

Intro: Garrison. Pastor. Merry Christmas! (Christmas fun jokes) Luke 2. **Pray.**

Do you ever feel like Christmas is just a bit more chaotic than you want or expect it to be? I mean think about it - party after party. You've got to get all these gifts you've got to buy. You're around family more, which can stir up all the emotions. You've got to travel all over the place. Then the New Year is right around the corner, where there's this thing in the back of our minds that we've got to get it together Jan 1, new year, new me! Maybe I'm making you anxious right now! It's a little disorienting. In our minds we think it should be awesome and peaceful; I should be living my hallmark movie of a christmas, but instead we've got chaos. Do you ever feel that way?

Then -- good news for you this morning - the first Christmas was very chaotic. Like we all love the song Silent Night. Well bad news, it's a LIE. Just kidding, but it was a very chaotic night.

Let me show you what I'm talking about. Let's look at Luke 2, the story we're all familiar with and see how the first Christmas played out. v. 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.

When you think Christmas time do you think 'census'? Probably not, but oddly enough it's the starting point for the story and the means by which God facilitates the fulfillment of prophecy that the messiah will come from Bethlehem.

So in some ways, much like we do today, there would periodically be a census (or, "registration") taken. This was how the government made decisions, decided how to tax their people, and so forth.

But back then, you had to go back to your hometown in order to be registered for the census. So Joseph, whose family line was from the city of Bethlehem, goes back to that town.

At the time, he was engaged to a woman named Mary, who was currently pregnant, which is a pretty big deal here. In their culture it would be seen as a scandal that she was pregnant before they were married.

So here Joseph and pregnant Mary, most likely with pregnant Mary riding on a donkey or some other type of animal, are going to Bethlehem, which would have been a couple days' journey in a desert climate.

This is what you call a bad babymoon.

But seriously, this is not a good start. The pregnancy makes them both look not too good in the eyes of the society they're a part of. Mary's most likely 8 or so months pregnant. They're traveling, which isn't the easiest thing to do with an expecting mother who's far along in 2022, let alone 2000 years ago in the desert. No air conditioning. No car. To go do a census for the Roman government, who all Jews hated.

Now will it get better? v 6:

[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.

They get to Bethlehem and this place is so jam packed with people due to the census that they get stuck in either a barn or guest house of some sort. This is most likely where people would've kept their animals. So it's surely gross and would smell horrible.

And as they're settling in with the animals, it's time for the baby to come. Joseph's probably scrambling to figure out what to do, probably was not prepared to help deliver this child, let alone in a barn. But they do it. The baby comes. And they place him in a...manger. Which is a nice way of saying 'an animals feeding trough'.

It's not ideal. But we're not done yet:

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

Shepherds were not people of social status these days. They were generally loners, they lived off the land, and among the animals. Which meant that they were most likely ceremonially unclean, unable to come worship. At the time, you'd have to maintain a certain level of purity and cleanliness in order to worship God, by following specific rules. One of those rules was avoiding dead animals, which in the case of shepherds, was a normal part of the job.

Now, it was normal practice to avoid anyone or anything that's unclean, shepherds fitting right into that category. With that, there's a social stigma around shepherds that you don't want to be around them. At minimum, you'd think they're a little sketchy, at worst, they're defiling to be around.

And this happens to the shepherds:

[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!"

Now, just so we're clear, that means the next thing that is going to happen in this story is that a group of shepherds are going to go and visit Mary and Joseph and the newborn Jesus in Bethlehem.

After all Mary and Joseph just went through, they're about to have some random strangers burst into their animal infested-Airbnb-delivery room to meet baby Jesus.

Can you imagine a more chaotic way to have a baby?

- Mary's pregnant out of wedlock. They're probably been shamed and possibly embarrassed.
- They're traveling for days, in a desert climate on a camel to go do a census.
- There's so many people in this small town that they have no place to stay.
- Mary gives birth basically in a barn. No doctors or nurses, just Joseph and a goat. No medicine or epidurals.
- Then in barges the shepherds, complete strangers.

Now maybe this whole chaos thing isn't making sense so far, this is a Christmas service after all. But here's what I'm getting at:

If you're Mary and Joseph, how easy is it to miss what God is doing? Like at this point in the story, they know what's going on. They've been told by literal angels that this is the Christ to come, Mary has sung a song about how blessed she is. But in the midst of all that goodness, there's chaos.

How easy would it be to miss that God has sent his Son? That God is doing something wonderful?

Isn't the same true for us?

If you're honest, how often in this season do you wake up Dec 26th and wonder what happened? Did I think about Jesus at all? Was I aware of God or what He's done for me in any way? Yes I had my advent calendar, but did that actually lead to me reflecting on the coming Christ?

In the chaos of our Christmas, how easy is it to miss that Jesus has come? All of the other stuff distracts us and we forget what this season is about.

But in the midst of all the chaos in their life leading up to those last couple verses, here's truly what was happening:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

One of the most famous verses in the Bible. That's the core of Christmas. **Jesus has come to earth. God gave His Son.**

God the Son, second member of the Trinity, who was there, not just when the world began, but when the *beginning* began. He was there when time and reality itself began, because it began with Him. We can't even begin to comprehend His magnitude as a being. He creates all things. Space, planets, stars and moons; atoms and elements; the ocean and the land; angels, animals and human beings. All out of nothing, just by speaking.

He becomes a baby. This is the baby whose birth we just read about. He didn't come into the world in glory or to be born into some rich or powerful family. He's born into chaos, to poor parents, in terrible circumstances.

He comes to save us. As John 3:16 says, He comes so that we wouldn't perish but have eternal life.

The reality is the creator's creation rebelled against Him in Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve eat of the tree they sin and everything breaks. And this isn't contained to just them, it's every human to have ever lived, including you and me. All have fallen.

Every single thing wrong in the world; everything that has ever gone wrong and ever will go wrong can be traced back to the Fall. We have sinned and turned our backs on God. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. And that's exactly what we deserve. Death. Physical and spiritual.

And in order for us to be made right with God, we'd need to be perfect. In order for the world to be made right, sin and death would have to be conquered.

None of us can do any of that. We can't be perfect. You can try, but you're sinful by nature. You'll fail. And none of us can conquer sin and death. There's no person, system, power, government or authority in this world that can overturn the powers of sin and death.

But the wonder of Christmas is that God steps in. God comes into the world to save us.

Jesus, God the Son is born to this family and grows up and lives the life we never could live because of our sinful hearts. He's perfect. And to die the death that we deserved. And He raises again, defeating Satan, sin and death.

Now all those who believe get His perfect record. When God looks at those who believe He sees His Son. His blood shed on our behalf clears us from all our sin and shame. And His resurrection secures a future hope. That all wrong in the world will be undone.

This baby has saved all those who believe and given them the only hope that can make it through this world unstained.

Why does God do all that for us? The Bible says love. And if I could take it even further. What is love?

Love, as shown by God, is giving. Love is generosity. That's what we see in the Christmas story.

The shocking, immeasurable generosity of God.

We deserved nothing but God's wrath, yet He gives us immeasurable grace and mercy. At great cost to Himself, God comes to earth to save us. The King became poor, weak and vulnerable, to save you by grace, free of cost. That is the core of what generosity looks like.

So this Christmas, remember what God has done. Let God's generosity amaze you. God's love for the world was embodied in him giving.

And therefore, the point that the bible will make over and over again is that our love for others should look like us giving.

That's why we did this series on giving during advent and Christmas time. Because Christmas is about God's generosity to us and how we respond to Him giving to us abundantly.

But also because we know that in the midst of the chaos of the season and the end of the year, our temptation would be to forget. So the best way for us to celebrate Christmas as followers of Jesus is for us to respond through giving.

So this Christmas, this is how we love the world: we give. We give of our money. We give sacrificially. Because God gave us Jesus.

That's the message of Christmas: God loved, so God gave. And because we love, we give too.

Pray.

***parents. Kids 18 mo or up are on their way to get to sing with us. Grab your sticker and you can get them right outside the room in our lobby.**