

Advent 2022: Rescue

Luke 1:26 – 2:35 (Overview)

In **Matthew 1:21** an angel of the Lord, through a dream, tells Joseph, “you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Jesus will save his people from their sins. This is the epitome of a rescue mission — a mission to save. Wars and terrorist operations in the 20th century produced a host of rescue missions of varying degrees of success, including one to save a missionary couple originally from Mulvane, KS. It was partially successful. Martin Burnham was martyred by Islamic terrorists in the rescue attempt, though his wife, Gracia, survived and returned home. Various rescue missions are described in the Old Testament, the greatest of which was God’s rescue of his people from Egyptian slavery. The rescue and exodus of God’s people from Egypt foreshadowed what God would do on a scale larger than Moses could dream. God’s ultimate rescue mission would transcend people, nations, and even time. The rescue of the world would not be accomplished by a team, but by one person: Jesus, the Son of God. He alone saves his people from their deadly captivity to sin and death. The deadly fall in Genesis 3 was a declaration of war against God’s rule and reign. We saw the fatal breach of life-giving communion between Holy God and sinful man symbolized by a flaming sword. In Isaiah 53 we saw the promise of what God would do to rescue his people. It was a shocking plan from a human perspective, and involved not escaping the price of sin, but a substitute bearing sin’s weight and horror as he was crushed by the Father to pay the deadly penalty. The promised outcome was shocking and unexpected: The crushed, suffering servant conquers death and is resurrected to his eternal rule and reign. In preparation for the D-Day rescue mission of Europe, so uncertain was the outcome that President Eisenhower prepared a letter that would be read if the operation failed. He closed the letter with this: “[Our forces] did all that Bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.” God prepared no such letter. Rather, he published his victory in at the front end in Genesis 3: He, the Son, will crush Satan’s head. Pray with me as we see God’s supernatural and unexpected rescue plan initiated at the first Christmas. **[PRAY]**

I hope you had opportunity to read through Luke 1 and 2 as I suggested in the app. It is a lengthy passage for the limitations we have on Sunday morning. I selected a few passages that, I pray, point us to the glory and greatness of our God, underscore why Jesus, our Savior and Lord, came as he did, warm our hearts and build our faith. His ways and thoughts are higher than our ways thoughts. So as we see his rescue unfold, there are things that are amazing, or unexpected, or even shocking

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— impossible with man. But with God nothing is impossible. He leaves nothing to chance. He accomplishes all he desires.

1. Time and Tyrant

Luke 2 opens by pointing us to a specific time and tyrant. **Luke 2:1** — In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be registered.

Galatians 4:4 notes that in the fullness of time, God sent forth his son. For a thousand years the people of Israel have cried out, “How long, Oh Lord, until the Messiah comes?” They cried throughout the monarchy as one king after another went from bad to worse, only occasionally making slight course corrections toward God. They were eventually hauled off into captivity. Then would have been a good time the Messiah to come. But now the “fullness of time” includes Augustus and his taxation policies. The Greco-Roman world that is on the ascendancy. It’s an evil culture, increasingly decadent. They worship a myriad of false gods with Caesar as the chief false god. The fullness of time connotes that every aspect of creation is primed and groaning for the Messiah to come, not because things are in good shape, but because they are in horrible shape and there is no human remedy. God seems to delight to intervene when there is no solution except him.

And as God precisely governed time, surprisingly — even shockingly — his rescue plan included the use of a wicked ruler to fulfill prophecies. God had promised King David that he would never fail to have a son from his lineage sit on the throne. Further, the prophet Micah had prophesied that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, David’s hometown. Caesar Augustus was a prideful idolater, a blasphemer, and a murderer. But Holy God, who brings down kings and raises them up for his purposes used this man, who imagined himself to be a god, to fulfill these aspects of His rescue plan.

A few points of application in observing how God governs both time and tyrants.

- First, remember that God’s rescue plan of redemption is completely accomplished in Christ. Contemporary rulers, no matter how wicked, cannot undo what Christ has done in saving his people from their sin. If our political situation deteriorates to open persecution, imprisonment, or even martyrdom, none of that impacts eternity or touches your soul. Rejoice Christ’s salvation!
- Note also that God is often pleased to come when times are dark. As we pray for revival, there is a sense in which the worse it gets, the more hopeful we can be that God will intervene. Again, the ultimate victory has already been won. But we can pray both that God will send spiritual awakening to current wicked culture to his glory, and that he will save those who are lost in sin.

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- Take heart that there is no aspect of creation, including politics, that is outside of the sovereign control of our good God. Caesar Augustus was an arrogant dupe of Satan. Of infinitely greater importance, he was a servant of the most high God, though unwittingly so. Where we see wicked rulers ascending who seem to be agents of Satan himself, let's be reminded and encouraged that our God brings about his sovereign will, executes his just judgments, and advances his Kingdom, not just in spite of wicked rulers, but through them. It may be hard to see from our perspective; it was likely hard for Joseph to understand why he had to take his very pregnant wife on a very long journey. As this servant of God discovered the plan of God unfolding through a wicked ruler, let us also serve and worship our God for all that he is doing in the world around us, though we may not understand it at the time. God is good and God is just. He is working all things together for good for those who love him — even through wicked governments.

2. A shocking servant of the Lord.

The sin nature Adam passed down to all of his offspring in Genesis 3 makes us rebels from the moment of conception, and as rebels, guilty before God. That nature is passed down in a natural way. The righteous Savior who comes in the form of man must therefore be conceived in a supernatural way. “A virgin shall conceive...” prophesied Isaiah in Isaiah 7. Beginning in Luke 1:26 and continuing for a few paragraphs we see that prophecy fulfilled. God orchestrates this divine interruption in the nature of Adam, and it is critical. **V 35** — The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy — the son of God. Nature is circumvented by the supernatural God. God is not a servant of his creation. Creation is a servant to its creator. As such, the sinless Savior is born who is able to live a righteous, sinless life. That sinless perfection — made possible through the virgin birth — is credited to us.

Also expected about this servant: She is just an unknown teen girl — unknown, that is, from the perspective of the important people. Caesar Augustus never heard of her. She is no influencer; she has no followers — other than God, with whom she has found favor and blessing.

What do we see in this passage that helps us know why she is favored and chosen by God for this unique assignment? She is obedient. **V 38** tells us that — “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” That's one thing. But she is also humble, not drawing attention to herself, but giving all glory to God. God chooses insignificant people from the world's perspective for significant assignments from his perspective. Those fully own their dependence on him will know it is

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all of God and will not rob him of his glory. They know that it is God who works in them both to will and to act according to his pleasure. As you read through the Magnificat, as it is called, beginning in [v 46](#) — we read it for the Call to Worship — she is magnifying, honoring the Lord in great humility. She declares it is the Lord who has done great things, not touting the reasons she was chosen. Those who have come to know their dependence on God — those who hunger for him — God fills them with good things. This is an echo of the 4th Beatitude: Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.

But the independent, the self-satisfied, the proud... God resists them and scatters them in the thoughts of their hearts. God will not share his glory with another. The mighty are brought down from their thrones. The rich are sent away empty. Those who are pleased with their abilities and their lives apart from God will have what their abilities can provide for them. In spiritual terms they are bankrupt. And those are the only terms that ultimately matter. But God draws near those who recognize their desperate need of him, who hunger for him, and he gives them living water. The proud are given over to drink the bitter muck of their own broken cisterns. They are outsiders to the kingdom.

We see the same melody playing out in the announcement of the birth of Christ. Look in [Luke 2:8–14](#).

The Announcement of the Rescue Plan is Shocking

First, it isn't an Insta photo with a cute pair of baby shoes in the picture. The sky is, in essence, ripped open by flaming messengers from the throne room of God. Remember what these guys look like from our memory work in Revelation 4 & 5? Some of them have eyes all over the place. Some of them have weird faces. They have multiple sets of wings. If you are in a quiet field and these creatures show themselves, you are gonna be terrified, too. So the announcement of the supernatural rescue plan is made by supernatural beings. That's cool, but it's not the most important thing. What they say who they say it to is even more unexpected.

Who — Shepherds. The lowest social class. The announcement was not to those who have it together, who are crushing it, to Caesar, to those who are living polite lives with respectable disposable income. The proud in heart and self-sufficient are not included in the audience. As with Mary, it is to the humble. In God's kingdom the insiders who have it all together are put outside, and those who were considered outsiders are brought in. The way into God's kingdom is not by improvement, success, or impressive resumés. Self-commendation is offensive to God who sees the

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corruption of our hearts and knows the depth of our need. No, blessed are the poor in spirit — those who know the spiritual poverty, who don't recommend themselves but bow in humility before the God who can save them from their sin. We are all broken and wrecked by sin — but many of us refuse to own it. Rebellion and arrogance leads us to believe they have no need of him. In this state God holds us at arm's length. But this announcement reminds us that God delights to come to those who know of their poverty. Humble yourself under God's mighty hand. He gives grace to the humble.

What — What is the nature of the announcement?

This is indeed unexpected and shocking. The lowly shepherds were told that salvation has come from God, is through God, and creates peace with God.

Since being driven out of the garden, a flaming sword of holiness has separated between God and the crown of his creation. A state of hostility and war has been in effect since that day. Worship includes bringing animals for slaughter as a reminder of the cost of their sin. At the temple God is separated by a thick curtain and an inner court — a moderated distance owing to Sin's War marks their relationship with God. But God comes down from Glory in the form of a baby — the Creator in the most fragile stage of creation. Separation is changed to nearness. Emmanuel is here — God with us. God fundamentally changes the relationship from "I am on the mountain; set a barrier that no one can come near lest they die" to "I am with you, and I will die to make it possible for you to be with me." That is stunning in itself. But even more unexpected and stunning, the word in **v 14** — Peace. Peace... That is the most shocking thing of all. God has unilaterally ended the war on sin— not by ignoring it, but by charging it's price to this baby in a Manger and completely the rescue by slaughtering this sacrificial Lamb of God on our behalf.

Is it really important that we believe and embrace that Christ came in human form, that he was born of a virgin, that he lived a sinless life, and that he died as a substitute, rising again to eternal life? If even one of those pieces is missing, you remain in your sin, there is no acceptable substitute, and you will pay the full price of your sin yourself.

But I bring you good news of great joy that is for all the people — including you. Unto you is born in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!

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Let's put a bow on this, if you will. Consider what all these things God did tell us:

- God will accomplish all he intends. His thoughts and ways are higher than our ways. He is not bound by natural or material means. He intervenes in the natural world to rescue our souls.
- He scatters the proud but reveals himself to the humble, gives them grace, and draws near to them. Live as one who knows his spiritual bankruptcy and hungers for God's life-giving riches.
- At Christmas we see God's rescue plan implemented. At the cross we see the rescue plan completed. A child lying in a wooden manger in a small-town cattle stall is not the ultimate focus; The Savior pinned a wooden cross on a hill outside the city is. The moment he was laid in a manger the shadow of the cross fell across every cry, every play time, every meal, every nail driven in the carpenter's shop. Yet he was obedient to death — even death on a cross.

Love was born at Christmas, but it is most manifest in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Only he could live a perfect life that would be acceptable. All the shocking aspects of his birth, death, and resurrection point to the necessity of the Lord Jesus, our only hope in life and death.

Think on these things. Respond to these things. See the great love God has displayed in sending his own Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Talk about these things. Sing these things. Delight in them. Let them draw you to kneel before the one who has come to cast out our sin and enter in. Worship Christ, the Newborn King.

PRAY