives are not characterized by joy and triumph. Christmas is not supposed to be the crowing jewel on a life that is filled with happiness. Christmas is a profound message of hope for those whose lives are filled with despair.

- That means for the cancer patient who has found out they are *not* going into remission, there is something for you of profound hope in the birth of this baby;
- To the one who feels a suffocating sense of despair this year because it is their first Christmas w/o a lost loved one... you'll look around the table and see an empty place where a loved one used to sit...
- To the one who was devastated this year by a divorce;
- To the one who lost a job and is not sure how things are going to work out this year;
- To the one overwhelmed with regret for bad decisions they have made, and feeling the weight of condemnation before God.

The birth of this baby has a profound message for you: God came for you.

And ultimately our reaction is to be the same that the shepherds did: "*O, come let us adore Him!*"

The Son of God born into the depths of poverty and pain for you, because there was no other way to save you!

Let that same spirit that flooded the hearts of the shepherds and the wise men as they fell down before Him and adored Him wash over you!

PRAYER: We stand amazed. You were born as a man for us. Lived in poverty and died as a criminal for us. We stand in wonder. Before you came as Sovereign, you came as Savior.

### Introduction:

Welcome to all of you... especially our guests. First time in church in a while... heard a story about a husband and wife getting ready to come to a service like this one. She was getting ready, thought he was... she came out and said, "Why aren't you ready? We need to go." I don't want to go for 3 reasons: "nobody is friendly to me; everyone is suspicious of me; I just don't like it." She said, "first, that's not true. Some people are friendly. #2. The suspicion is mainly in your head. #3. You're the pastor. You have to go." That was my wife and I about an hour or so ago.

Whatever your situation, we welcome you here...

**I told you that at Christmas we reflect on the mystery of all this... and that is true.**

But I don't want you to get so wrapped up in that mystery that you lose the simplicity of what God was doing.

You see, I feel like for a lot of people Christmas is the most complicated time of year: That's how it is for my wife and me. The month of December is the most stressful one all year. Right?

- First, we feel this pressure to surprise people with exactly what they wanted but never realized it, so that when we give it to them they are surprised, but thrilled, because they always wanted that never realized it (and so never bought it for themselves.) The pressure of that is enough to drive you crazy.
  - And this is an especially stressful time for men... our wives just flat lie to us. Husband says, “What do you want for Christmas?” wife: “Oh, I don’t want anything.” Woe to the man that believes that lie! You men, “No, I think she meant it.” No, she doesn’t.
  - My wife makes it easy for me in two ways... she will sometimes buy her own gift and bring it home and tell me... 2-page list.
- So you’re stressed about gifts. Some of you get stressed about decorations. Everybody in your neighborhood has the flashing lights that line their roofs and a blimp circling their house... some of you guys are like me...
  - My wife pointed out we were the only house in the neighborhood with nothing... foreigners who don’t celebrate Christmas.
- You get stressed about which relatives to go to, and how long you have to/get to stay... which parties you’re obligated to be at; and how long you have to stay at them...
  - Recurring conflict for my wife and I... we’ll pull up at some house for a party and I’ll always ask, “How long do we have to stay?” “Can’t you just enjoy it?” “I’ll enjoy it more if I know when it’s over.”

There’s all this complexity at Christmas, and I don’t want the message to be complicated. So let me make it very simple. (a lot of pastors...)

### Message:

What you should know about the Christmas story is in the announcement the angels made: *“Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”* **Luke 2:11**

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### 1. God gave us a gift, and that gift was a Savior

- At Christmastime we give gifts. (This is what people know about Christmas: even people in other countries—China). This is good and right. They are in memory of this gift.
- That gift, the angels declared, was a Savior, which meant that there was something we needed to be saved from, and we could not do it ourselves.
  - Dilemma of buying for a rich person... *what God was doing for us we could not do for ourselves*
  - You see, one of the oldest questions people have asked about God is this: How much do we have **to do** to get on His good side?
  - **We think of it in terms of scales:** If I asked you if you knew you were going to heaven, most of you would immediately pull out that scale in your mind and think, have I done enough?
- The Bible teaches that our acceptance before God can never be earned that way. We are too sinful; too damaged.
  - Sin, the Bible says, in us is like a poison and a defilement that corrupts the whole of us.
  - **Illus.** Blood with Aids virus; Urine with milk.
- Nothing we would ever do would not be fatally tainted by sin. So salvation had to be a gift, done by someone without sin. Jesus, who was without sin, died under the curse of sin, absorbing it’s power and penalty so He could put sin away forever.
- Around the Summit Church we say the essential message of the gospel is: **Jesus in My place.** Jesus in My place. Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we were condemned to die and offers to trade places with me. He got the penalty for my sin; I got the gift of His righteousness.
  - **“It is finished.”** ‘It is paid.’ Written on receipts.
  - **Gift: theologians call it gift righteousness.** God’s righteousness given to us as a gift...

- Hear this: the essential message of Christmas is not “be better” or “go back to church.” The message is that Christ gave us a gift by taking our place and paying our price.
- **Do vs. Done.**
- So, again, if I ask you, “If you died right now, do you think you’d go to heaven?” And you say, “Well, maybe... 80% sure. I’ve been doing this well; this pretty good... you’re thinking about those scales, and you think... “as long as God grades on the curve.”
  - That shows you’ve never really understood the gospel. The gospel is that you were so wicked before God you could never DO ENOUGH to save yourself; but Christ’s gift is so complete it assures salvation to all who receive it. It is D-O-N-E.
  - If you understand the gospel as gift, then you’re sure of it, because it is no longer dependent on how well you’ve lived, but on what Christ accomplished and gave to you.
- **Or think of it like this:** If I asked you right now if you could afford a beach house; some of you would know immediately, “no.” Some of you might have to say, “Let me check my investments; see if I could squeeze in another mortgage payment.” But if I put into your hands \$100 million dollars in cash... you don’t have to check. You know the answer is yes. Some of you don’t know you’re going to heaven because you’re still checking your own moral bank account, and haven’t embraced the gift-righteousness of Christ.

## 2. Christ is the Lord

*“Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11*

- This statement the angel made was actually a pretty inflammatory statement... because the central pledge of allegiance in the Roman Empire was “Caesar is Lord.”
  - You see, the Roman Empire was made up of all these different nations and religions and what the Romans said was, *“You can worship any god you want, as long as you know that at the end of the day Caesar calls the shots.”*
- When the angel said, “Christ is Lord,” that meant no, ultimately Jesus calls the shots.
  - The angel’s statement was a direct confrontation with the Roman world: Caesar is not the ultimate authority, God is.
  - The question is a confrontation with you, too: “Who ultimately calls the shots in your life?” For many of us, if you were honest, it would have to be you.
  - For many of us, Jesus is an influence, but is He Lord?
  - We might call ourselves His followers (that’s what Christian means), but “follower” in Jesus’ day meant that you had given up full control to the one you were following.
    - Today, we follow people on *Twitter*, which doesn’t mean the same thing. How many of you are on Twitter? Twits? Some people I pay a lot of attention to; others not so much. Ultimately, though, I’m in charge.
  - Becoming a follower of Jesus does NOT mean that he becomes one of your primary influences; at the top of your Twitter list. To be a follower of Jesus means that He is the Master of everything in your life: what you believe; where you go; what you do with your money.
    - Lordship is one of those things that if it’s not total, it’s not real.
    - If you’re still telling Jesus which parts of His leadership you’ll submit to and which you won’t, then you don’t really get Lordship.
    - If you follow Jesus in 99 areas out of 100... pretty good, right? But you’re deciding which 99... You’ve still got ultimate authority in your life; veto power.
    - He’s either Lord of all or not Lord at all.
    - We think of sin as bad things... Sin may include that, but it doesn’t start there. It starts with “I want to be in control, not God. Sin is the great “I” problem.
    - Who’s in charge? Is it “I”? Or is it Jesus?
  - I know that to say that Jesus must be Lord is really hard for some of you. We’re Americans. We don’t anybody to tell us what to do. I understand. I really do. A few things to consider:

**1. He is God**, and He created you and one day you will answer to Him. He is the One you really can and must give up control to.

**2. He is your Father**, and He loves you, which means He desires your good. This is not a God that just showed up and demanded your obedience, though He could have; this is a God who was born into the lowest poverty to rescue you. This is a God you can trust with your life.

You see, most of our disobedience problems begin as trust problems. You can't let go of your life, because you feel like you'd lose control. Until you know that Jesus is trustworthy, you'll never be able to let go of control!

- Mechanic and the chimney... "that's what I'm doing with God." That's what some of you are doing, too. You don't think you can trust God enough to let go. You're holding on tightly to control when all He wants to do is save you; you are clinging for dear life to something that give you no salvation.
- This is a God you can trust with your life! He came as a Savior to rescue you!
- He didn't come to angrily strip away your freedom but to affectionately deliver you from slavery.

**This is a God worthy of our highest devotion!** He left heaven and came to earth for you. He got as close to you as possible. Took upon Himself your pain. Drank death's bitter cup for you; suffered sin's penalty for you.

- **This baby was the God** who spoke the worlds into existence. He was the God who **possessed all the riches** of the universe but lay in a feeding trough amidst the smell of manure for you. He would be **violently resisted** by the world's rulers and despised by the religious authorities, ultimately yielding His life up to brutal crucifixion *for you*. He wouldn't **let anything stand** in His way, because He was on a mission to save you.

- That God is worthy of your greatest devotion and most extravagant gifts.
- When you get this, you'll have the same reactions the shepherds and wise men did. You'll kneel at Jesus' feet and pour out your gifts upon Him not because you have to, but because you are so overcome with wonder at the God who gave up everything to rescue you!
- Oh come, let us adore Him!

## Conclusion:

So there it is: The simplicity of the Christmas message is 2 things:

- Christ was given as a gift of a Savior to you
- Christ was the Lord.

So here's the question: have you received that gift personally? **"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," (John 1:12)**

- Receive: *You have to receive a gift.*
  - Going to church doesn't mean you've received it. You might go to church occasionally to mask the fact that you have not received it.
  - Being more moral doesn't mean you've received it. You might go through streaks of good behavior to mask the fact that you've never really surrendered to the Lordship of Christ and received the gift He's offered.
  - Personal reception of the gift. Have you received it?
- There are 2 categories of people (those who have; those who haven't). I often think of it like sitting in a **chair**...