

Christmas 2021 | David Baumgartner

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[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Good evening everyone and Merry Christmas from my family to yours.

Tonight we are celebrating a very special night when God stepped into humanity. What a great thing that is. Some 2,021 years ago, a little baby was born.

And we heard something about that tonight. But this little baby would eventually grow up and impact more lives than all of the famous people who have ever lived combined.

There's another celebration that's going on tonight, right now. It's a secular holiday. It's known as Season's Greetings. It's known as Happy Holidays.

It's a Christmas without Christ. This one celebrates Santa and his reindeers. It celebrates a winter wonderland. So, two different celebrations going on, running parallel with each other.

[1 : 11] And each one being observed by millions of people. And I want to ask you tonight, why is that happening? Why are there two parallel celebrations going on?

Well, tonight I think that we can answer this by looking at the very first human beings who were told, besides Mary and Joseph, about this little baby that was born.

I'm talking about the shepherds. And we'll be looking at Luke's Gospel very shortly here. Next week we're going to be looking at the wise men. So, that ought to be interesting.

Let's go ahead and pray. Heavenly Father, I want to thank you for each person here. We thank you for this time of year that we can celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

And we're thankful for everyone here tonight. Thank you for the children and for just the wonderful way they exhort us and just to lift you up. We ask that you bless our evening tonight in Jesus' name.

[2 : 10] Amen. If you have that handout, I'd welcome you to follow along with me in Luke chapter 2. I'd like to begin here by saying verse 1.

It says, Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. Now this would mean, of course, that everybody would have to go back to their place of ancestry.

And since Joseph and Mary were from the line of David, they had to go back to the city of Bethlehem. And that would be about an 85 to 90 mile journey for them from Nazareth.

And the thing is, is Mary is about to deliver. We heard about how the time they arrived in Bethlehem, there's no room for them. No accommodations were available.

So they end up where? In a stable. A place where animals are kept. And it was here, if you'd look with me, verse 7. It says that Mary gave birth to her firstborn son.

[3 : 14] She wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger. It's kind of interesting that Luke's gospel account, in spite of it being the longest account, there's over 19,000 words in this account, that that's all Luke tells us about the birth of Jesus.

Wouldn't you have liked to have heard more? I would have. While Jesus is born, we're told in verse 8 that in the same region, there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

I want to ask you, what do we know about shepherds? I remember when earlier this year, Mark had shared with us from a book called A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm.

And in that, we learned about how shepherds care for and protect the sheep that are under their charge. Oftentimes, entire families would be involved in shepherding.

You could kind of think of it as a family business. We see this like with Jacob and his sons in Genesis 37. Or how about Jesse and his family in 1 Samuel 17?

[4 : 25] Of course, that's where David was a shepherd. So here in our account, we find shepherds. And we find them, they're resting. All is calm.

All is just wonderful. They're probably, just like every other night, I'm sure that they're telling stories. They're probably playing some flutes, singing songs.

Yeah, did you know, just like the cowboys, shepherds would sing songs to their flock just to keep them calm. And then in verse 9, it says, And the angel of the Lord suddenly stood upon them, stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

And it says that they were terribly frightened. I kind of picture angels as glorious creatures. Don't you? I do. And here, this initial reaction, it must have just scared them quite a bit.

In fact, it says they were terribly frightened. The word there is mega. Mega frightened. Whenever we see angels delivering a message to people, the initial reaction is always the same.

[5 : 32] What is it? Fear. Yeah, fear. But in each of the instances we see, we see that the angel says, do not fear. And why is that?

Because there's good news coming. Verse 10 goes on. For behold, the angel says, I bring you good news. Good news that will bring great joy, which shall be for all the people.

Boy, what is the good news? Verse 11. For today in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

I want you to notice this good news. It shall be for all people, all the people. I want to ask you, what people? I think here's the key here.

It's for all those who need, who see their need for a Savior. And I believe that this is why we have two celebrations going on simultaneously.

[6 : 36] For some people, this is good news. And yet for others, it's not. That word Savior, that implies that we need to be saved from something.

And friends, that's not a very popular idea today. People may say, saved from what? I'm okay. Didn't Jesus come to bring us happiness?

Didn't Jesus come to bring us wealth? Didn't he come to bring us a purpose in life? The truth is, my friends, is that Jesus came to save us from that which separates us from a holy God.

What am I talking about? I'm talking about sin. Back in Matthew's account, even when Joseph was instructed by an angel in a dream to name Jesus, he said, why?

He said, for he shall save his people from their sins. And it just occurs to me that all of the problems that we have seen this past year are a result of sin.

[7 : 49] Isn't that true? My sin? Your sin? Somebody's sin? But here's the truth, friends. God knows exactly what you and I need.

We need a Savior. Maybe you've heard this quote before, that if our greatest need had been for information, God would have sent us an educator.

If our greatest need was technology, God would have sent us who? A scientist. If our greatest need was money, he would have sent us an economist.

If our greatest need was pleasure, he would have sent us an entertainer. But you and I need most is forgiveness. And that's why God sent a Savior.

And friends, family, this is the best news of all. That our account with God can be wiped away clean forever and ever.

[8 : 49] Regardless of who you are, regardless of where you've been, regardless of what you've done, God has provided a way. And he did this by first sending this little baby.

Now this angel, who's probably Gabriel, he says in verse 12, And this will be the sign for you. In other words, this is how you will recognize him.

First, notice, you will find a baby wrapped in cloths. Now if you just stop right there, that's a pretty common practice in the ancient Near East. For newborns to be swaddled, that is to be wrapped in cloths.

And that was to protect their little arms and legs and keep them warm. But how about lying in a manger? No. Nobody puts a newborn in a feeding trough.

Just as the Tash family was mentioned tonight. What a horrible thing to think about that. But it tells us that the first distinguishing feature about this little baby is that it is the humble state into which he was born.

[9 : 59] We might want to pause and ask, what did heaven think about that? Friends, they were celebrating. Look with me, verse 13. It says, Suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased.

I believe that from Luke's perspective here, this is the high point in this account. That's because we see a multitude of angels appearing.

Do you realize this is the only occasion where we see a multitude of angels praising God together? The only other place is in Revelation chapter 5.

I'd like to read that section to you because John is on the Isle of Patmos at the time. And he's seeing this vision. And he's in heaven. And he says, A strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice said this, Who is worthy to open the book and break its seals?

And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the book or look into it. And John says, I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it.

[11 : 21] And one of the elders said to me, Stop weeping. For behold, the lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and to its seven seals.

And so this lamb, the lamb of God, comes into John's view. And he's standing there as if he has been slain.

And John says, I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders. And the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands.

And every created thing which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and the sea and all things that were in them were praising God. What a wonderful thing when God's creation praises him.

But friends, that account in Revelation hasn't happened yet. But it will. It sure will. Because no one, no one is like this baby Jesus.

[12 : 30] These angels with the shepherds, they knew who Jesus was. The second person of the Godhead laid aside his glory to become, to enter into humanity.

And how did it affect the shepherds? Well, we see in verse 15, the shepherds began saying to one another, Let's go straight to Bethlehem then and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And then when they had seen this, it says in 17, they made known the statement which had been told them about this child. So these shepherds became the first New Testament evangelists.

They saw the baby and they made the good news known to everybody around. And then how did everyone respond? Verse 18, it says, All who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by shepherds.

They wondered about it. Wouldn't it have been nice to, if it would have said, all of them who heard it immediately dropped what they were doing and went to see this baby Jesus?

[13 : 44] It doesn't say that. I kind of find it amazing that there's no mention of anyone checking it out themselves. They just wondered and they went about their business.

How can that be? Well, I think it's possible that there were many distractions going on that night with all the busyness of the crowds and the census going on.

Things were hectic back then too, right? I mean, think about it. Dealing with the Romans. How about dealing with out-of-town relatives? Yeah, things a little hectic then.

But I think there's another reason why there was no reaction. It's because the people didn't see their need for a Savior. Apparently, most of them missed the sign.

The good news wasn't good to them. And I think Jesus is still being missed today. Friends, we're here tonight to remind one another, don't miss the sign.

[14 : 46] Just as the kids told us tonight, don't miss that. How can we keep from missing the sign? I'd like to just say just a few things here. First, in this account, we see God's faithfulness, right?

That he sent that long-awaited Savior into this world. And this little baby will become the greatest king that the world will have ever known. Secondly, we see how God orchestrates the universe to fulfill his purposes.

I'm sure when Emperor Augustus made this decree for the census, he probably thought he was in charge of everything, right? No, he's not in charge. He's just fulfilling prophecy to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

As it says in Micah chapter 5, verse 2, For you, Bethlehem, too little to be among the clans of Judah. From you, one will go forth from me to be ruler of Israel.

But here's the third reason. And I think this is what Luke really wants to emphasize here. How this whole account is saturated in humility.

[15:57] Consider with me, friends, Jesus is born in what? Humble means. Not the fanciest hotel. Not the greatest thing that man could ever build.

But in a lowly, humble stable. We may ask, why did God choose these lowly shepherds to be the first humans to see the baby Jesus outside of Mary and Joseph?

Why not go to the movers and shakers of this world? Why not go to the Sanhedrin? Why not go to Caesar himself? I think it's because the shepherds are most likely to be poor in spirit.

Those who know that they have nothing to offer God. Nothing to offer Him. Jewish shepherds are actually, they were despised by most Jews.

Consider, they slept outside. They handled animals. They were in constant violation of the law. And that's because of their work. They couldn't keep the Sabbath.

[17:00] It's kind of interesting that Bethlehem is only six miles from Jerusalem. And many theologians believe that these particular sheep that were grazing at this time were those who were sold in the temple as sacrificial animals.

Perhaps these shepherds were among those who were looking forward to the consolation of Israel. Knowing that one day the Lord would provide a final sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The Lord reveals Himself to those who are poor in spirit. Those who come to understand their need for a Savior. About 55 years later, the Apostle Paul would write these words.

If you'd look with me on your handout. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.

And the base things of the world which are despised. God has chosen the things that are not that He might nullify the things that are. That no man should boast before God.

[18:11] I'd like to end with just this thought here. How did this little baby become our Savior?

Well, He grew up. He lived a perfect life.

He taught us. He showed us what God the Father is like. Kind, compassionate, full of grace and mercy and truth. And then Jesus eventually yielded Himself to die on a cross.

But you talk about humility. He took upon Himself the punishment that you and I deserve. The real message of Christmas, friends, is that God gave us a gift.

By faith, we can receive this gift and forever be reconciled to God. If you haven't already done so, receive it this Christmas.

Amen. Father, we thank You so much for this account. We thank You for Your Word, Lord. And just how it shows us how our Savior came into this world.

[19:15] Father, we pray that this Christmas, that it would take on a new meaning for us, Lord. Just as we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

And if there's anyone here, anyone that we know, we ask that You would open their hearts. That they would see their need for a Savior. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.