

The Coming of the True King
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Luke 2:1-12
December 22, 2013

What a blessing to hear you sing and have you back home for the holidays. What a beautiful, beautiful song. Do you have room for the Savior? I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 2. I decided to, this week, take a break from our exposition of John and reflect on the message of Christmas. Young people, you are dismissed. We'll see a movement, an anticipating movement is happening around here. Oh yeah, we've got to dismiss, that's right. May the Lord bless them and may they grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ this morning.

I wanted us to focus on the Christmas message this morning, and to do it from that familiar passage, Luke 2. I remember in seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, Knox Chandlin, my New Testament professor, challenging us when we were studying through the Gospel of Luke, Dr. Chandlin could get emotional in his teaching, and at times would be preaching. I remember talking about when people say, he said, "I've heard ministers say, 'What are you going to do for your Christmas message? It's just so hard to preach the same thing year after year.'" And Dr. Chandlin said, "Let nothing like that ever come out of your mouth. This story is so wonderful, and so glorious, it should be preached all the time with joy and anticipation every time." The miracle of what God has done, and the word of God is infinite. We could have one page of a Bible and spend our lives, if that is all we had, mining the glory of that.

Luke 2:1-14 is what we're going to look at, and the title of the message is 'The Coming of the True King'. I believe that what Luke is doing, when we remember that out of all the four Gospels, Luke is the one Gospel that is aimed the most directly at the Gentile world. Luke himself is a Gentile. He is an associate of the apostle Paul, and so in a sense he gives us the Gospel according to Paul in a way. The same way that Mark gives us the Gospel according to Peter. He was an associate of Peter. He writes down so much of what he draws directly from Peter. So Luke draws so much from Paul, and he also does a lot of research, as he tells at the beginning of the book. He's writing to a Gentile believer, Theophilus, and he is trying to set down before him an orderly account of all the things that have happened. He does it in a two-volume work, Luke/Acts. Luke and Acts both addressed to Theophilus, both written by the apostle Luke. He is associated with the apostle so he then is able to write Holy Scripture. His aim, as a Gentile, is to encourage Gentile believers to stay strong in their faith. He's writing to a Gentile

believer, Theophilus, one whose name means *'lover of God'*, but he is also writing with a view toward unbelieving Gentiles, but his focus is most directly, as he's associated with the apostle Paul. Isn't it appropriate that the apostle Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and so Luke, of the four Gospel-writers, is the one who writes the Gospel for the Gentiles? So he has in mind certain things that Gentile believers, or Gentile potential converts would have in their minds. He is thinking from the standpoint of what he shares will impact them. I think when we understand that, it helps us to interpret and see some of the things that he includes.

We talked about, as we've studied through the Gospel of John, it is important to realize that each of the Gospel-writers gives us a unique portrait. Each of them is selective in what they record. Every detail, inspired of course by the Holy Spirit, they are using their minds though to present a message, and they are carefully crafting the account. They are telling us exactly what happened. It is perfect truth and yet it is selective. We've seen that John skips over things in his Gospel so that he can set side-by-side certain things. Every word is important, and as we look at this passage, one of the things that I think we're going to see is that Luke is the only one who gives us the birth narrative. Think about that. Mark's Gospel starts with the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus is already about 30 years old when John the Baptist comes on the scene, and so Mark begins there. John actually begins much earlier, "In the beginning was the Word." He begins back in eternity past and yet what does he do with the incarnation, the coming of Jesus? In four words: The Word became flesh. It tells us nothing about the birth narrative, nothing about the wise men.

Matthew does tell us about quasi-birth narrative, he tells us about the angel coming to Joseph and telling him, "You shall call His name Jesus." Then he tells us about the wise men coming, who we believe came sometime probably months after the birth of Christ. There are a number of reasons we believe that. One is, Herod had all the children from 2 years and under, the boys, killed in Bethlehem. The second reason is that when they came, the word that is used in Matthew 2 is, "They came to the house." Apparently, Joseph and Mary are in a house by then. So he tells us the story of the wise men coming, but it is Luke alone who tells us about the events of the night of Jesus' birth. Here you have, in the glorious plan of God, these four different viewpoints, four different eye-witness accounts telling us of the glory of the Son of God. Each one bringing out new elements, new nuances, just like you were interviewing four people who saw something happen from different vantage points. They focused on different things because they saw different angles, and such is the portrait of the glorious Son of God.

Matthew records to us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Remember he tells us that when the wise men came, they came to Jerusalem. They said, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east, and we’ve come to worship Him.” Jerusalem is in an uproar, Herod is, “Hey, we’ve got to get some research done. Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” The teachers of the law come and say, “It is clear where He is going to be born. He’s going to be born in Bethlehem,” because Micah 5:2, which we read earlier, says, “But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are least among the clans of Judah, one will go forth from you to be the ruler.” So it is clear that He had to be born in Bethlehem, but Luke alone told us how they even got to be in Bethlehem, and he tells us the wonder of it because it is really an amazing turn of events that gets them there. Because it wasn’t as if Joseph and Mary were completely on top of the game. They weren’t calling Travelocity to get their reservations to go to Bethlehem in time for the baby to be born. They had no idea they were due in Bethlehem. In fact, it was the last place they wanted to go. It is the last place that Joseph, I’m convinced, wanted to travel with a pregnant woman close to birth.

You know, when Patti and I were expecting Jonathon, our first child, our son, I guess we were about five months along and this is the closest thing we had, nothing like this, but we broke down on the interstate. Now for young people, you have to understand, in 1990 and 1991, this was 1991, there were no cell phones. Or at least if you had them, only few people had car phones, and you had to put something big in your car and pull the phone off. It was like a field radio. So I didn’t have a cell phone. Nowadays if you break down, you call somebody, no problem. Well back then, we broke down twice in the pregnancy, at about five months, and at about 8 months. The first time we had to get out of the car and I’m going to walk to the exit, back about a mile and a half. Patti is like, “You are not leaving me here,” so, okay, so we both start walking to the exit. Praise the Lord, somebody helped us, stopped and saw I guess the dilemma we were in, picked us up and drove us to the exit. I don’t necessarily recommend that as a course of action, but that is what the Lord did that day. I can sympathize a little bit, I thought to myself as I’m getting out of the car, how awful this is going to be to walk two miles with a woman who is pregnant. I mean her feet are already hurting, starting to have discomfort, so for Joseph, he’s got to go 80 miles. Not in a car, on foot and possibly on donkey. He has to go from Nazareth up to Bethlehem. Bethlehem is almost 3,000 feet altitude. It is an uphill journey. It probably took them at least four days.

Well, we see how it all comes to pass as we look at this passage. Luke wants us to see the wonder of how it comes, and also what he is doing is he's telling us more details, but he is also telling us some details about the human instruments. I think he is making a contrast between Jesus, the baby, who is only mentioned in this passage in the very briefest way in Verse 7. But I think he is making contrast between Him and Caesar Augustus, and I believe that the Gentile audience, receiving this Gospel in the 60's A.D., would have been prone to see that clearly. Caesar Augustus was a name that would have rung with them in a big way. In fact, Luke is writing about 70 years after the event, 70 years after the birth of Christ he is writing about the birth of Christ. Jesus was born probably 6 B.C. There are some problems with our counter. When they established the counter in 4th Century, they missed it by 6 years. It should have been 1. There is no zero. Anyway, sorry to even go there. The numbers just flashed out at me, but 6 B.C. is when He was born. Luke is probably writing about 63 A.D., so that is 70 years difference.

In thinking about us, if I were to tell you about the leader of the free world 70 years ago, that would be Franklin Delano Roosevelt, FDR. And for most of us that have studied our history, there are certain things about FDR we know. We've seen things about him. We've heard things about him. *We have nothing to fear but fear itself.* 'The New Deal'. That was a deal, but he led us out of World War II, led us through World War II. There are certain things we know about FDR. He's one of the more well-known presidents of the 20th Century. Augustus, Caesar Augustus had that kind of a ring, even greater than that. He was the first Roman emperor, the first Roman leader that had all authority. There were wonderful associations with him for the Roman people. So when he introduces his name at the beginning, which he doesn't have to share, I think he is ringing that for, or putting that as a backdrop for the rest of the story. Let's read Verses 1-14 of Luke Chapter 2.

Luke 2:1-14 ~ Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased.”*

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that You might grant that in Thy light, we might see light. That Your Spirit might open to us the word, that we might see the living word. And we pray this in His wonderful name, Amen.

Now what I want us to do is just kind of observe the text, and just walk through it. And the question we're mainly looking at though, we're going to use some of the W's. You know, *Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?* Five W's and an H. We're going to use just four W's. We are going to talk about *What? Who?* We are going to keep coming back to *Who?* because *Who?* is the most important question. The ultimate question is: *Who is this baby? Who is the King?* We are going to look at *What? When?* and *Where?* as well, as we go through this passage.

1) What?

Now, first of all, what we notice is, Luke tells us, that a decree went out. That is the *What?* A decree. A command. It was a decree that a census be taken. That is another answer to *What?* A census. In fact, that word is emphasized in the passage. It occurs four times. Verse 1, *...a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.* Verse 2, *This was the first census taken...* Verse 3, *...everyone was on his way to register for the census,...* Verse 5, when it says, *in order to register along with Mary,...* The word 'register' has the word 'census' in it as well. It could have said, "In order to register for the census along with Mary." So he wants us to see that this census happens, that suddenly Caesar Augustus decides it is time for a census. It is time to count everybody again. Apparently, what happened was, normally

when the Romans would do a census, they would not require people to go back to their ancestral home. That is apparently a modification that Herod the Great, the sub-ruler, the governor of Judea and Israel area, implemented. Herod was a great PR guy. He was not a Jew, but he knew how to deal with the Jews. I think what he does, some scholars suggest that what he does is he makes it more palatable. “The Romans have said, ‘You’ve got to be counted again for tax purposes.’ That’s a bummer. A census? More taxes? The Romans rule, but listen...” He doesn’t go and say all that, he just says, “We’re going to take a census, and what we’re going to do is go to your ancestral home.” He appeals to the Jewish way of thinking. “Go back to your roots and remember what tribe you are from,” and that is why they go back to their home towns.

So Joseph, we’re told, goes to Bethlehem. So the Lord is working through the decree of Caesar Augustus, and through the mindset of Herod, to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem at just the right time. This decision is going to have great impact on the coming child, this decree of the emperor.

2) Who?

That brings up the second question, *Who?* Caesar Augustus. I mentioned Caesar Augustus was a name that the people, even in the 60’s, would have remembered very clearly because he was the first Roman emperor. In fact, the word ‘*Augustus*’, he was given the title when he came to possess sole power in 27 B.C. The years before he consolidated power were times of great civil unrest, political instability, civil war. In fact, he defeated Marc Antony in a civil war in 27 B.C. to take power, but there had been decades of unrest and turbulence. So when he came to power the civil war ended. There was peace again in Rome. So you know when you are in the midst of conflict, in war, you are happy when the war is over. So the people were naturally happy that the war was over, and though they didn’t initially intend to, basically Caesar Augustus becomes the sole ruler of Rome. The senate is really just de facto in existence. It is there, but he is doing everything he wants to do. The senate gave him the title ‘*Augustus*’, which itself there is some irony in that. Luke could have told us this without telling us. He could have said, “Hey, there was a census taken and so Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem.” But he wants to tell us, “No, there was a census taken because Caesar Augustus issued a decree,” and in telling us that, he uses his whole name, Caesar Augustus. He was actually named ‘*Octavian*’, but he was given the title ‘*Augustus*’. It comes from a Latin verb which means ‘*to increase, to be great*’. So it is essentially ‘*Caesar, the Great One*’. It could be translated ‘*The Illustrious One*’, or ‘*The Majestic One*’.

In fact, the roots of emperor worship go back to Caesar Augustus. It wasn't fully practiced widely until later, but he is the one where the corner turns to where they really began to believe that there was something divine about the emperor. As I said, some of the circumstances of his coming to power set the stage for that. He brought peace to Rome. He was a great military leader. He defeated Marc Antony, and then he defeated the enemies of Rome and extended the borders of Rome. He coined a term the '*Pax Romana*'. '*Pax Romana*' is '*The Peace of Rome*'. So that when Rome would conquer an area it would bring peace in the sense that because they ruled with an iron fist, there was no fighting, and crime actually went down too because he was a great administrator. So there was the sense in which it was great harmony that he brought to the social fabric of the Mediterranean world. So he was a great military leader. He was known as '*The Great One*', '*The Majestic One*'. He is the first emperor to rule. He is the '*King of Kings*' in a sense, and he is the one who brings peace. Now all of that is in the understanding, like I said, of the readers that first read this Gospel. Caesar Augustus.

3) When?

He tells us *When?* The next W, *When?* This was the first census taken while Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Then we can tell that 6 B.C. would have been the time when this census was issued. So as I said, 70 years before Luke writes. Augustus was also a great administrator. He constructed roads. He was able to create the police and fire departments of his day. He took it to a whole new level in the administration of just social services, civil services. So in many ways he brought blessing to Rome.

Now, back to *Who?* again. The next *Who?* we encounter is in Verse 4, Joseph. ***Joseph also went up...*** Joseph, the father, the earthly father, the adopted father of the child to be born. Joseph. But he quickly connects Joseph to David. Look what he says in Verse 4.

Luke 2:4 ~ Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David...

He doesn't say, "To Bethlehem..." first. He says, "To the City of David." Which the angels also say, "The City of David." Which is interesting because in the Old Testament sometimes the City of David refers to Jerusalem, but really the City of David, they are speaking of the place where David was born. That is the City of David that Luke uses, and the angels when they talk to the shepherds. The City of David, Bethlehem. This connection though with David, the great king. So the child

to be born in the City of David. The child to be born, this is to connect them to Micah 5:2. The child to be born is the one who we have been expecting. The long expected King and Savior.

4) Where?

We can look at the *Where?* in Verse 4, can't we? He went up from Galilee, from Nazareth to Bethlehem. I mentioned it was a journey of 80 miles, four days. Think of the hardship on that young couple, and the hardship on the baby, in the womb, about to be born. He tells us about Mary, the next two in Verse 5.

Luke 2:5 ~ in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

It's amazing how simple and straightforward that account is. ***...she gave birth to her firstborn son;...*** Three verbs—she gave birth, she wrapped Him, she laid Him. She gave birth, and then she wrapped Him in cloths. I think the emphasis here is first of all, the cloths would be just strips of cloth that you might wrap any child, but particularly poor children. But the fact that she wrapped Him means there was nobody there to help her. It is just Joseph and Mary, and she is not going to let him do it. He's a guy. He wouldn't know how to do it. But her mother is not there, there is no friend there, there is no woman attending to her. It is them in isolation, in loneliness. She wraps Him, and she lays Him where? In a manger. A feeding trough. The Savior of the world has come into the world and He is laid in a feeding trough. Isn't that amazing? I mean, donkeys, or oxen, or sheep, eating out of this wooden trough. Now straw is placed in it and a baby is laid in it. That seems unthinkable for anyone. Can you imagine? Laying your child in a feeding trough? Your newborn baby? And yet this is the King of Kings. What an astonishing picture of lowliness, and you think about this has all happened because of the whim of Caesar Augustus. I mean, he decided he wanted a census. The whim of the ruler, the stroke of a pen. "Yeah, let's have a census right now," and the word goes out, and then Herod decides how to implement it, and he with the stroke of a pen sends out the instruction and it impacts everybody in that dominion including Mary and Joseph and the Child, and it brings them great hardship. They're not able to say, "We'd like to come later." It's not like jury duty. You can't write a letter or make a call and not show up. They have to go.

I think one of the things he's teaching us here is that we need not fear the whims of our rulers, because there is this understated and amazing irony behind it all. It seems as though when you first look at it that the edict of the Roman Emperor, the stroke of his pen, brings great hardship and just tosses about his people including Mary and Joseph and the Baby, but in reality what we see is that the Baby in the manger has decreed that Caesar make the decree. The Baby in the manger is the one who knows the Baby in the womb knows He's got to be in Bethlehem, and so He puts it in the heart of Caesar to decree that as Proverbs 21:1 says, "The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. Like a water course He channels it wherever He wishes."

Have you ever flown over like the Mississippi River in an airplane and been able to see out the side of the airplane or any large river, and you look down? It's amazing. When you're on the ground and you drive over a river, it seems like they're all straight, but up from the sky at 30,000 feet looking down, they look like this, and the reality is that's what they are. And he says that like a water course, the Lord turns the heart of the king. Caesar was going to decree a census because the Lord wanted him to decree a census. It didn't matter if he didn't want to. His heart was going to turn to do that. Somebody might have suggested the day before, "Hey, do you think we need a census?" and he would have said, "No, I don't think so." The next day, "Yes, we need a census," because the Lord decreed it. The Baby is ruling from the feeding trough.

Now, think about how that applied to the original audience. In the 60's now they have an emperor Nero just a few years before widespread persecution is going to break out, and really for the next 250 years, there are going to be seasons of persecution that break out. Basically though, the church is in the minority. It appears to be a hopeless cause, and the might of Rome standing against it. I mean, at different times emperors are going to decree it's against the law to be a Christian. They're going to decree that you have to worship the emperor, which Christians will not, because Christians are convinced Jesus is Lord, and they will not take the Roman oath which says Caesar is Lord. And so for 250 years, this is about to happen, and here God gives through the apostle Paul and Luke, here, this message that says appearance can be deceiving. It may appear that all the might and the power rests in this world, but in reality, the one holding the scepter is Jesus Christ, and no matter how it appears, remember and be comforted in that.

Now, think about that for us today. I mean, I mentioned FDR. They would have thought about Augustus and Nero. We think FDR. We think of our President. The whims of our President, he can sign with his pen an executive order and suddenly

our lives can be completely turned upside down. We're seeing that with his work toward healthcare. That's right, we could stay there a while, but we're not going to stay there, because the message is that no matter what he does to healthcare, no matter what he does to our morality as he has advocated homosexual marriage, if he outlaws us to preach the Gospel and to preach the Gospel to homosexuals and says, "There is a better way. God has not created you this way. All of us are sinners. All of us have natural bents that would lead us to destruction, and if we follow those we will be destroyed, but if you repent and you trust in Christ, He can liberate you from whatever it is you struggle with."—Even if he outlaws that, what do we know? Christ is still ruling. It doesn't matter what appearances look like. We know whom we have believed. We know that what we've committed to Him, He's able to keep until that day. He is reigning and ruling, and if it's true when you're looking at a Baby in the manger, how much more is it true when we know the risen Christ is seated at the right hand of the throne of God right now, and at any moment the clouds may part and He may appear?

So we need not fear what man can do to us. We need to rejoice in a God who reigns. The reality, the question that this passage says, look at the background. Caesar Augustus is basically the backdrop. He's an impressive backdrop, and all throughout history it's been that way. When we studied Daniel a few years ago, you looked at the kingdoms of this world, and remember that impressive statue in Daniel 2? It represented the four great kingdoms of the world with golden heads, silver shoulders and chest, bronze midsection and thighs, iron legs and feet. Those were the four great kingdoms of the world—Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome—but there's a little stone that is cut out without hands, that is hurled against that massive statue, and when that little stone strikes the feet of that statue, it doesn't knock it over. It shatters the statue. It shatters it and then that stone becomes a giant mountain that fills the whole earth. You see, appearances, small appearances in reality are very different. That is the way of God in a fallen world. Everything's not going to be fixed until He finally returns and comes back, and when it is, everything will become evident. The reality that is invisible will be visible, and the fact is He truly is reigning, and we see this as we continue in the story, because think about this. Verse 7:

Luke 2:7 ~ And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke could have skipped over to Verse 21, because he told us about the birth, and he could have said:

Luke 2:21 ~ And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus,...

He could have told us about the time in the temple, but he didn't. He tells us about something else that happened, and again, he's the only Gospel writer that tells us about the appearance of the angels to the shepherds. In Verse 8:

Luke 2:8 ~ In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

That's a very unimpressive group of people to be the first to greet the Messiah.

Luke 2:9 ~ And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

Here you are looking at a Baby in a feeding trough, but the reality of who that Baby in the feeding trough is, is seen by looking at what's going on in the outskirts of Bethlehem. One angel appears, and the glory of the Lord shines around him, and they are terrified. I can remember when I first really was studying this passage years ago and it just hit me how erroneous our whole view of what angels are is, the Precious Moments kind of angels. I'm not trying to say get rid of them, or whatever. That's up to you, but you know an angel when an angel appears. It isn't like a Precious Moments little child. When an angel appears, people are terrified.

In fact, the King James of course says they were *sore afraid*. In the Greek it says, "They feared a great fear," literally. They feared a great fear. They are terrified. The angel appears. One angel appears and they are instantly in complete dread, because of the might and the power representing that one angel. What they're going to see in a moment is going to blow their minds, because in an instant, suddenly with that angel appear a multitude of the heavenly host, literally heavenly armies, a multitude of them. This numberless multitude of these soldiers, that one of them terrified them, now the whole sky is ablaze with the glow of these heavenly armies, and what is the message here? The Babe in the manger, those are His armies. Caesar Augustus, he claims to bring peace with his Roman legions, but the Babe in the manger, that tiny Babe in that manger that comes in lowliness, that is going to live a life where even as you see Him, not be so impressive. "He doesn't have a stately form or majesty that we should be drawn to Him," Isaiah said. Not outwardly impressive, He's just flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones, infant holy, infant lowly, and yet He in reality is the One who commands those heavenly armies. The unseen armies of God are at His beckon call.

Do you remember the story of how Elisha was surrounded in Dothan? Remember Elijah the prophet had been prophesying and protecting the Northern Kingdom of Israel from their enemies, the Arameans, the Syrians, basically. Elisha would know what the Syrians were planning to do and would tell the King of Israel accordingly and he kept escaping from traps they had set for him and his army. Finally the King of the Syrians/Arameans says, “What’s going on? Who among you is a spy? Who’s telling the King of Israel?” and one of his advisors says, “Oh King, the prophet Elisha knows what you say in your bed chamber,” and so the king says, “Let’s go get the prophet Elisha.

So they go to Dothan and they find him at Dothan, and he’s in this little, small village of Dothan, a little walled town in Israel. They surround the whole town with their armies. The mighty army of the Arameans surrounds Dothan, and Elisha is still kind of slumbering in the morning, and his servant Gehazi gets up to make coffee, basically. He’s getting water. You can imagine him getting up and he’s walking over. They’re sleeping on top of the roof. It must have been a hot time of year so they’re sleeping on top of the roof so they can be cool, and he’s going over to get the water, and he looks out. Can you imagine? He looks out and he sees the whole town surrounded with tens of thousands of soldiers, this small little village, basically, and he begins to be terrified.

He says, “Elisha, Elisha, wake up! Wake up! You’re going to get it now. Finally they’re on to you. They’ve got you. You’ve been protecting the king.” I mean, he’s just scared, and Elisha says basically, “Don’t trouble yourself. Greater are those who are with us than those who are against us,” and Gehazi thinks Elisha’s lost his mind and that he’s not awake yet. And then Elisha says, “Lord, open his eyes.” Remember what he sees? Dothan is a little village nestled in the hills of Judea, and suddenly his eyes are open and he sees the multitude of the heavenly host who are all throughout the hills surrounding Dothan so that the Aramean army has surrounded them, but the armies of God have surrounded the Arameans, and at that moment Elisha prays and the Lord strikes the whole Aramean army blind, and Elisha himself leads them directly from there. He says, “Follow me,” and they lead them into the Kingdom of Israel and Samaria, and into the city, and then they open their eyes and they’re surrounded by the army of Israel. Well, what was true, the reality is the armies of God are always surrounding His people. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, but we don’t see it, and we see in this moment the veil is taken back and the shepherds see what Elisha saw, that though it doesn’t appear that this Baby is anything special, the reality is He is the One who commands the heavenly host. He is the One who rules, and in fact, when you look at what the angel says to them even before the armies appear, he says:

Luke 2:11 ~ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

There's a point by one of the commentators that Luke and Paul are really the only New Testament writers that use the term Savior in speaking of Jesus. They all talk about saving, but to use it as a noun, Savior, is particularly characteristic to Paul and to Luke. Luke uses it in Luke and Acts, and Paul uses it in his epistles. And one of the reasons that we think they particularly used that term was because of the associations of the term for the Gentile world. You have the apostle to the Gentiles, Luke, the Gospel writer to the Gentiles using this term Savior. Savior was a term that was reserved for the Roman Emperor, but I want to read you something from 9 BC, three years before Jesus was born. This was inscribed on the calendar inscription about Augustus Caesar and how they viewed him. Listen to this:

Whereas the providence (they're speaking of the gods of this world, the Roman god's providence). Whereas the providence which has guided our whole existence and which has shown such care and liberality has now brought our life to the peak of perfection in giving to us Augustus Caesar whom it filled with virtue for the welfare of mankind, and who, being sent to us and to our descendants as a Savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order.

Isn't that amazing? There's that desire for man to find a Savior among humans. I think we saw that in the recent elections of President Obama. I think there's this Messiah complex with him. People want a Savior, and they're willing to impute that to somebody, and they did the same thing. There's nothing new under the sun. It's just like it's always been, and they did the same thing with Augustus Caesar. In fact, the emperor was repeatedly called—we have this in inscriptions—the Savior of the world, and the Savior of the inhabited earth, the Roman Emperor, and then you look back at how Luke phrases things.

Luke 2:1 ~ Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

And then when the angels come and speak, they don't announce first Christ, but the first word they say is:

Luke 2:11 ~ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior,...

Men look for saviors, but there is only one true Savior. Jesus Christ is the true Savior. Men look for saviors who can deliver us with the blessings of this world, but we need a Savior to deliver us to another world, because this world will be destroyed. So he says: *...a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*. In fact, I think the emphasis in the last phrase *...who is Christ the Lord...* falls on *Lord*. Actually, there is no definite article in the phrase. It actually says *who is Christos kyrios* or *ὃς ἐστὶν Χριστὸς κύριος*. It can mean *who is the anointed Lord*, and I think that's the sense here. It does mean anointed in the sense of Messiah and Christ, but the emphasis falls on Lord. He is Savior and He is Lord, and those were two words that were very familiar to first century Gentiles, and they associated it with Rome.

So the message here is don't look for salvation to any earthly entity. Don't put all of your hopes in the greatest men that are around. There is only One who can save, and there is only One who rules. The true Savior and the true Lord is Jesus Christ. He came into the world to save us, and there is salvation in no one else. To be saved you have to repent of your sins and you have to believe that Jesus Christ came into the world, He lived a perfect life, and He offered Himself as a substitute for the sins of everyone who would ever believe, and when He hung on the cross, He received the wrath, the full measure of the wrath for every sin ever committed by everyone who would ever believe, and He filled up, He took that full measure of God's wrath, and then He said, "It is finished!" And when He said, "It is finished!" it was finished. He had taken all of the wrath that could ever be poured out from God against all the sins that you have ever committed if you're a Christian, that you've ever committed or ever will commit. He took all of the guilt, all of the shame, and all of God's holy anger, and He received it in His infinite person, and He swallowed it, and He took care of it, and it is removed forever. There remains no more wrath for sin if you're a Christian.

Isn't that amazing? Nothing can change your standing before God. This is the Savior we're talking about. We don't need a human savior. What does it matter? I mean, is it that big a deal? Certainly it's a big deal for healthcare and the economy and all that to be messed up. It's a big deal, and it's a significant deal, but what is it compared to eternity? It's nothing, and in fact, God may be using it just the way He did back then with Rome to let some great things come up to appear to be mighty and powerful so that He can actually show people that those things don't really satisfy anyway, that all of the Messianic hopes involved in electing a President are foolish and ridiculous. There is only one Savior and He is Jesus Christ, and there is only one who is Lord. No matter how many armies, no matter how many people they can marshal, Jesus has them surrounded. He reigns and rules.

I don't know how people that are really following what's going on today make it if they really put their hopes in this world. You know, when you follow politics, and I do that from time to time a little bit to stay up on what's going on, but I have to discipline myself not to do too much because it can be depressing, but what always brings me back is when I start to get depressed, I just remember: Who is it that really reigns? Why is this happening? Is it happening by a whim? Is it happening because people are not thinking and they're voting? Well, yeah, but why is it really happening? It's really happening because the King of kings and the Lord of lords has issued a decree, and nothing can happen apart from His issuing a decree, and He's working all of these things to bring the salvation of all His precious people that He's going to bring to Himself.

He's bringing it to pass, and when we put that into perspective, that's good news and that's what the angel said. "Don't be afraid. There's nothing to fear." It looked like there was something to fear. They see an angel show up. I mean, if you saw an angel show up, you'd be afraid. There's nothing to fear because God has sent you a Savior, and God has sent you the One who He has appointed, He has anointed, He has made both Lord and Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. And when we know that, we have nothing to fear. We have every source of joy, and we have a message worth trumpeting and sharing, a message that this dark world is dying to hear, the message that the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light. The people who live in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has dawned. For unto us a child has been born. Unto us a Son has been given, and His Name is wonderful, counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father.

He is the One who brings peace, and only He brings peace. He brings peace between us and God. He brings peace between us and each other, and one day He's going to make it just like Ted read about earlier from Isaiah 11. Who is it that brings peace? Who is it that makes the wolf and the lamb lie down together? Who is it that brings the ox and the lion to eat straw together? Who is it that enables a child to reach his hand into the den of the viper and play with a snake? Only Jesus Christ—He is the one who removed all enmity and will one day make it like it was originally meant to be, and when that comes, that is the blessing that we all ought to be looking for and anticipating, and as the world gets darker, let's just rejoice that the Light is coming, and when it comes we're going to have more than we can ever imagine. We're going to be more satisfied, more overjoyed, and these things that happened around us are just reminders: Don't feel too at home here, for Jesus is coming. He's coming in glory. Praise His Name.

Let's go to Him in prayer...

Our Father, we rejoice in such a glorious plan of salvation. We are amazed at the wonder of Your mercy and grace, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God would leave the realm of glory, leave the place of perfect communion with the Father and the Spirit, and would become a Man, and would live in this sin-sick world, this dark place, see the ugliness of what we've done, the tragedy of what we have caused, and He would experience the agony and become a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief, and live through every temptation, and He would do that so that He could offer a perfect sacrifice, and He could give us a perfect righteousness.

He was willing to go all the way down to the manger, and from there the road just went down even further to ultimately the lowest point, the cross, and because He was willing to come down so far, He's able to lift us up so high. We glory in our Savior, and we, Father, say today, may Jesus Christ be praised, may His Name be exalted, may You give Him the Name that is above every name, and may every knee bow. May every tongue confess that He is Lord. We pray for the people in this room, that we might all be among that number today who are truly from our hearts yielding to Him as Lord and Savior. We pray it in His Name, Amen.

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