

Jesus is born

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[0 : 00] Let's listen to God's word together. The birth of Jesus Christ. In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria and all went to be registered, each to his own town.

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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 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.

And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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.

[1 : 19] 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

[2 : 38] This is the word of God. That was completely intentional, of course.

Well, great. And a warm welcome also from me. If you don't know me, my name is Niels, part of the staff team. I'm looking forward to speaking to you from God's word. Yeah, about the message of Christmas.

But why don't we pray before we listen? And the angel said, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Father, I pray for each of us here that indeed Christmas would be good news of great joy. No matter whether we've been in church for decades or this is our first time in church, no matter how much we know, would you convince us today that Jesus is good news and would we rejoice in that.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Great. Well, Christmas, of course, is a celebration of the birth of a baby. Now, I don't know if you guys know what this is.

[3 : 55] No, no, right. It's some biscuits with some kind of sugar sprinkles. I think there's one Dutch person here who probably knows what it is. This is a Dutch tradition. When a baby is born, you kind of make these biscuits and give it to your neighbors and to your friends to celebrate the birth.

In this case, you can see the blue. It was a baby boy. Right? So, yeah, it's a way to celebrate someone's birth. People, different countries, have different traditions. Sometimes you watch an old movie and in America, in the 30s, there's a baby born and so the dad goes around handing out cigars to everyone.

Apparently, that's how you celebrate a baby's birth back then. Maybe, I don't know which country you're from, you probably have some ways of celebrating because, you know, a birth of a baby is a wonderful thing, right?

You should celebrate it. You should announce it. In the past, people would put it in the newspaper, right? Every week, there's a list of babies born or you would send a card to all your friends and then, of course, Facebook came along and now people post it on Instagram.

But, yeah, you would announce it. You would celebrate it because you do that. But Christmas is a little bit over the top, isn't it? Now, my kids are really special but I'm not sure that kind of 2,000 years later the whole world will be celebrating their birth, right?

[5 : 18] Why would we celebrate Christmas? What makes this birth, what makes actually this person who was born so special that, yeah, the whole world should be celebrating his birth 2,000 years later?

That's what we're going to think about. In a way, the story we just read is very familiar. We saw it acted out pretty accurately, maybe apart from Bruce Lee, in the story just now.

They had Mary coming to Bethlehem and giving birth and the shepherds and the angels and all those things. But usually, the key to a story in the Bible, certainly, is in the speeches.

And we get a speech explaining what's going on. And so, that's in verses 10 and 11. It's an angel of the Lord, right? I mean, if someone like that shows up and gives a speech, you listen.

And what does he say? Verse 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.

[6 : 17] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And so, it's a birth announcement about this baby. And what do we learn about this baby that makes, well, makes this so worth celebrating?

And the first thing that strikes you, of course, is that this is a royal birth, right? We've heard it in the play. It's a royal birth. This is a king. And not just a king. This is like the capital K king.

So, he is born in the city of David. Why not say Bethlehem? Why mention David? Well, David, in the Bible, is the ancestor of the royal family.

So, emphasizing, hey, this is the city where kings come from. And here is a king. And not just any king, he is Christ. Well, Christ is a, it's not a last name, Jesus Christ.

It's a title. A title for God's chosen king. God said that one day there would be a king who would rule, not just a country, not just the world, rule the universe.

[7 : 20] He would be called the Christ. And the angel says, well, the Christ has just been born. He's called the Lord. Again, I don't know what you think is a Lord.

Maybe you're familiar with Britain and you see those politicians. They're called lords, right, with their wigs and stuff. Well, this is not a politician. In the Bible, the Lord is God's name.

So, this baby is, according to the angel, that's God himself who comes down and is born as a human being and to be king of the whole universe.

Right? This is how big this is. No wonder this is for the whole world. Right? No wonder it's, you know, 2000 years later, we're still remembering that. This is someone you can't ignore. You know, maybe we live our own life, our own way.

The Bible would say that actually there is a king over everything and that's Jesus. And yet, if this is a king, if this is God himself, then this birth is really, really weird.

[8 : 24] Because, well, we saw it a little bit in the play, but what does the angel go on to say? Well, he's Christ the Lord and this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in a swaddling cloth and lying in a manger.

The baby is in a manger and, you know, Luke mentioned it three times, in a manger. Now, we hear the word manger after 2000 years of Christmas. And when you hear manger, we think of away in a manger and we think of Christmas trees and mistletoe and all those things.

It's very nostalgic. But do you know what a manger really is? Right? It's a feeding trough for animals. Can you imagine the children singing that?

Away in a feeding trough. It just, it doesn't fit, right? A feeding trough. It's not nostalgic. That's dirty.

So, oh, we have some picture here. And so, you go to Google and you look for feeding trough.

And you get a few sheep here. A feeding trough. And then one with a pig. And, you know, some goats. This is a feeding trough.

[9 : 30] This is really what, where Jesus was kind of born. And, ugh. All right? I hope you feel that's disgusting. I mean, I've, I've lived in Hong Kong for a while now.

My hygiene standards are a lot lower than most Hong Kongers. Right? For me, germs are good. They build your immune system. Even I wouldn't put a newborn baby in a feeding trough. Right? This, this disgusting. It, it's, it's shameful. Right? Here is a, why would you put your newborn baby, the king of the universe, in a feeding trough in the, in this disgusting thing? It's humiliating. Right? Especially, yeah, this is no ordinary baby. This is a, this is the king. This is God himself. He should, yeah, born in a palace, as we heard, surrounded by all the government officials and the best doctors.

And presumably, if he's God, he had a choice. Right? But most of us don't have a choice where we are born and when we are born. It just happens to us. But if you're God and you control everything and you know the future and you control the future, surely you can make sure there's a room at the inn when you get born.

[10 : 41] Right? You can do that. Except that Jesus didn't do that. Jesus chose to be born in a feeding trough. And I think that is deliberate.

It's supposed to tell us something about what it's like for God to come down. Because, yeah, this is a mess, right? The feeding trough is a mess.

But think about it like that. Imagine you are God. What is it like? And so you're in heaven. You're on a throne, ruling the universe, millions of angels worshipping you.

Everything is pure and beautiful and love and joy and peace. It's perfect, right? And then you come down to this world. What is this world like?

Well, there's wars and there's injustice and there's conflict and there's abuse and disease and hunger and pain and frustration and decay and suffering.

[11 : 41] Actually, this world is a mess, right? If you think about it. Not just the world, maybe even your life. You look at your life and you think, why would God want to come into my life? Because my life is such a mess.

This world is such a mess. That is what it's like for God to come down, to come and live with us. It's entering a terrible mess.

God chose to enter a mess, our mess. Why would you do that, though, right? Why would you, I mean, for me, why would I want to jump into a pool of mud or something like that?

I would never do that, would I? Well, here is one situation in which I would jump into a pool of mud. What if I'm hiking and I'm with one of my kids and one of them falls into this pool?

Danger, deep mud. Now, I know what I would do, right? I would jump into that pool and try to get them out. I love them. I want to rescue them. I'm willing to enter the mess.

[12 : 41] I'm willing to do this in order to save someone I love. Well, that is exactly what Jesus did. Christmas is not just a royal birth, a shameful birth.

It's a saving birth. Look again at what the angel says. Verse 11, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, a rescuer.

Jesus came to save us. Out of love for us who were sinking in our own mess, Jesus came. And he couldn't save us from a distance. He couldn't save us from up in heaven.

He had to come down, which is why he came and was born as a baby, so that he could get us out. Now, you may wonder why. We talked about it a bit in the play.

How did we get into this mess? Well, this world is God's world and God made us to know him, to love him, to have a relationship with him, but most of us, well, we don't live like that, right?

[13 : 42] We've turned away, all of us, and trying to live in God's world in a different way, it leads to a mess. That's why, yeah, we need forgiveness. That's why Jesus had to come.

Ultimately, he had to die for us. Can you think of anything more shameful than a manger? Well, how about a criminal's death on a cross, which is ultimately what he did, but, you know, that's a big story.

I'm not going to talk about it now, but this is the message of Christus. Jesus came down and entered our mess to rescue us, to get us out, and if that is true, well, surely that is good news of great joy, right?

Being rescued, can you think of anything more joyful and more wonderful than death, right? Such a joy to be able to get out of the mess, to, Jesus promises, you know, that we be in a world without pain, without conflict, without suffering, right?

Wonderful. And not just, well, into the world, Jesus rescued us to know him. He doesn't just rescue us and send us away, we, he adopts us into our family.

[14:49] Christmas is really the most wonderful news. At the same time, if you're new to Christian things, if you're here, you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. Maybe this is quite a lot to take in, right?

Like, whoa, there is a God and he came down and he came to rescue us because we need rescuing. It's quite a lot to take in. So, how would you respond to this?

How would you respond to this, to this news? First, can I encourage you, don't ignore it, right? If someone says they've come to rescue you, you normally wouldn't ignore it, right?

Imagine you're hiking and suddenly there's this helicopter and someone on a rope comes down and says, I've come to rescue you. What would you say? Well, good for you.

Very interesting. And you go on your hike, right? You wouldn't do that. Maybe there's something going on. Maybe it's fake. Maybe there's something really going on but you wouldn't just ignore it, right?

[15:48] You would ask questions, you know? Hey, is this genuine? Who is this? What's really going on? Why do I need rescuing? You would do something. Well, have you done that with Jesus? Maybe this is a great opportunity.

Well, if the Bible says Jesus has come to rescue, let me look into that. What are a few options? You could read a biography of Jesus. So, if you look over there, a few places around the room, we have these little biography of Jesus.

Jesus. This one is called Mark. We've read from Luke, but Luke is very long, so this is a shorter one. It's more, but, you know, you read through it and you see what Jesus is like. You know?

It's real history. I mean, you've heard the reading, right? It's in the dead year when Quirinius was governor, et cetera. It's history, but was this man a good teacher? Or was this really God's king come to earth, right?

You can make up your mind just by reading the historical evidence. Or maybe, feel free to take one. If you're here as a visitor, as a guest, someone who doesn't know, please take one.

[16:54] They're free for you. Alternatively, maybe, how about that idea that this world is a mess? I don't know if that resonates with you. So, on your seats, we have this course called Explore that we are hosting in a few weeks.

We're not starting in next week because Chinese New Year is coming and then everyone goes away. So, we're starting after Chinese New Year. But this course, Explore, it's to explore those questions about the world.

You know, is there more to life than this? Where can I find peace in this restless world? Where can I find hope? How can I have relationships that work? Right?

Actually, it's a way to think together about life and actually, maybe life isn't really what it should be and maybe we do need rescuing. And so, please sign up for that.

Please take this home and that'd be a great way. Although, maybe for some of you, actually, you don't need all that. Maybe you're here and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian but now it clicks and you kind of know, okay, yeah, I know I need Jesus.

[17:59] I mean, I'd love to help you start a Christian life. Please come and talk to me after the service. Talk to the person who brought you here. but, yeah, this is really good news of great joy and if you want to, you know, want to accept that, want to come to Jesus, there's nothing better in the world this Christmas.

But how should we respond then? How about the rest of us? Those of us who have come to Jesus, those who know that they needed rescuing and that Jesus has done that.

Well, I think this passage says very clearly how we should respond, right? Verse 13, suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying glory to God in the highest.

And that's what they did. Verse 20, and the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. I mean, it's hard to miss, right?

The right response is to praise God, right? if God really in his love saw our misery and came down and rescued us, well, the most wonderful news, yeah, it's wonderful, right?

[19:08] Wow, this is so great. And we praise God, right? We wouldn't praise ourselves, it's our mess, but he came to rescue us, so why don't we do that? Well, it's such wonderful news this Christmas.

Why don't we praise God for what he's done? Let's give him the glory and let's respond with praise and thanksgiving. I'm going to pray and the music team is going to come up and then, yeah, we're going to sing that song about the angels, Hark the Herald, such a wonderful song of praise. But let's pray together. Lord Jesus, thank you that you came down. Thank you that you entered into this mess of this world and that you did it out of love to rescue us. Father, we pray that we would see the glory of Jesus. Father, we pray that we would respond, that each of us would know that we need him and that we would come to him. Maybe some of us, this is completely new, something we need to think about. Help us to take this seriously, to investigate what would you lead us back to yourself, that we can be rescued, that we can be with you forever and indeed that we could praise you and glorify you for what you have done out of your love for people like us. [20 : 27] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.