



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Luke 2:1-7

Sunday, Dec. 25, 2011

"No Room In The Inn"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Mark and good morning. We're going to look at the Gospel of Luke Chapter 2, Verses 1 through 7, a familiar story to all of us at the birth of our Savior, and then we'll consider it at some length. Luke Chapter 2, beginning with Verse 1,

2 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.

Luke 2: 1-7

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time in studying it together. Let's pray.

Father, we do pray Your blessings upon us this morning. We pray that You would give us some appreciation and understanding of the things that we've read; there's so much to appreciate from it. This is the day that historically the church has remembered the birth of our Savior. When You sent Him into the world and in such an inconspicuous way; as a baby born not in the palace but in a stable; laid not in a royal crib but in the feeding trough, the manger.

And yet, there is in all of that a great, great truth and lessons for us to learn. And we pray, Lord, that as we do that this morning You would bless us and give us an understanding of the depth of this very simple passage that we've read, (but one that's so profound). And help us see the profundity of it, what it should do for us, and the application that should be made by each one of us as we consider the birth of Your Son. It is a great thing to remember Him on a Sunday morning, as is the day historically. We remember the resurrection. Every Sunday is a reminder of that. And now we can remember this day; His birth, His death, His resurrection. It is all a proclamation of His great work of salvation to us. We give You praise and thanks for that. What a joyful thing it is.

We think of this season as a time of giving gifts, but what greater gift can there be than the gift of eternal life which your Son won for us at the cross. That's why He came. He was born into this world in order to offer Himself up as a sacrifice. We give You praise and thanks for that and thank You that He is not a dead martyr—He is a living Savior; and we worship Him. We pray that our time this morning will be one of great worship and one of edification for each one of us.

We pray, Lord, for ourselves spiritually, but we pray also Lord that You bless us materially. We have a list of prayer requests and needs, and we pray for those who are sick. We pray for those that are experiencing a variety of difficulties; perhaps financial, maybe work-related; sometimes it's simply stress in the home. Father, give relief; give strength; help those who are in times of difficulty to reflect upon the promises that You've given us and who You are.

You are the God of history. You are the God who has a plan and purpose for our lives, each of us individually. And You are at work, You are dealing with us providentially and You'll bring good results into the lives of each and every one of us—that's the promise You give us.

And Lord, in light of all the difficulties we may experience, they pale in insignificance compared to the great blessing that is ours in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have eternal life in Him, and this brief life which will soon be over for each one of us, is not the end—it's the beginning of a glorious and eternal destiny and future that we have. And we give You all the praise for that.

Now Lord, we pray that You'd bless us as we continue with our service. May it honor You. May it be encouraging and edifying to each of us, and we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) According to legend, when Alexander The Great was born, the great temple at Ephesus, (one of the Seven Wonders of the world), caught fire. That was a spectacular omen of greatness.

How different from the birth of Jesus. There was no burning temple, no special effects, no great fanfare. What is so impressive about it...is how unimpressive it was. It happened in a small town, in an obscure place, among farm animals. There were angels nearby, but the only people who saw them were a few shepherds. That's all.

And yet, this is the One the angel called "the Lord". Paul wrote, when He was born, "...God was manifest in the flesh...". (1Ti 3:16). It was the birth of the Lord God. Still, most people didn't notice—or have any interest.

Nevertheless, in spite of its obscurity, it is the best-known event of history. People all over the world know about the baby in the manger. And for all its simplicity, it was a world-shaking event. That means it was an event of history—not legend. That is a very important point and the first point that Luke makes in his account of the birth of our Lord.

There are really three lessons that I want to bring to our attention this morning from this text. The first is that, the Lord's birth was an event of *history*. The birth of Jesus really happened.

Secondly, it was an act of providence. God's invisible hand is seen from the beginning to the end of it. And in that, we see the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. So in that second point, there are really two lessons. It's a lesson of *providence* and a lesson of *prophecy*.

And thirdly, it is about *salvation*. History, providence and redemption. The baby born in Bethlehem is the Savior of the world. And all of that being so, this is not just some sentimental story of the season but one that requires a response.

The first, as I said: It is an event of history. Luke makes that plain in Verses 1 and 2. And as a historian, (and Luke certainly was that; recognized by biblical scholars, down through the ages and modern scholars, as an excellent historian), Luke sets it on the stage of history. He gives what we all expect in a history lesson; names and dates. We're used to that: 'William the Conqueror, 1066.' 'Christopher Columbus, 1492.' We can go on with the list of names and dates that are typical of a history lesson.

And here we have much the same thing. He begins the chapter, "Now in those days 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." (vs1-2). These names and the event were well-known to Luke's contemporaries; they knew all of the. When it occurred some of them probably had experienced it—had been a part of that. We would date this around the year 5 BC. So we can locate it in history and it was a major event. People all over the empire had their lives disrupted. They had to make plans. They had to change plans and leave home and go back to their ancestral home to register for the census.

So the event of Christ's birth fits within a specific, well-known period of history. It is no fable, but an event in space and time; a point Luke was certainly making. The

events that are foundational to the Christian faith are rooted and grounded in history. They are fact.

But he's doing more than recording history. As important as that is, he's also explaining history. He understood that God is Lord of time; and the actions of an emperor in a distant city were part of His purpose. Long before He had revealed His plan, down through Israel's history, the promise of the Messiah had been made known. The hope that Israel was given had been recorded in the pages of the prophets. It was a promise of a Redeemer to come; a King to come.

In Isaiah Chapter 7, Verse 14, the birth of a child was prophesied whose name would be very unusual – the name, *Immanuel*, which means, "God with us." In Chapter 9, Isaiah gives even more names of this child, unusual names: 'Wonderful Counselor', 'Mighty God, 'Eternal Father', 'Prince of Peace'...amazing names! —Mighty God?

But then later, in Chapter 53, Isaiah prophesied that He would be a *servant*. God and man, prince, servant; and that He would suffer death as a sacrifice—that He would be a guilt offering; and by doing that, Isaiah tells us, "He would justify the many." (Is 53:11). So He's a Savior. What a hope to have.

There are other prophecies; many other prophecies we're given, and they are very specific. In Micah Chapter 5, Verse 2, the unique origin and nature of this Messiah, this child, is given and the very place of His birth is recorded: "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." He would be from the tribe of David. He would be born in the City of David. But his origin preceded David; it was "from the days of eternity." Who is this child? He is unique.

That prophecy was given in the 8th Century BC. The years went by, the years turned into centuries and many children were born in Bethlehem. But no child like the one that's described in that prophecy or in the prophecies of Isaiah.

And then in the days of Caesar Augustus when Quirinius was governor of Syria around the year 5 B.C., Gabriel visited Mary and announced that she would bear a child. In Chapter 1, verse 32 of this Gospel, that child is described as "the Son of the Most

High." The time of fulfillment had finally arrived but Mary and Joseph were not in Bethlehem of Judea. They were 80 miles to the North in Nazareth of Galilee. The prophecy could not be fulfilled there.

But nothing is impossible with God. He is the ruler of the world. He is the Lord of history who governs the hearts of men—even the greatest of men—even emperors sitting on a throne in Rome. Proverbs 21, Verse 1 tells us that, "The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." And He did that at the right time; He moved the heart of Caesar to make a decree requiring a census that called for the citizens of the empire to return to the city of their family's origin to register.

So Joseph had to leave his work and he had to take his wife on a difficult journey, South, to Bethlehem – a journey he would not have made otherwise—not in Mary's condition. It was a great inconvenience for them. And they may have wondered, in fact, as they traveled South or as they prepared for their journey, 'Why would God allow this to happen at this time?' This is a very inconvenient moment for them. They had to travel the hard roads and hills of Palestine so that a mere pagan king could satisfy some desire he had to gather names and have a census to raise taxes and revenue for his empire.

'What, does he have another military adventure; or he wants to expand the borders of his kingdom, or perhaps he wants to do more building in Rome?' Augustus said, "I found Rome a city of bricks. I left it a city of marble.", (He had to raise revenue for that!) These may have been things that they thought about as they made that difficult journey.

But the fact is, while Caesar made a decree, it was God's plan. He turned the wheel in Rome to move a couple in Nazareth. That's the providence of God at work in a decision, the purpose of which was unknown to that family in Nazareth and to people all over the empire. And so it is in the lives of people in every generation.

Things go on that we don't know about—or when we do, we may not understand—but they fit perfectly within the plan of God. And one thing we can say

about our sovereign God is that, He has a plan. He has a plan for this world. He has a plan and purpose for the lives of each and every one of us.

And it all works together. I don't know how. You don't know how. But every event in history, every event in time, works together for His plan—and we fit perfectly in that plan. So, that which may seem inconvenient to us at a particular time in our life, really, in the end, produces a blessing. And a great blessing. Certainly this did. "...His ways are past finding out." (Rom 11:33).

So we read in read in Verses 4 and 5 that Joseph went up from Nazareth to Bethlehem, "...because he was of the house and family of David...", and he went accompanied by Mary who was with child.

Not long after they arrived, Mary went into labor. But amazingly, we read in Verse 7 that, "...there was no room for them in the inn." Despite the urgency of the moment, no one made room for them. So the Lord was born outside in the courtyard or stable among the animals. "Then Mary wrapped the baby in cloths."

So here she is, a young girl, probably age 14, becomes a mother and a caring mother. She didn't discard this child. She wraps the child in cloths. And, because there was no crib there in the stable, she "...laid Him in a manger..."; a feeding trough for animals. It must have appeared a pathetic sight to those who witnessed it—the result of arriving in Bethlehem and coming to the inn a little late; 'Just a case of bad luck.'

Well, there's no such thing as luck; it was the outworking of God's plan. And it all had great significance, all of this, in foreshadowing the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The people's failure to make room for Him fit within the providence of God—for a purpose; to point to the obscurity, the poverty, and rejection which would be true of Jesus. Just as it had all been prophesied of Him so many centuries before.

Isaiah prophesied that He would be "a man of sorrows" and "forsaken of men." (Is 53:3). Before he was even born, there was no room for Him in the inn. His life was one of poverty; we see that from beginning to end. At his birth, He was laid in a borrowed manger. At His death, He was laid in a borrowed tomb.

But all of that was by design. Nothing is by mistake. There is no 'luck' or 'bad luck.' It was all perfectly according to God's plan. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, Verse 9, "...though He was rich, yet for your sake, He became poor so that you through His poverty might become rich."

He didn't come into this world for comfort or glory. He left all of that glory and comfort, beyond anything we can comprehend, to become our Savior. And to become our Savior, it was necessary for Him to go through all of this. It was necessary for Him to become like us; to become fully human; to be a real man with a true body and a reasonable soul so that He could represent us in death—and in so doing, save sinners.

But still, having said all that and looking at the prophecies about His coming, what a birth for the Son of God and Savior of the world! And "King of kings" —in a stable —among animals—and ignored by men! No spectacular signs and wonders, no blazing temple heralding His coming into the world. Instead, He had an obscure birth described very simply and announced very modestly.

The rest of the passage recounts how the Lord's birth was revealed to shepherds who were there in the fields nearby and who went to the manger, saw the child, and announced it to others. That itself is surprising.

Now, we're not all that surprised as we think about that because we're very used to the shepherds in the story. But the reality was, they were despised in ancient Palestine—and the profession of a shepherd made it very difficult for shepherds to observe all of the details of the Law; such as rules about washings—the many rules about washings. They couldn't keep all of that. Their profession kept them from being punctilious about the details of the Law. So the ancient writings of the rabbis label shepherds as a group that's not allowed to give testimony in a court of law. They were not trusted. They were simple men, not well-educated men. Shepherds were social outcasts. They were a despised and lowly group of men.

But they were not despised by God and He blessed them by giving them the first announcement of His Son's birth and the privilege of being the first men to announce it among them.

I find something very significant in all of that. All of this is recorded in these seven verses—but this is not the way men would have done it. They would have announced it in the great capitols of the world, to kings and to emperors, and they would have sent royal heralds out to make the auspicious announcement. But the fact that it is recorded in this way gives credence to the account. The simplicity of it is evidence of its credibility.

This isn't how men would have written the story if it were invented. It doesn't read like propaganda; it simply has the ring of truth. And again, in all of this, we see the providence of God not only in the arrangement of the events; from the decree of the king, to the response of a peasant; but also in the instruction that it gives. It's an example of how God's way is different from our way; how, as Paul wrote, He "...has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise..." (1Cor 1:27).

And what greater example of that, and what greater act of that, is there than this? —Bringing salvation to the world through the incarnation. Bringing salvation to the world through the birth of a child—a helpless baby boy. And bring about his birth in such a way as this: that "The King of kings", born in a stable of all things, among the straw and cattle and dust because there was no room for Him in the inn?

But again, that's the providence of God, to so arrange things that it would teach us about His life in this world. Although He's a king, he would live a peasant's life. And yet, how instructive. The 'King of kings' born into poverty demonstrates that He is not a King only to kings and queens; and to princesses and princess, but to the poor as well.

He understood poverty. We are studying in our studies in the Book of Hebrews that this One, Jesus, is our great High Priest—and a priest has sympathy for those to whom he ministers. And certainly, He could sympathize with all men. He was born into poverty. He understood that; and He was a friend to the poor. He understands affliction.

He understands want. He understands what it is to be without a house over one's head. He didn't have that.

'The King of kings' lived as a pauper. He's a friend of the poor. He's a friend to all. And that's one thing that this points out. The poor man, the rich man, to every kind of man, He is a friend to all of them. He invites them to come to Him.

And there's something inviting about this; about a child laying in a manger. That's not intimidating as, say, a palace would be or a royal crib might be. Shepherds would have had a very difficult time approaching that place. It would've been intimidating to them, for one thing. But had they tried to approach the palace of the great king, they wouldn't have been allowed to get near it. But the Lord in a stable, laying in a manger, that's different. That's disarming. It's not an overwhelming situation. It's inviting and it shows Him to be approachable. There's no class distinctions. He is for all—for all who believe.

Charles Spurgeon had some typically perceptive thoughts on all of this, on the child in a manger, and how it is a welcoming picture to sinners and illustrates God's purpose to save sinners. He pointed out the obvious, that the manger is where animals are fed. And then he made the point that the men – the worst of men – become very much like animals—like beasts. But Spurgeon said, "The Savior in a manger shows that even beast-like men, they come to Him and live." And that's what the child of the manger invites, and that's what He promises. They may be fed. And not only that, they may be cleansed; they may be forgiven; they may be made children of God! What a privilege; what a thing that this child could do; and what an invitation and how inviting all of that appears.

And then, the fact that Christ—the Creator—is in the stable laying in a feeding trough surrounded by animals, cattle and donkeys, is appropriate. The Creator was with His creatures. They were at peace. They were docile. They didn't resist His presence. They moved over. They made room for Mary and Joseph and the Child. And what a statement that makes.

Isaiah gives great prophecies about the Savior's birth, but he also gives warnings concerning His people. "There was no room for them in the inn." Really, think about that. 'No room for Him in the inn!' If Caesar had come to town, if he'd come to Bethlehem, do you think there would've been room for him in the inn? Of course there would've been. Men would've moved—and they would have moved quickly. They couldn't move quick enough to give Caesar a room and a place. There was no room for Him in the inn, for Jesus, because no one cared. They had ignored the prophecies. They weren't looking for Him. They weren't hoping for Him. They didn't care.

'He was despised and rejected of men', Isaiah tells us, (Isaiah 53:3). "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not", John Chapter 1, Verse 11. —And yet, the cows did.

It's a reenactment of Isaiah; he had given great prophecies about the birth of the Savior; about His coming—and also had given warnings to his people. At the very beginning of that book you have that warning. It's a warning from the prophet, but it's really a reproach that comes from God through the prophet. At the very beginning in Verse 3 of the first Chapter, we read, "An ox knows its owner. And a donkey its master's manger, *But* Israel does not know, My people do not understand." The animals are more responsive and obedient than the people of God. And it's not just Israel. It's the Gentiles. It's the world.

And unfortunately, fellow believers, it is you and me. So often, we neglect our Savior. And why is that? Why do we, mere creatures, fallen sinful creatures: why do we neglect the eternal Son of God, our Creator and our Savior? We don't value Him as we should.

What an amazing seven verses in this second chapter of Luke's Gospel. Notice how they begin and how they end. They begin with what man thinks is important, and they end with what God says is important.

The passage opens in the capitol of a great empire—it closes in the backwater town of a small province. It begins with a king on his throne—it ends with a baby in his crib. A baby. —That's what's important. That's what God values.

Caesar thought that it was all about him. He was making a decree so he could raise revenues and do some great thing. "It's all about him."

And yet the reality is, the whole world revolves around this baby who is the eternal Son of God who had come to visit man. He is the Savior of the world. That is truth. —And that is history. He really came. So that requires a response.

Those words, "No room for Him," ought to stir each of us to some good self-examination. What is important to us?

There are lots of good things in this world. And as I look out on the audience, I can say, 'I know you; I know you're engaged in good things; we all are, hopefully. We're good people engaged in good things.' But sometimes we get placed to good things at the expense of the best things. And what is best?

The best thing is knowing God. We know God through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, the best things are knowing Him, living for Him, honoring Him, honoring the Lord Jesus Christ.

May God, who moved a king, to move the world, to move a family, to move to Bethlehem, where there was no room for the true King; so move us to make room for Him in our hearts and lives.

For years, I've heard that a good sermon is three points followed by a poem. I think I had three points, so I'm going to end with a poem; a poem you won't find in any book of poetry. Maybe you will someday.

It's a poem written by one of our members. I thought, 'What a perfect way to conclude this passage';

The joy of Christmas comes not from the pleasures of the earth,
but in a baby long ago that offers men new birth.

He came without the trappings that the world adorns a king,
but in the heavenly realm above did angel choirs sing.

Christ the Savior was born today,
take courage all who sin.

Christ Jesus came to wash you clean,
the victory He did win.

The joy of Christmas abides today inside of all His sheep,
so come to Christ, He bids you to, your soul He'll ever keep.

That's true.

Father, we give You thanks for the truth of that—the truth of this passage. It is history. It happened. It's not legend. And while there were no great burning temples, there is something far greater than that. Your hand of providence witnessed in everything, to show that He gave up the riches of heaven to become poor so that we might have His riches. That's the work of the great Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we give You praise and thanks for all that we have in Christ.

Now, Lord bless us as we continue our service. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

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