**A Saviour has been born to you**

Luke 2:1-12 Sara Ryu

Key Verses 2:11-12 15.12.20

“Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

What is Christmas all about? For most people, it’s about giving gifts. So this story, about the birth of Jesus Christ, might seem somewhat removed. But I think this passage actually has the heart of this gift-giving tradition. The first gift was a baby. In this passage, we’ll see the historical event of the birth of Jesus, and the revelation of its meaning. We learn *how* and *why* Jesus was born. My hope is that within the next 30 minutes, each one of us hears, sees, and receives the good news that gives us great joy!

**A baby in a manger (1-7)**

Let’s read verses 1-3: “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.” These verses give us the historical background of the birth of Jesus Christ.

It was the time of Caesar Augustus, the first emperor of Rome. He reigned from 27 BC to 14 AD. His reign was known as *Pax Romana*, an era of relative peace due to Rome’s acknowledged imperial greatness. At this point in his reign, he decreed that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. A census was a big political undertaking, for the purposes of, among other things, determining measures of taxation. His government had big plans; it was a historical moment.

Caesar’s decree set the whole population into motion. Everyone had to go to his hometown to register. So that would mean…Justin would go to Elmer, Quebec; Ian would go to Kingston; Joyce to Stratford; and Moses, unfortunately, would have to go all the way back to South Korea. Nowadays, under the COVID-19 pandemic, I think we have some sense of the force of a strong command of the state. Caesar’s command *moved* people beyond their wishes; our government makes us *stay* beyond our wishes. Travel plans are canceled. We can’t eat out or go places as we wish. That’s the force of political authority.

At this point, the story zeroes in on 2 individuals. Read verses 4-5: “So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.”

If you’ve read Luke 1, you’ll already know Mary and Joseph, as a young couple living in Nazareth. Luke 1 also tells us the unusual circumstances of Mary’s pregnancy. About 9 months previous to today’s passage, an angel had appeared to Mary and had said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Lk 1:25) Mary and Joseph knew, and we as readers know, that the child in Mary was the Son of God. They were a very special couple, central to what God wanted to do in world history, as a fulfillment of his millennia-old promise to send a Messiah. But they, too, were moved to go from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. Even Joseph, and even Mary, who was probably in her last month of pregnancy.

Let’s read verse 6: “While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born...” Oh my God. Can you imagine? They’re standing in line to register, and Mary’s water breaks! There’s no midwife, no room, no bed, no water. What happens next? “and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” That is how the baby, who was the Son of God, came into the world.

I think for some of us, the significance of this is somewhat muted by familiarity. Baby Joy was born in May, so she is a “corona baby”, born in a global pandemic. While pregnant, I considered the idea of giving birth at home instead of at the hospital, because I wanted the safest environment possible for her. If even I sought the best conditions for my baby daughter, what about God for his son? Where is the sovereign father God here? Isn’t he God? Isn’t he above Caesar Augustus? Furthermore, no one showed pity even on the woman in labour. Every man was fending for himself. Why was Jesus born dislocated from home, not even welcomed into a guest room, and laid in a manger? It was not a nice place for a baby to be laid. It seems like he is a helpless victim of Caesar and of people. Where is God? To understand more, let’s see what happens next.

**Good news of great joy (8-14)**

Read verse 8: “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.” Now the story shifts, new scene and new characters. Now we’re looking at a group of night-watch shepherds, some ways away from the stable housing the baby, Joseph, and Mary. What happened? Read verse 9: “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.” This is so not a normal nightshift. As these shepherds were watching the flocks, suddenly, an angel of the LORD appeared to them! The glory of God appeared before them like an astoundingly bright light. They were terrified. But what did the angel say to them? Let’s read verses 10b-12: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour 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.” Let’s think about the angel’s message in 3 parts:

1. The introduction: Good news that will cause great joy for all the people.
2. The contents: Today, in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ, the Lord.
3. The sign: a baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger
4. The Introduction: Good news that will cause great joy for all the people

Let’s read verse 10 again, “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’” For many people this year, 2020 was a really bad year. Time Magazine called it “the worst year ever”. We’re really in need of some good news.

For some people, good news this year was “Biden beats Trump!” For others it was the news of the potential discovery of a corona vaccine. But “Biden wins” was bad news for Trump and Trump supporters. Even the news of a corona virus vaccine was bad news for some people who are suspicious of vaccines and of government.

Every human bad news and every human good news has sides, because in the fallen world life is conflict. We have sides. And good news is my side winning and the other side losing.

So can there really ever be good news that will cause *great* joy for *all* the people?

1. The contents: Today, a Saviour has been born to you

Let’s read verse 11: “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord.” What kind of news is this? The good news of great joy is…a birth announcement! Usually when we hear someone had a baby, it’s happy news! Good news of great joy for the new parents! But to call it good news of great joy for all the people is a bit of an overstatement. What is special about this birth announcement?

Let’s read the verse again: “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” The difference is *who* was born. The one who was born was no normal baby. How is he described here? “A Saviour”, “Christ”, “the Lord”.

“A Saviour”: Last week Ian gave us a message on the passage previous to this one in the book of Luke. In that passage, a priest named Zechariah inspired by the Holy Spirit sang a song in prophetic worship of this Saviour. He sang, “a horn of salvation for us…salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us…salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God…” (Lk 1:68-79) That song was a prophesy about the one to come. Now, the angel announces, “Today, in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you!” The Saviour was actually born, as an event in history, in a real place. And through the angel’s declaration, the good news is delivered to us.

While I was preparing this message, I actually struggled a lot because of inner turmoil. In the past year, people who had been close to me thought and said some things about me that were not true. My pride was enflamed, and I thought, “How *could they* think/say such things about me?!” I was unforgiving, vengeful, and self-justifying. My heart had no room for the word. When I pridefully cried out, “How could they?!” The tender mercy of God came upon me in the words, “I forgive you.” Those words of God tamed my pride with perfect love, the love of a God who knows me in all the depth of my sinfulness and does not cast the stone against me. With those words, the Saviour was born and laid in this manger of my anger and sinful pride. He is the horn of salvation and the tender mercy of God who forgives my sins. Do you hear the angel’s good news? “Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you!”

The angel also called this Saviour, “Christ”: This is a very particular description that would have been meaningful to the Jewish shepherds. “Christ” or in other translations, “the Messiah” refers to the one God had been promising to send to save his people for thousands of years. From the very first instance of the fall of man, God had promised to send someone who would crush the head of Satan, the age-old enemy of God and of man. (Gen 3:15) God had promised The Messiah through whom all people of all nations would be blessed. (Gen 12:2,3) He promised to send a great light for those living in deep darkness; one who would shatter the rod of the oppressor. (Is 9:2;4) The people of Israel were a waiting people. They waited, waited, waited. It seemed like the day would never come. But today came! “*Today”*, the angel announced, “a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ!” God has come and has redeemed his people.The birth of a Saviour who is “Christ” makes this message of the angel not only for the shepherds, but for all people, including for me and for you, because it is saying something about who *God* is. In Micah 5:2, God had already declared that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem. Caesar Augustus’ decree was for Roman tax purposes. But seen differently, it was for God’s purposes; to literally move the world such that his son was born in Bethlehem, as he had promised. God is sovereign. God is faithful throughout time and space; he keeps his word. Through faith, this day can also be “Today”, the day Christ is born to us.

“the Lord”. The Saviour and Messiah is also the Lord. This says something about *from what* the shepherds, all people, and *we* need to be saved. It’s from the wrong *Lord*. Who is “Lord”? This is a question about worship. Who occupies my heart? To who’s words do I pay attention?

The people of Israel were oppressed, thinking Caesar Augustus was Lord. Maybe among the shepherds to whom this message was given, there was one who was kind of overbearing, lording it over the others. So we too are under bosses, authorities, and leaders, who are sometimes undesirable, even evil. But when we start to let our inner worlds, our hearts, be ruled by persons, or circumstances, who are essentially imperfect, we become ruled by our sins. Anger; fear; unthankfulness; pride; bitterness. The fruit is death and darkness.

But the angel says, “Not they, but *he,* is the Lord.” We’re paying attention to the wrong things, worshipping the wrong one. O God help us! Arrest us in worship of the right one. Give us faith to make room in our hearts and minds for the one who is the Lord. As we let our hearts stand here and melt in worship of *this one,* and may this good news bring great joy to each one of us.

1. “This will be a sign to you…” After delivering the message, the angel gave the sign. It’s an audio-visual message. A “sign” is “an object, quality, event, or entity whose presence or occurrence indicates [or means] something else.” This sign is an event, whose occurrence means something. The good news of great joy was given as a message, and also as a sign.

After hearing the message that the one born was “The Saviour”, “Christ”, and “Lord”, what sign might you expect? This is a picture of the christening of Prince George of Cambridge (first son of Prince William and Princess Kate, third in line to the British throne). His birth was widely celebrated across the British commonwealth. Did you maybe expect the sign of the Saviour’s birth to look something like this? What was the sign? “This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” It’s a baby, the Son of God, lying in a manger. Now we see the passage come full circle. The child of Joseph and Mary, born during a national census, in Bethlehem and laid in a manger, is actually the sign of God. He’s the sign of the good news of great joy.

Now I am a mother. And the most beautiful moment in my life was when I first held my baby Joy. From the time I knew I was pregnant, to this day, I am full of awe at the preciousness of one life. To a parent, their child is the most beautiful, most precious; of eternal worth. When I look at Joy, I thank God for his grace, in giving me something so precious.

But the Christmas story is about God giving his own Son, a baby, to sinners. This is the costliest and first Christmas gift ever. In this sign, the baby is God’s love; the manger is us. The baby in the manger is the foreshadow of the man on the cross. “But God shows his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Ro 5:8) “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things.” (Ro 8:32)

This past year was frankly the hardest year of my life. There were times I doubted God’s goodness and sovereignty. But God, in his tender mercy, gave me a baby. And through faith in God, I named her Joy. She was born in global and personal tumult. Do you know who I am? I’m nobody. But God gave me baby Joy. And she’s the sign of the sign. Through her, the hope of God was born into this manger of my life. When I think about God’s miraculous grace in sending her and growing her, it pierces through the hurt, anger, and worry crowding my heart. She points to the living God who is greater than life itself; and who in his love gave his own Son. The angel said, “This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby, wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.” Good news of great JOY! This baby is God’s sign and God’s gift. “O Come let us adore him! O come let us adore him! O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”

In the rest of this chapter, we see the responses of heaven and earth to the angel’s message. All of heaven burst into song of praise to God. The shepherds went to see for themselves this sign. And when they had seen it, they spread the word concerning him, and glorified and praised God. The good news gave them such great joy they had to tell someone, and they had to praise God! Today, this good news is given to us through the word. Let’s read verses 11-12 again: “Today in the town of David a Saviour 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.” I pray that the Holy Spirit helps us to hear this good news of the birth of a Saviour and see the sign of a baby in a manger, such that we have great joy and give glory to God.