

The Birth of the Son of God - Part 2

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Luke 2:1-7

Preached on: Sunday, December 16, 2012

Will you join me this morning by taking your Bibles and turning to Luke's gospel chapter two? We will be examining verses one through seven again, the second part of the discourse that I began last week entitled "The Birth of the Son of God." Luke chapter two. Let me read the first seven verses to you this morning.

Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all were proceeding to register for the census, everyone to his own city. And 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, in order to register, along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.¹

The more we study the Word of God the more we become aware of its supernatural character. And it is my great joy to open up again to you this morning. I must say that I have nothing to say to you, but the Word of God has much to say to you. And my responsibility is to just get out of the way and let God speak to you through his Word.

So we come again here to these first seven verses where I wish to have us focus on three intriguing concepts that emerge from this historical narrative. We looked at the first five verses the last time we were together with respect to Bethlehem's destiny. May I remind you that we studied the idea of Bethlehem being the royal city of David and therefore it was fitting that the greater Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ be born in this little village, the divine King of Israel, the Messiah. And this was consistent with Micah's prophecy. Micah 5:2 says:

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."²

So Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was one more piece of the magnificent puzzle of God's sovereign plan whereby he had promised to David some 1000 years before in 2 Samuel seven that he would make a covenant with him and that from him a descendant would arise, the Messiah King who would establish David's kingdom forever, a dynasty that

¹ Luke 2:1-7.

² Micah 5:2.

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will one day dominate the world when the King of kings and the Lord of lords returns to judge the nations and establish his messianic kingdom upon the earth.

So, through a divinely orchestrated and complex saga of political machinations, God moved upon the heart of the leader, Caesar Augustus to take a census of Palestine and Joseph and Mary travel some 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register. And there the official stamp of the Roman Empire would verify that Jesus Christ was, indeed, the Son of David, the rightful heir of the throne of David, fulfilling the promises of the covenant in 2 Samuel seven that God made with David requiring that the Messiah would descend from the loins of David.

Now we might ask the question of the text: Why did Joseph go alone? I think one of the reasons—and the Scripture isn't real clear about this—but certainly it would be to avoid embarrassment. How would you explain to your friends and neighbors that an angel appeared to you and said, "I want you to take Mary to be your wife and that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit and they are going to call his name Emmanuel, God with us"? And, by the way, the angel appeared to her, too, and said that you were going to conceive in your womb. You are going to bear a son. You are going to name him Jesus. And he will be great and will be called the Son of the most high and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

It would be pretty hard for your friends and neighbors to swallow, wouldn't it? Not only that he told her that he is going not reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom is not going to have any end. In other words, he is going to be the Messiah. And the Holy Spirit will come upon you and he said the power of the most high will overshadow you and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.

Once again, that would be hard for your friends and loved ones to believe. So I believe, to avoid embarrassment and also to be together, the arrival of the child they made this strenuous journey.

But I think there was another reason why Mary and Joseph would endure such a trip. And I think especially of Mary being with child to go that far. And I think it had to do with the fact that they knew what was about to happen. They knew the prophecy of Micah. They knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. We know that Mary even as about a 13 year old young woman she was well versed in Old Testament theology. Her heart was absolutely saturated with the Word of God. I mean, all you would have to do is read Luke one where you have a record of her praise before the Lord. She understood that her child was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

So they were willing to go on this grueling, this very dangerous trip. And, again, it would be from Nazareth to Bethlehem, 85, 90 miles, something like that. And I know as a

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horseman that if you are riding a horse, usually 26 miles a day is pretty much the average, but Joseph would have been walking with a little donkey. So you could probably roughly say 20 miles a day, maybe. And so it would have taken them roughly four to five days.

By the way, some of you have asked and this digress for a moment. Some of you have asked, my goodness, to think that they were going to get married at 13 and Joseph about 15? Isn't that awful young? Well, not in those days. It was very common. You must understand that they were far more mature at that age in those days than people are today. In those days young men in particular had to learn how to survive. It was a matter of life and death. Either you go grow up and you grow up quick or you will starve. And so they didn't have television and video games and they weren't molly coddled like our young men are in this culture where they are feminized. They grew up very quick. And so this was not something uncommon.

By the way, it is interesting that teenage marriages today have a much higher rate of divorce than all other marriages. In fact, if there is a child involved it is right at the 70 percent mark that end up in divorce. But it wasn't that way back in those days.

So that is a little review of Bethlehem's destiny. Secondly, I want us to look at Bethlehem's child. Notice verses six and seven.

“And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her first-born.”³

This is the first born, the πρωτοτοκος (pro-tot-ok'-os) in the original language, not the only son, which, by the way refutes the Roman Catholic doctrine that somehow she was a perpetual virgin until her death. We know better than that, not only from the grammar of the... or the actual exegesis of the text, but also we know in Matthew 13 there is a description, even the names of Jesus' half brothers and sisters. So she had a number of other children.

Now I want us to focus on this first born son. Who was he really? Now most Gentiles and most of us are in that category would say, well, he was the Son of God. He was Jesus. He was our Savior. Well, that is very true, but was he the Lord? Is he your Lord? Is he the master, the supreme authority in your life? Is he the one that you obey and the one that you worship, the one that you serve?

Most Christian people don't think in those terms. Maybe you don't. How do you see Jesus? And I would submit to you that in most cases, especially in our culture today, our understanding of who this first born son really was is very deficient. It is inadequate. It is incomplete. It is superficial. And, as a result, he is not priority in most Christian's life. In

³ Luke 2:6-7.

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fact, the typical mind set of most believers is one that is man centered rather than God centered. When they think of Jesus it is kind of all about me. Yes, Jesus is the Son of God who loves me. He died for my sins, but now he is in heaven and he really doesn't expect a whole lot of me. He has kind of turned me loose, but he is there to bail me out if I get into a jam and he is there to make my life happy and successful and one day he is going not take me to heaven. That is kind of the end of it in most churches today. Even the concept of him being a Savior of our sin is downplayed. You don't hear much about repentance and holiness and hell and judgment and the cross. That doesn't sell very well.

So in most cases we find Jesus being repackaged as kind of a Santa Clause figure that winks at sin, loves us unconditionally and he hands out the goodies if we have the right formula of faith and all of that silly superficial type of stuff. In fact, the majority of churches today in their evangelism try to make unbelievers feel comfortable and feel accepted by God so that they will, quote, accept Jesus into their heart.

So you ask them who is Jesus, the son of Mary, the Son of God? And the answer is something along the line of, well, you know, he is my best friend. He is the one that loves me and I have this emotional attachment to him.

A woman not too long ago was disappointed in our church and she said, "You know, I just don't feel Jesus here." So it is that kind of superficial emotional type of connection many people have. In fact, you turn on the Christian radio stations today and most contemporary Christian music is based on this superficial sentimentality of Jesus. You listen to the lyrics and it is nothing more than Jesus love songs that you could, frankly, take Jesus out and put your girl friend's name in there, kind of help you snuggle up to Jesus. I mean, that is kind of the mindset.

And then for many others, again, he is the spiritual Santa Claus that he kind of gives me the stuff that I need and gives me purpose in my life. He healed my marriage, makes me successful or he is kind of the social justice Jesus.

So the mindset is Jesus is all about me, but I am not all about him. We must do better than this. The angel announced in Luke 2:11 that he was a Savior who is Christ the Lord. What does Christ mean? What does Lord mean? What do these terms mean to you? What difference do these terms make in your life? The term Christ is used 500 times in the New Testament. It translates the Hebrew word messiah. Who is the Messiah? What is that all about? The term Lord, κυριος (koo'-ree-os) in the original language. It means ruler, master. It was a title, one who commands, who exercises supernatural authority.

So what does this say about Jesus and what difference should this make in our lives as believers? It should make a huge difference. Let me give you some context. Mary and Joseph and Zacharias and Elizabeth and the shepherds, they all knew that the infant child was the Messiah. So we need to understand what does that really mean?

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In John 1:41 Andrew, you will recall, finds Jesus. Jesus, I should say, finds him. And he runs to find Peter and he says:

“‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ).”⁴

Now did he have his mind we found our best friend that loves us? We found this divine benefactor who will give us free stuff and make our lives successful. Was that what was going through his mind? Well, of course not. The Samaritans also believed in the coming Messiah and in John four we read about Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman. And he exposed her bondage to sexual sin and in verse 19 the woman said to him:

“Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.”⁵

And in verse 25 she says:

"I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."⁶

And Jesus said to her:

“I who speak to you am He.”⁷

So what was her mindset concerning the Messiah? And as Jesus went on to preach to the Samaritans verses 41 and 42 of John four we read:

And many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."⁸

My friends, the baby Jesus in the manger was and is the Messiah. And this should have a profound impact on how we live out our lives, how we see him. Think of the angelic announcements. Remember Gabriel came to Joseph and told him, “You are going to have a son conceived... or Mary will have a son conceived by the Holy Spirit. His name is going to be Jesus for it is he who will save his people from their sins, Emmanuel, God with us.” So we see that this Messiah is the Son of God. He is the Savior. And Mary

⁴ John 1:41.

⁵ John 4:19.

⁶ John 4:25.

⁷ John 4:26.

⁸ John 4:41-42.

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heard from the angel he is going to be the son of the most high, the heir of the throne of David whose kingdom will have no end. He shall be called the Son of God.

So here we see that this Messiah is also going to be a king. And then when the glory of the Lord came and enveloped the terrified shepherds in Luke two beginning in verse nine, the angel said to them:

“Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”⁹

Messiah has come. Now we must understand the Old Testament concept of the Messiah because these are the truths, my friends, that permeated the minds of Mary and Joseph and all of the people of that day. And I fear that many of these great truths have been set aside and forgotten. Moreover, the more we understand about who Jesus really is the more we will exalt him and the lower we will bow before him and the more precious he will be in our life. In fact, habitual disobedience and indifference to the lordship of Christ really betrays a heart that loves sin more than Christ.

Jesus says:

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”¹⁰

The reason why many people don't keep his commandments, they don't really love Christ. And many times they really don't love Christ is not only because they love their sin more, but also because they don't really understand who Christ is as the Messiah.

So, beloved, the more we understand the majesty of the excellency of Christ the more we will love him and obey him, serve him and worship him.

So let's talk about the Messiah. What does this mean? Well, it comes from a Hebrew verb that means to spread a liquid over and it became a term that was used symbolically to mean to anoint someone with oil. So messiah literally means the anointed one. In the New Testament it is Χριστός (khris-tos') in the Greek translated Christ. So whenever you read Christ, know that that is the Messiah, that is the anointed one.

Now in the Old Testament we see that there were three offices in the theocratic kingdom that God designed for the covenant people of Israel and each man that was appointed to one of these offices had to be anointed or consecrated, set apart by God for their respective duties. And so they were all mediators between God and man. They were all

⁹ Luke 2:9-10.

¹⁰ John 14:15.

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messiahs, anointed ones, messiah is with a small m. And those three offices were prophets, priests and kings. Prophets spoke God's truth to man. The priests brought man's burdens and sins to God. They interceded for man between God and they provided sacrifices. And the kings were simply those that ruled in God's stead. They ruled for God. They were the mediatorial rulers in the theocratic kingdom.

Now I find it interesting. Because of our sin God knew that we needed these three offices. We need a prophet to reveal God's truth to us. There are so many lies, so much deception we would be unable to figure anything out on our own. So we have to have a prophet, but we also need a priest to sympathize with our weaknesses, to be our mediator between God and man, to intercede with him on our behalf. But we also need a king to rule over us according to God's standard of righteousness, because we certainly can't rule ourselves. Just look at the mess we are in the world today. We need a king that will subdue every enemy of our soul.

Now, my friends, all of this pictured in the Old Testament messiahs, these men that were anointed to function in the three offices of prophet, priest and king. And what you must understand is that there were three things that were always true about God's messiahs, about God's anointed men in these offices. First of all they were chosen by God. No prophet, no priest, no king was to be chosen by the people. None of them were self appointed. No one volunteered for that type of a position. In fact, the verb form messiah is in the passive voice which means a messiah is one who has been anointed.

Now so not only were they chosen by God, they were given divine authority. God gave them that authority to speak for God and act on his behalf. And, finally, they were empowered by God to do his bidding.

Now, beloved, this is what you must see this morning. And never forget. All three of these offices—prophet, priest and king—are merged together in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah, the anointed one. He is the perfect embodiment of all three offices. So when someone asks you, "Tell me about this Jesus that you believe, this baby that you talk about in this manger. Who was he?"

Well, now you will have much more to say. For example, you could say that Jesus was and is the Messiah chosen and sent by the Father. Let me give you some texts to verify that. Quoting from Isaiah 42:1, Matthew tells us in Matthew 12:18 how Jesus spoke of the Father's choosing him when he said:

"BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED;"¹¹

¹¹ Matthew 12:18.

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And in John 6:38 Jesus said:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."¹²

And in John 8:44 he says:

"...it is My Father who glorifies Me."¹³

In other words, I am not glorifying myself.

Hebrews five verse five we read:

"So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, 'THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE.'"¹⁴

Quoted from Psalm two verse seven. So, indeed, Jesus was chosen by God. He is the King Priest.

He was also given divine authority. Jesus said in Matthew 28 verse 18:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."¹⁵

That pretty well covers it, doesn't it. That is all authority over men, over Satan, over demons, over nature, over disease. Even said that he was the Lord of the sabbath.

John five verse 22 he said the father has given all judgment to the Son. And in verse 27 he says:

"...and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man."¹⁶

So he was chosen by God. He was given divine authority, but he was also empowered by the Holy Spirit. Again in Matthew 12:18 where Matthew quotes from Isaiah 42:1, we read:

"I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."¹⁷

¹² John 6:38.

¹³ John 8:54.

¹⁴ Hebrews 5:5.

¹⁵ Matthew 28:18.

¹⁶ John 5:27.

¹⁷ Isaiah 42:1.

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And in John chapter one verse 32:

“And John bore witness saying, ‘I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.’”¹⁸

And, beloved, as we go through the New Testament over and over again we read about the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, how God has chosen him and given him all authority and power and all three offices, prophet, priest and king.

In Ephesians one verse 20 we read:

He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.¹⁹

Beloved, this is the Messiah. This is the infant son of Mary. We read in Colossians chapter one beginning in verse one, Paul tells us that:

And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.²⁰

Again, dear Christian, this is the baby in the manger, the divinely chosen King of kings, Lord of lords, our Creator that holds all things together, the Messiah to whom God has given all authority and power. And it is for this reason Paul tells us in Philippians 2:9:

Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE

¹⁸ John 1:32.

¹⁹ Ephesians 1:20-23.

²⁰ Colossians 1:15-20.

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SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.²¹

Is he the ruler of your life? As King he alone is the quintessential, the all righteous and eternal King of kings and Lord of lords. When we think of him as priest, he alone is the quintessential, the all righteous and eternal priest who actually bore our burdens, our sins in his body, the one that became our substitute, who died on our behalf, the final sacrifice for sin. And now where is he? He is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.

1 Timothy two and verse five we read:

“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom.”²²

Hebrews two verse 17 we read:

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.²³

The writer of Hebrews also tells us in chapter seven verse 22 that Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. He goes on to tell us that unlike the former priests who were mortal and died, he, referring to Jesus, abides forever, holds his priesthood permanently.

Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.²⁴

And, as pastor Joe read earlier in Hebrews nine verse 11 we read:

²¹ Philippians 2:9-11.

²² 1 Timothy 2:5-6.

²³ Hebrews 2:17-18.

²⁴ Hebrews 7:25-27.

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But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?²⁵

Who is he? He is the Messiah. He is the flawless embodiment of the priestly office. What we must bear in mind is that this is true of this baby that we think about in the manger during this Christmas season.

I must also add how he must be viewed in terms of the future. Again, as was read in Hebrews nine verse 27 we read:

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.²⁶

You see, our sin was satisfied on the cross. It was paid in full. He said, "It is finished." And because the Father is satisfied with our great high priest, he is satisfied with us because we are hidden in him. So when he returns again for those who long for his appearing it will be, as it says here, without reference to sin. But also, my friends, as prophet, the Messiah is the perfect embodiment of a prophet the one chosen and empowered by God to speak truth to the people. In Hebrews one beginning in verse one we read:

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.²⁷

²⁵ Hebrews 9:11-14.

²⁶ Hebrews 9:27-28.

²⁷ Hebrews 1:1-3.

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So, beloved, again, the Lord Jesus Christ is the quintessential, the all righteous and eternal prophet. He is the very Word of God that became flesh, John 1:14, the Word of God that became flesh and dwelt amongst us. Why? That we might behold his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth.

Beloved, because of these great truths pertaining to these three offices of the Old Testament theocracy and unlike any of the Old Testament messiahs before him, only the child conceived by the Spirit of God in the womb of the virgin could have the titles Lord and Savior and Messiah with a capital M.

I find it fascinating as I have meditated upon the truths we see three different colors of thread woven into the gospel accounts pertaining to the birth of Christ. Each thread having a different color pertaining to one of these three offices of prophet, priest and king. Think about it. The Messiah's coming was announced by the angel Gabriel to Zacharias, one who held the office of a priest telling him that the ultimate and the final priest is going to come. Not only that, the angelic messenger told him that his barren wife Elizabeth was going to conceive and bear a son. His name would be John and he would be a prophet. He would be the divinely chosen, the divinely empowered, the authoritative spokesman for God, the one who would herald the coming of the Messiah and give people the truth of how they enter into the kingdom. And, finally, and I think this is almost comical, through the Persian king makers who came to worship the Christ child God spoke to a king, to Herod the king, the usurper, the man appointed king of Israel. He was no king at all in God's eyes, because he was not chosen by God. He was given no authority by God. He was not empowered by God. And what did these king makers tell that king? He warned them ultimately and all of Jerusalem that the true king was coming. And for this reason Matthew two verse three:

And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born.²⁸

Oh, Bethlehem, according to Micah 5:2. Oh, dear, we are in trouble.

So, my friends, this was Bethlehem's child. This was the Messiah, Mary's first born son.

But I want to conclude this section of this study by focusing on Bethlehem's manger. Notice at the end of verse seven that she wrapped him in cloths. By the way, they did this to give the child a sense of security. You have all seen little babies. I saw one this week flailing around under the light and they are kind of grabbing and they look like they are falling, you know. But they also did this to protect the little child from scratching themselves. You know how sharp those little nails are. But they also believe that this kind

²⁸ Matthew 2:3-4.

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of helped him... their bones grow straight and so forth. So they would do this. So it says she wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger because there was not room for them in the inn.

Now the term inn could be translated shelter. Don't think of Motel 8 here. They didn't have those types of things back then. They had crude, public shelters for travelers, often there were caves that they used. In fact, tradition says that Jesus was born in a cave and there is certainly some caves right there in that area.

But these shelters would have separate corrals for the animals so that they could be separated. You can't put a horse in with a camel and you can't put a donkey in with them typically and sometimes you can't put horses in with other horses or donkeys in with other donkeys because they fight. They don't know each other. And so they would have different corrals. This was almost like our gas stations where you would have to pull in. You have to have a place to feed your animals. You have to have a place to rest. And they would often almost inevitably, almost as we do today, they would have their hay up high, the feeding, the food for the animals up high to keep it off of the ground, but also away from the animals and people would pay, you know for a certain amount of this feed for their animals.

And then they would have mangers which are nothing more than feeding troughs for the animals. This very important. Again, I know this from years of having horses. It is important for your animal to eat from a trough, not off of the ground because you want to get the animal up away from the dust, let the dust settle. It helps with respiratory health for your animal. And also you don't want the animal eating right off of the ground because many times they will ingest sand and when they do that, that will settle in certain portions of the bowel and that distended section can become kind of a weight and when the animal rolls over it can get twisted and when they get a twisted gut they will eventually die.

So they had mangers. And because of the census, evidently, all of these public shelters were full. Many times the people would sleep up in those hay lofts because you don't want to sleep down there with the animals because there is things on the ground that you don't want to have to deal with. And so that was probably what was going on here. That shelter was full and so evidently they weren't sleeping up in the upper part. And, again, we don't know all of these things for sure, but we can surmise that this is true. So they probably had to sleep somewhere close with the animals because we know that baby Jesus was put into this feeding trough.

By the way, we also don't know how long they were there. If you will notice in verse six it says:

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By David Harrell

Bible Text: Luke 2:1-7

Preached on: Sunday, December 16, 2012

“And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.”²⁹

We don't know if it was, you know, a couple of days. It certainly had to be more than one. It might have been a week. It might have been more. We just don't know.

But what I want us to focus on is why a manger. And not just a manger, but why does this smelly stable? Why a feeding trough rather than a palace crib? Why did the Messiah, the Son of God enter this world in such obscurity and filth?

May I suggest three reasons? Number one, to picture the Messiah's rejection. What a perfect place to begin his days of humiliation as prophet, priest and king. As prophet he came as the living Word of God to save sinners to tell us how we can be reconciled to a holy God, how we can be made righteous for this reason, according to Philippians two and verse seven we read:

...but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.³⁰

And we know according to John one and verse nine:

There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.³¹

Think about it, folks. How could Christ be our faithful high priest and sympathize with our weaknesses unless he had first experienced the life of pain and poverty and persecution? Again, as we reads in Hebrews two verse 17:

“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest.”³²

And in Hebrews four verse 15 we read:

²⁹ Luke 2:6.

³⁰ Philippians 2:7-8.

³¹ John 1:9-11.

³² Hebrews 2:17.

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For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.³³

Certainly this has been my prayer as I am sure it has been yours for these dear people in Connecticut. Oh, what a picture of evil and depravity. They need the Messiah. They need to know the perfect prophet who alone can reveal truth to them through his Word that they might find help, that they might find hope. They need to know the perfect priest who alone can sympathize with their weaknesses, who could atone for their sin, who can give them grace in this time of such great need, who can actually make them righteous and give them the hope of heaven. They need the perfect king who has authority over Satan and sin who alone can subdue the enemies of our soul who will one day rule in perfect justice and righteousness.

Folks, where would we be if we didn't have this hope? Where would we be? And then imagine. To lose a child like that? But the world rejects him and this is pictured in the manger scene. Think about it. Had the Messiah come and in glorious splendor as he will in his second coming people would have instantly worshipped him, but for all the wrong reasons. You had a glimpse of that in his mock coronation, remember, at his triumphal entry, as it is commonly referred to where he first came to Jerusalem riding on a donkey. They thought, oh great. The Messiah is here. He is going to defeat Rome and we are all going to be exalted. No more work, free food. Hosanna to the Son of David. That was the mindset. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord for he has come to exalt me. That was the idea, not to save me from my sin. He is the one who is coming to heal my diseases and eliminate my poverty, make me rich. But the Lord knows that type of thinking, that proclivity that we have, how we are prone to be enamored with the spectacular and the grandiose so the king of glory is born in a lowly stable, not a Roman palace.

You know, I marvel as I think about it. The King of kings was born in a manger and later he would die on the cross. He was born, perhaps, in a cave and later on he would be laid to rest in a tomb. He would be twice wrapped in cloths, at his birth and again at his death. And think about it. He was homeless in birth as well as in death. Indeed the Lord said of himself in Matthew 8:20:

"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."³⁴

³³ Hebrews 4:15-16.

³⁴ Matthew 8:20.

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Think about it, my friends. He came the first time being borne along in his mother's womb, riding on a donkey, attended by two humble teens dressed in peasant's garb. But we know according to Revelation 19:14 that when he comes again he will be attended by the, quote, armies which are in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean. It is a reference to us, folks, the glorified Church. First time he came he wore the swaddling clothes, but when he returns, according to Revelation 19:16 he will be clothed with a robe and on his thigh he has a name written, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

So I believe he was born at this stable and placed in a manger first to picture the Messiah's rejection. Second, to picture his humanity. May I remind you of some great theology here lest we forget? Sinful man could never atone for his own sin. We are helpless to do that. God's holy justice can never be satisfied apart from a holy ransom. And only God could provide that substitute. Only God could provide a remedy to accomplish this and, of course, this required a virgin birth, because the work of redemption demanded a thanthropon, a God man, one who could supernaturally fuse the human nature with the divine to form an indissoluble bond. And we see this in Christ. So Jesus had to take upon himself the nature of a man in order to be punished for our sin, to be our substitute. Yet he also had to be God in order to live a sinless life and perfectly fulfill the law and become a holy ransom that would satisfy the perfect and holy justice of God. And he would also have to be God in order to endure the sufferings on the cross for all of the elect, an amazing thing to think about. And had there been another way, had there been an easier way, surely God would have thought about it, a way that would have prevented him from sending his own Son to suffer and to die.

No, God could not deny his own justice. The incarnation, the sacrificial death of his Son was the only way. You see, folks, nothing but perfect righteousness could satisfy the penalty for violating perfect holiness. So both the human and divine natures had to be supernaturally woven together. Jesus had to be conceived by God and born of a virgin in order for him to be both the Son of man and the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us, the son of a virgin according to the flesh, yet God with us according to the Spirit.

So what better way for God to establish the humanity of his Son than to have him born of a virgin in a stable and placed in a manger?

In Hebrews chapter two and verse nine we read:

"But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."³⁵

³⁵ Hebrews 2:9.

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Beloved, this doesn't mean that he came just to die, but he came to die for us. As a man he became our substitute. And this is the heart of the gospel, beloved. Don't ever forget this. He came to make atonement for sin. And you must remember that atonement requires a provision for a moral or a legal repayment for some fault or injury. And it requires two things. It requires satisfaction and it requires a substitute. Satisfaction of the offended holiness of God and a substitute, one that would be the substitute for the guilty party. And all of this pointed to Jesus for in him we find mercy and justice coming together in the cross.

But I believe, finally, the manger scene pictured the Messiah's subjects. As we close this morning I want you to look around that dusty stable for a moment. Get the smell in your nostrils. See the dust, all the dingy filth and I want to ask you. What don't you see? Do you see Caesar? Do you see an emperors? Do you see any kings or queens? Do you see any princes or noblemen? Do you see any generals with vast armies? How about some business moguls? Do you see any celebrities? Any Hollywood types? No, you don't see that. Do you know what you see? You look around and you see two little Galilean rednecks from Nazareth. That is how they were considered. Poor, common, the two people who longed to see the Messiah and place their faith in him as their only hope of salvation.

And, friends, these were the subjects of the King of glory, soon to be joined by the peasant shepherds, later by the Gentile king makers and then many others that the Father would draw unto himself.

Beloved, think of it this way. Jesus is the Savior and Lord of the meek and of the lowly, not of the proud and not of the mighty. He is the prophet, priest and king of the broken and of the bowed down, not the self willed and the self exalted. We enter into the kingdom broken, bankrupt spiritually. And I am reminded of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians one beginning in verse 26.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.³⁶

My friends, I would challenge you this morning to think about these great truths that are so often so eclipsed by all of the clutter, all of the materialistic and immoral garbage that has been nixed in with the Christmas season. And, frankly—and I say this with love—

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

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some of you have an understanding of Jesus that is as shallow as frost on a pumpkin. And it is for this reason he doesn't make that much difference in your life. You just kind of live your life for yourself and, oh, every now and then if you need him you kind of cry out to him. What a dishonor to the Lord. So I would encourage you, Christians, strive this season to think about the implications of the Messiah in your life, that he is the prophet that has come to give you the truth that you might be saved. He is the priest that gave himself for you and now intercedes on your behalf. And he is your king that deserves your absolute allegiance, the king who is coming again in power and in great glory.

For those of you that live your life for yourself, you know who you are, you don't really care that much about Jesus. You may even think it is all a bunch of baloney. I pray that by God's grace you would understand who this Messiah is, my Messiah and the Messiah of all who love him and that you would bow before him not just before him in the manger, but see him as your judge as, indeed, he is the judge of the living and the dead. Because God is holy, all sin must be punished and you have a choice. You can either repent and cry out for undeserved mercy and place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your substitute or you can pay the penalty yourself for eternity in him.

So I would plead with you as a minister of the gospel, this day repent. Come to Christ as your Savior. I pray that today you will experience the miracle of the new birth.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths. We are so humbled by them and we are so encouraged. Lord, I pray that they will bear much fruit in the heart of every believer and I pray, as well, that the good news of the gospel will be used to save sinners even this day. We commit it all to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to pastor, Bible teacher and author David Harrell. For more information or to order additional tapes or CDs of pastor Harrell's messages, please visit OliveTreeResources.org.

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