

Baby Savior
Luke 2:1-14
Key Verse: 2:7

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

As we celebrate Christmas, we sense that we should be happy and joyful. But the truth is that many people are lonely, sad, and miserable. With our mouths we say, "Merry Christmas," but in our hearts we say, "Bah humbug," which means "There is nothing to be joyful about." As we have heard, in Newtown, Connecticut, 20 elementary school children were killed by a crazed young man. Parents had sent their little children to school, expecting to see them again later that day. But the children did not return. Families were preparing to celebrate Christmas together. But now they are consumed by grief. When we heard this story, we were shocked. Many wondered, "Where is God in all this?" And doubt, fear, sorrow, and anxiety entered many hearts. We asked, "How can we have Christmas joy in a world like this?" Yet we find that at the time of Jesus' birth there were also tragic things happening. For example, King Herod had all the baby boys in Bethlehem under two years old killed in an effort to destroy Jesus. So many mothers were grieving, and families were devastated. Matthew wrote of this event: "Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more'" (Mt 2:17-18). Satan was working to destroy life. But God was working to send the Savior according to his plan. People were living in darkness, under the oppression of the Roman Empire. Yet at the darkest time, the sun rises. So Jesus, the rising Sun came into the world. Today, let's see how Jesus came into the world and consider what this means to us.

I. The baby was laid in a manger (1-7)

Verse 1 says, "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world." Caesar Augustus conquered and ruled the world with military power. When he issued a decree from Rome, people throughout the empire had to move whether they wanted to or not. There was no exception. Even a pregnant woman had to take a long and dangerous journey. 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 (4). It was a journey of about 80 miles. It would be like traveling from here to Milwaukee. However, they traveled on foot, and there was no paved highway, rest stops or McDonalds along the way. Joseph went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child (5). "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" (6-7). Luke particularly notes that the baby Jesus was laid in a manger. While a manger can be about the size of a baby's crib, in essence, it is an animal's feed box. This suggests that Jesus was born in a cave or a barn, surrounded by animals. Christmas cards make this manger scene seem warm and friendly, even poetic. But in reality, it was the worst place for a newborn baby to be laid. It seems that Joseph and Mary were driven into a corner by the ruthless decree of Caesar and the baby was born in the most poor, helpless, pitiful manner.

In Luke 1:32a, the angel said of him, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." Conceived by the Holy Spirit, he was in very nature God. Why was God born into this world as a baby and laid in a manger? There is a mystery here. Yet the Scriptures do tell us some things. First of all, Jesus is God Incarnate. He is fully God, and at the same time he is fully man (Php 2:6-7). He did this to be a perfect mediator between God and mankind (1 Ti 2:5). In order to become fully man, he humbled himself, renouncing his glory and majesty as God. He experienced life as we do, without any special privileges, in order to fully understand us. Many people say, "You just don't understand me." No one can understand another person without experiencing what they experience. Hebrews 2:17 says, "For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." Jesus knows our flaws, vulnerability, miseries, agonies and failures; he knows everything. Yet Jesus does not judge us; Jesus understands and shows us mercy. Matthew 8:17 says, "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases." Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need." Let's approach Jesus with confidence.

II. The baby Savior, the King (8-14)

In verses 1-7 Luke tells of Jesus' birth from a human perspective. But in verses 8-14 he tells us how heaven responded. The Lord made a glorious announcement to shepherds living out in the fields nearby. While they were 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" (10-12). Then a great chorus of the heavenly host appeared with the angel and celebrated Jesus' birth, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (13-14).

Jesus' birth was the headline news in heaven. What a contrast! In the view from earth, the Roman Empire looked glorious and powerful and as if it would never end. The baby in a manger looked weak and vulnerable as if he would disappear soon. Everyone paid attention to Caesar, but no one noticed the baby Jesus. Yet in the view from heaven, the Roman Empire was just the background for Jesus' birth. Now we can see that the Roman Empire has disappeared. But the baby Jesus grew and became the Savior and King. His influence has spread throughout the world and continues to grow through the generations. How could this happen? It is because there is God's life in the baby Jesus. Here we learn several things.

First, God's work is characterized by the manger. Luke mentions the manger three times (7,12,16). The manger symbolizes humility, poverty, and purity. Jesus' life and ministry reflected these characteristics. Jesus began in Galilee, a despised place. His lifestyle was pure and holy, marked by prayer, the word of God, and serving others. He called ordinary, uneducated, yet pure and humble men to be his disciples. It looked small and unimpressive. Yet there was the life of God at work. We can call this a "manger ministry."

Second, the baby Jesus is the Savior. Let's read verse 11. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." To some the word "Savior," sounds trite or theoretical. They know in their minds that Jesus saves, but their lives don't change. They become trapped in unbelief and pride. The truth is that Jesus saves! To the shepherds, the word "Savior" meant rescue from oppressors and enemies, both within and without. Some people need to be saved from depression. We feel that we have fallen into quicksand and cannot get out. The more we struggle to be free, the deeper we fall into the pit. We need someone to help us. Human help is limited. But Jesus can save us from depression. Some people need to be saved from addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, sports, technology and so on. The addictions have warped their personalities and overtaken their lives. They cannot stop even though they really want to. Jesus can save us from addictions. Some people are slaves of feelings of anger, bitterness, envy, and the like. Though they have many reasons to be thankful, they complain and blame others. They want to change, but they can't. Jesus can save us from destructive feelings. Some people are paralyzed by clever laziness and bad habits. They want to accomplish great things, but end each day with a sense of defeat. Jesus saves us from paralysis.

Jesus not only delivers us from bondage, but he comes to dwell in our souls as our Good Shepherd. He leads us to grow in holiness and enables us to serve God without fear. He gradually transforms us to be like him. Though we have ups and downs along the way, he finishes what he starts in us. It is because he loves us with an unconditional, sacrificial, mighty love that never fails. There is a man who was spoiled and self-indulgent. He wanted to be Jesus' disciple, but he also wanted to live a pleasure-seeking life. After struggling in this dilemma for a while, he left his church, falsely accusing his pastor. Afterward, he was so tormented by guilt that he abused alcohol and drugs and engaged in bad behavior. On one occasion, he was caught by the police, charged with a crime and went to prison. At that time of desperation, he did not give up in despair, but cried out to God for help. Suddenly, he began to remember the words of God he had studied in the past. He found the wisdom to escape practical danger and great comfort for his soul. He even began to teach the word of God to his fellow prisoners. Upon his release, he returned to his church with a repentant heart and asked forgiveness. To his surprise he was welcomed with grace. He began a new life. He studied the Bible with a sincere heart. He began to serve others instead of nagging for love. Jesus saved him from all his addictions and gave him a new direction as a missionary. By the grace of God he earned a TESOL certificate. He is engaged to a sacrificial and fruitful woman of God and will marry soon. Jesus is his Savior. Jesus can save anyone who trusts in him from any kind of oppression or bondage and make us blessed children of God.

Jesus saves us from all our sins and gives us eternal life. In order to save us, Jesus gave his life on the cross, shedding his blood for our sins. Amidst the terrible news from Connecticut, there are also many beautiful stories. You may have heard of Vicki Soto, a first-grade teacher who as just 27 years old. Upon hearing gunshots, she hid her

students in closets and cabinets. When the gunman came to her classroom, she intercepted him and said the students had gone to the gym. Then he killed her, but many of the children were saved. Vicki gave her life to save her students. Now they can look forward to a full life through her sacrifice for them. She has the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus has done even more than that for us. Jesus not only saves us from the troubles and distress of this life. Jesus saves us from eternal condemnation. Jesus' blood was more than that of a man; it was the blood of the Son of God. Jesus saves us from sin and its consequences by his blood, now and forever.

Third, the baby Jesus is the Lord. Let's read verse 11 again. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." Jesus is not only the Savior, he is the Messiah, the Lord. The Messiah (Hebrew), or Christ (Greek), means "the anointed one." This refers to God's anointed one, who is prophet, priest and king. This baby is also the Lord, God himself. Luke 1:32b-33 say, "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." Jesus is the Sovereign Ruler of all creation. Throughout history, who rules makes a big difference. When a ruler is good, his people are happy and prosper. When a ruler is evil, his people suffer terribly. Even in a family, when a husband is gentle, kind and compassionate, the family is happy and healthy. But when a husband is irresponsible, selfish and mean, the family members become anxious and fearful and develop personality disorders. This can be applied to communities and nations as well. When Caesar Augustus ruled Rome, a few favored people were happy, but most colonial people suffered from injustice and oppression. Though Caesar ruled with great military power, he never earned the respect and love of ordinary people. He could not rule their hearts. On the other hand, Jesus never used his almighty power as God to oppress people and make them obey him. Instead, he humbled himself to serve all kinds of people according to their needs. He gave sight to blind men. He healed paralytics. He had fellowship with lonely tax collectors. He saved a woman of ill repute and made her a child of God. Wherever Jesus went and touched people's lives, he brought healing, forgiveness and salvation. Finally, Jesus died on the cross for us. Then God raised him from the dead. Jesus defeated the power of death and opened the way to the kingdom of God. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. All things are being put under his feet. His kingdom never ends. When he reigns over us, he protects us and gives us peace, love and life. Jesus wins our hearts. People who receive his grace of forgiveness, eternal life and his kingdom give their lives to him out of love and gratitude. Napoleon Bonaparte was once asked who Jesus Christ was. He replied, "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great empires; but on what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him."

Why are people fearful, sorrowful and depressed? There may be many reasons. But we can say simply that their hearts are not ruled by Jesus. When Jesus rules our hearts as king, he gives us peace that no one can take away. Jimmy Greene is the father of Ana Marquez-Greene, a six-year old girl who died in the shootings in Connecticut. Mr. Greene is a devout Christian and an accomplished jazz musician. Many musician friends posted condolences on his Facebook page. He responded, "Thank you for all of your prayers and kind words of support. As we work through this nightmare, we're reminded how much we're loved and supported on this earth and by our Father in heaven. As much as she's needed here and missed by her mother, brother and me, Ana beat us all to paradise. I love you sweetie girl." He has peace and hope in his heart even in the midst of the tragedy. Jesus gives us peace and joy in any situation. Jesus fills us with love, life and light. When Jesus rules our hearts we can overcome the dark and evil things of the world. We can be healthy and happy and live meaningful lives for God's glory. We can influence others with the presence of Christ. Let's ask the baby Jesus to come into our hearts as Savior and King. Let's pray for the people of our land to accept Jesus, that he may rule us with peace and joy.