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Christmas Eve

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What Child Is This?

The child is Jesus, the son of Mary and protected by Joseph her husband. The child is Jesus, the Son of God whom God sent to remove the tragedy of sin and the horror of hell. In sending his Son in Mary's body God kept his promises to the people of the Old Testament. In sending his Son God keeps his promises to us to redeem and save us.

Sermon

Luke 2:1-14

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.

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. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior 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."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

You see poverty wherever you look. I don't mean in a foreign country or in the inner city. I mean at Christmas you see poverty wherever you look. Joseph had a job, maybe in carpentry. But he wasn't upper class even in little Nazareth. Mary was worse off. She was probably a teenager: a pregnant teenager at full term. Without Joseph's protection, she might have been stoned for adultery. The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was exhausting: 90 miles, five days on foot, and most of it uphill. The Bible says nothing about a donkey. It makes sense that they walked with other people for protection against bandits and hucksters. They slept on the ground and ate the food they carried from home. Did they stay with relatives in Bethlehem? Maybe, but when Mary went into labor, the stable behind the house was more private and certainly quieter than a guest room. The manger was warm enough but it was still a manger, a place where animals ate and drooled. You see poverty wherever you look at Christmas.

Poverty seems to set the mood for Christmas. Christmas makes us think about the hopeless and the homeless. We buy toys for poor children and put coins in red kettles. We contribute to food shelters and make mittens for urban schools. And we remember that Christmas is about the weak and the lowly and the poor and the needy—Just like the baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph on Christmas Eve. No room for the high and mighty at Christmas.

But stop and think. Actually, the high and the mighty are here on Christmas Eve; we just move past them pretty quickly. And it's important that they're here. The truth is that the high and mighty in the Christmas story tell us something about God's love. Our lives depend on God's love and that he showed us his love by sending Jesus into our world. But the high and mighty remind us that God used everything in his control to send Jesus into our world. We won't lose sight of Jesus tonight, but for a few minutes let's focus our attention on

The High and the Mighty at Christmas

1. The birth of Jesus wasn't haphazard. God had been planning to send a Savior for centuries. And God was specific. One of the specifics was that the Savior would be a descendant of King David and another was that he would be born in David's hometown, in Bethlehem. When the time right, God put the plan into action. Gabriel visited Mary and then he visited Joseph and Mary was pregnant and Joseph took her as his wife. So far, so good. Now they needed to get to Bethlehem. But Gabriel never mentioned Bethlehem to either Mary or Joseph. I can't believe Joseph wanted to walk 90 miles with a pregnant fiancée. But all at once he didn't have a choice. He had to go to Bethlehem. Caesar said so.

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.

For 41 years Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus was the most powerful man his world. He had absolute authority over 57 million people scattered around the Roman Empire. His armies ruled from England to Egypt. To make his empire work he needed money. To get money he raised taxes and to raise taxes he needed a census. Since he was the most powerful man in his world, he could issue a census anytime he jolly well pleased. Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was the emperor's get-it-done guy. What Caesar said, Quirinius did. He was powerful and he was intimidating. Quirinius was the one who set up the process for the census and nobody could register by mail.

So what moved Caesar Augustus and Quirinius to call for this census in Judea? Did Gabriel make a visit: Hey, we have to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. Wanna help? I don't think so. In a way that we can't understand, God convinced an emperor and his general to carry out his promises. He molded their minds like putty and he made them carry out his will. Of course, no one realized what was happening. The Roman Senate had no clue and neither did the Roman army. The Jewish taxpayers certainly didn't see it. But God had a plan he intended to finish and he used the high and the mighty to carry it out. God loved us so much that he used the powers of Rome to keep his promises. **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. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.** Exactly the way God planned it.

Nothing stops God when he has a plan. And God definitely had a plan for Christmas. God's plan was to undo what happened at Eden. God's plan was to reverse the effects of sin. His plan was to redeem human creatures from hell. God sent his Son to carry out the plan. The Son of God became the Son of man named Jesus. He would be called **Wonderful Counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace**, but he never owned his own home and had no place to lay his head. He became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich. The plan was--and the plan is--that we are a part of the plan. In our quiet times and our honest moments, we know we haven't done what God expects of us. We always hope that doing our best is good enough, but deep down we know it isn't. God knows it, too, and that why he sent his Son. God forgives us because of Jesus. Jesus came to forgive you and he came to forgive me. **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** Nothing and no one can change that. The Bible tells us that nothing **will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.** God's love is written in stone and inscribed in lead and God will use every method and every means to make sure it stays that way. He will even use the high and the mighty, just as he did at Christmas.

2. So the Savior was born in Bethlehem. That part of the plan was done. But another part of the plan was to get the news out. God had said, **The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.** Well, who would be the first to see the

great light and how would they see it? **And there were shepherds living in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night.** That was an ingenious plan. The shepherds were just as poor and lowly as Joseph and Mary and Jesus were. They had animals in common that night and if anything was colder than a stable, it was the open air. The shepherds would have been happy to hear any good news from anybody.

God created angels before he created humans and to this day they live in the presence of God. Angels aren't almighty like God is, but they have plenty of power. The Bible says that one angel killed 185,000 thousand soldiers who attacked Israel. Angels are powerful and they carry out God's will. They are also God's messengers. Think of Gabriel. If any of God's creatures could be considered the high and the mighty, the angels would qualify, hands down.

Like I said, the shepherds would have been happy to hear the good news from anybody. God didn't send just anybody. God sent his high and mighty angels to tell the shepherds that Jesus was born. **An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.** No kidding. **But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior 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."** Really, one angel would have been great plenty. But there were more: **Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."** This is as good as the good news gets and it's news for us, too. A Savior is born for us, and he is the Savior who saves us from sin and Satan and hell. This Savior is God's choice, his chosen one, born to be David's greater Son; he fulfills God's promises to us. This Savior is for everyone in every place in every time—you, too. This Savior brings joy where there was only fear and sadness. You've all seen plenty of fear and sadness in your lives, but the Savior offers joy to you instead.

God continues to use the high and the mighty to tell us the good news. The strongest built roads so missionaries could travel to far-away places. The wisest made copies to carry the message in books. The craftiest invented the printing press to make the message accessible. The most intelligent translated the message into languages all could understand. The cleverest invented the internet so that the message can be spread instantly around the world. The bravest share the message underground and in secret when governments destroy churches, and when Covid shut the churches down, innovators shared the message through streamed services. God says that **the message goes out into all the earth, its words to the ends of the world.** God will use every method and every means to proclaim the message of Jesus to the world. He will even use the high and mighty, just as he did at Christmas.

No one high and mighty brought you here tonight. No emperor or general laid out a plan to lead you to church on Christmas Eve. No one high and mighty shared the message here tonight. No angel spoke and no angel choir sang. But the message is here tonight on this Christmas Eve. Jesus, the Son of God was born in poverty to save you from the fear and the fright of your sin. Jesus lived and died and rose for you to take your sins away. Jesus loves you as only he can. Hear the message, believe the message, hold to the message and you will join the angels and saints and all the high and mighty of God in his throne room forever. Amen.