

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

It's a familiar story to many of us – the Christmas story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, in a stable, because all the inns had the “no vacancy” signs flashing. Remember how that carol goes, “Away in a manger, no crib for a bed...” Mary and Joseph had come to Bethlehem to pay their taxes to Rome ... just like the hundreds of others who returned to their ancestral home to be registered by the tax man. No crib for a bed, no room at the inn. You'd think God could've made better arrangements to bring salvation to the world.

Think about your own life ... maybe the plans you have or the plans you've had ... think about how things haven't gone according to plan this year. Are your Christmas plans the same this year as last? Most people don't plan to have serious illnesses, or to lose their employment or their business, or have family members who need care, or even lose a family member. None of us planned a COVID Christmas... In reality life isn't all that easy. And much of what we go through during tough times doesn't make sense at the time it is happening.

Still, it's amazing how God works things out in His time, when the worst looks like that's as good as it's gonna get. The coming of Christ is the best news the world has ever heard ... but most people are thinking, “What's for dinner?” before it even dawns on them that the first Christmas occurred in less than ideal circumstances. Sometimes **we don't appreciate the good news until we see it against the backdrop of bad news.** God, you see, is the God of all circumstances, redeeming even the worst of times. Sometimes it takes a disaster or tragedy or a pandemic to wake us up to the goodness and power of God.

I. A Redeemer Promised

Long before that first Christmas God put a plan into motion to redeem people from their sin. And then, **at just the right time God's own son was born into our history to be our Savior: Born this day in the city of David.** The city of David is Bethlehem, six or seven miles south of Jerusalem. Until modern times it was a tiny village. Seven hundred years before the first Christmas the Lord had spoken through the prophet Micah and declared that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Here's what it says, ***But you, Bethlehem ... though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times,*** Micah 5:2.

Bethlehem means “house of bread.” How fitting that Jesus, The Bread of Life (John 6:51), was born there and then placed in a feeding trough (that's what a manger is). Through Him we are nourished with God's spiritual sustenance. Jesus grew up in **Nazareth** which **means “new shoot”** just as the prophet Isaiah

said: ***A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit, Isaiah 11:1.*** He is the way that God chose to be with His people.

II. The Right Time

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world, Luke 2:1-2. “In those days...” tells us that Jesus’ birth is situated in a specific time and place. “In those days...” tells us that this is God becoming incarnate, in real time, with hands and eyes, with a baby’s needs - ***unthinkable humility for the Sovereign of the universe,*** Creator of all that is seen and unseen. This is not a legend or a nicely told fairy tale, but an event that really happened. In those days God entered into human history, not with thunder and lightening, but with a chorus of angels telling lowly shepherds about it.

But the angels did not say “In those days” because they proclaimed to the shepherds, ***To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior... Luke 2:11.*** How timely are their words for us in these days of COVID lockdown and fear. In those days the palace and the capital ruled the world. But this day the world is being turned upside down. In those days the shepherds were “nobodies,” but this day the shepherds received a gift of the kingdom of God!

So, consider this: In those days we read about a miracle way back when. On this day we expect one! In those days we tried to make our traditions and material gifts perfect. ***On this day we let go of our anxiety over making things perfect so that we can make room for a perfect God.*** In those days our Christmas list was full of material things for family, friends, coworkers. On this day our list contains what Jesus wants. Wouldn’t that be a miracle?

Christmas is about Him after all. Jesus wants the proclamation of good news, release from sin, recovery from addictions, freedom to be as God intends, and God’s favor. In those days we worried about what’s under the tree instead of the tree of life. On this day we see clearly the Giver of life, and truth, and grace

It’s the timeless message of Christmas because it is always on this day, which is the place where God lives,ⁱ and where we live. ***God has given us a Savior for the very times we live in.*** Good and bad times, smooth and rough, light and dark – Jesus, Savior, can redeem them all. Jesus, Redeemer, came into the world to defeat the works of the devil, so He can redeem us from the darkness of sin around and within.

III. God Sent The Very Best

Listen again to what the angels said to those shepherds: ***For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*** [In the original language they didn’t use any articles so it read like this: *for unto you is born this day ... Savior, Christ, Lord.*]

Savior is an Old Testament word that means “One who delivers his people.” When the angel announced the birth to Joseph, he said, *Give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins*, Matthew 1:21. **Jesus means “God saves.”** We desperately need a Savior, don’t we?

Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew word Messiah, which means “the anointed One” – anointed to do a special work of God. And Lord? It is a term for Deity. It’s a synonym for God.

He is the Savior, He is the Christ, He is the Lord — the one sent from God. This is the heart of Christmas. God cared enough to send the very best for you and for me. This is the stupendous truth of Christmas—Immanuel—God with us.

IV. He Came For You

Jesus, Savior, came for you. How do I know? Because he came to redeem sinners, and I have it on good authority that you’re a sinner ... just like me. Here’s the other reason I know He came for you: the Bible says so, *For unto you is born this day ...* Maybe those shepherds were flabbergasted when the angels declared that the Savior, Christ, Lord came for them. We forget that shepherds were near the bottom of the social order in Israel. Not many people would pick “shepherd” on their Career Preference Form. **The angel is really saying, “Christ came for you nobodies of society.”** Do you ever feel like a “nobody” in this celebrity-obsessed society of ours? It’s either Hollywood, professional sports, or politics. The rest of us? ... well, our Lord came for us nobodies. And what about all those celebrities and elites? He came for them too. I just pray that one day some of them will get it. And I hope you won’t be too busy to notice Him and receive Him.

Tonight, or tomorrow, many families will gather around their Christmas tree to open gifts. What use is a gift if it’s never opened? **Two thousand years ago God sent you a gift wrapped in swaddling clothes,** lying in a manger. You will never experience Christmas joy until you personally receive this gift—the Lord Jesus Christ – and let Him be opened in your soul.

Kern County is home to numerous prisons – from Tehachapi to Taft, to McFarland, Delano, and Wasco. But there are other kinds of prisons that don’t have bars and guards. **Some prisons are inside the human heart where we are held captive by our own brokenness, pain, and sin.** Some people inside of real prisons are free, while some people outside prison are not free – imprisoned by all manner of trouble. Christ came to free us from our prisons — yet He cannot free us until we open the gift to us that He is.

Glory to God in the highest heaven, Luke 2:14.ⁱⁱ From lowest to highest Jesus’ birth is the hinge of history, the glue of the universe, the light of the world. He’s the Savior we all need.

V. Worth Knowing

A man traveled a great distance for an interview with a distinguished scholar. He was ushered into the man's study, where he said, "Doctor, I notice that the walls of your study are lined with books from the ceiling to the floor. No doubt you have read them all. I know you have written many yourself. You have traveled extensively, and doubtless you've had the privilege of conversing with some of the world's wisest men. I've come a long way to ask you just one question. Tell, me, of all you've learned, what is the one thing most worth knowing?" Putting his hand on his guest's shoulder, the scholar replied with emotion in his voice, "My dear sir, of all the things I have learned, only two are really worth knowing. The first is, I am a great sinner, and the second is, Jesus Christ is a great Savior!"

If you know those two things, know them deep down in the recesses of your soul - you know the best news in the whole world. Now what will you do with that knowledge? Act on it. Open God's gift to you. Receive Him.

A Savior has been born for you, who is Christ the Lord!

ⁱMatt Rawle, *The Redemption of Scrooge*, (Abingdon, 2016, Nashville, TN), 98-100.

ⁱⁱMatt Rawle, *The Redemption of Scrooge*, (Abingdon, 2016, Nashville, TN), 85.