

We’ve been studying about the birth of our Savior. Our sermon series is:



“Christ the Savior is Born,” and we saw last week that Jesus was born in something that was more like a cave than a barn/stable, at what was more like a roadside rest-stop than a Hampton Inn. For Joseph and Mary, it was a hard situation. I believe they were eager to get out of Nazareth because of all the rumors, it was a scandal, she was found to be pregnant as Mary and Joseph were betrothed to one another. Then, a hard 75-mile trip to Bethlehem with no Uber’s.

This would have been brutal for Mary and then to give birth in such squalid conditions and to place her son in an animal feeding trough. So odd. Not what you would expect. And so, we come this morning to turn our attention to what was happening outside of Bethlehem, in the fields...where shepherds were watching their flocks of sheep by night. This morning we’re going to see: “Angels and Shepherds and the Birth of Jesus.”

Luke 2:8-14

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Now we all know why Jesus came to this earth... Scripture is clear: “He came to seek and save that which is lost.” That’s why Jesus is described as the “Savior of the world.” A Savior is: “someone who saves.” The question is: What do we need to be saved from? Our quick answer is: SIN and that’s true...but, I offer to you, this morning, that what we really need to be saved from is OURSELVES. We sin because we are sinners. And it’s not just WHAT we do...it’s who we ARE... “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

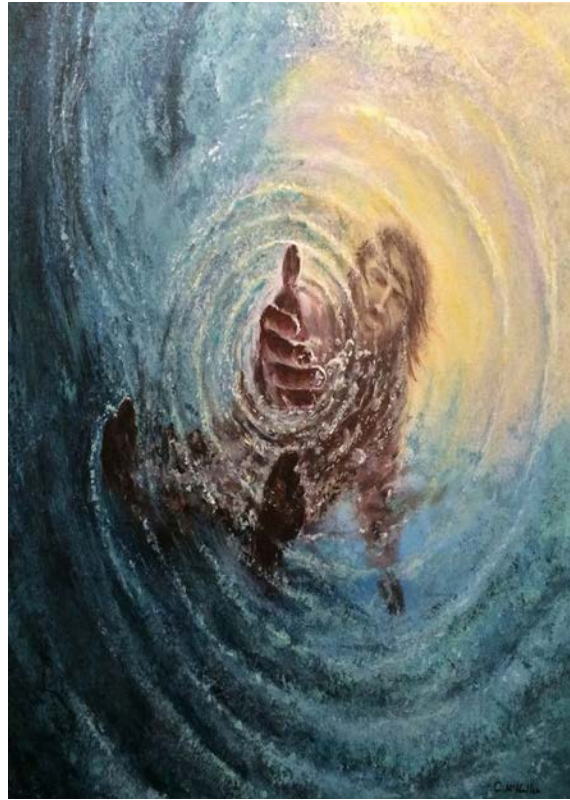
In essence what we need is: TO BE RESCUED. We're stranded, if you will, drowning in an ocean of sin and we've dog-paddled as long as we can...and we're going under...we've pushed up for the last time...but then at the last second, we see the Savior...the only one who can save us; we see Jesus walking on the water and reaching down to pull us out... See this depiction...I love this:



But you've got to take His hand. Now, I want you to hear me...Jesus didn't come to give you what you think life should offer you. He didn't come to a stinking manger and a Roman cross, so you could have your best life now and fulfill your destiny...so you can be your authentic self. He didn't come to give you a perfect marriage, perfect kids, perfect job, perfect life... He didn't come to fulfill your every desire. He didn't come so you could retire and go on your dream vacation. He came to save you from yourself and your sin.

No, none of us have a perfect life and we never will, because this isn't heaven... No, Jesus didn't come as a "Divine Butler" to give us whatever we want when we snap our fingers. No, again, He came to save us from ourselves.

You see, here's the truth: when you're rescued from yourself, from your sin, you understand and accept the fact you may never realize any of your dreams. But I tell you what you will get...you'll get the presence of Jesus and He's better than all of those things, bar none. See the picture again...



listen now...for every person sitting in this room I can say this assuredly, without Jesus...you will drown in the ocean of your sin and you will go to Hell. I don't care how good you think you are or how good people tell you that you are... You are a sinner and have no hope of escaping Hell without Jesus...and that's why He came. Have you called on His name? It's time. Some of you have waited long enough. Call on Jesus to save you. You can do that right where you sit and then come see us after the service so we can rejoice with you.

Church family, the Church needs to get back to reminding people that God sent His one and only Son to save people from their sins, not to give them a perfect life...that can't happen here...for those shepherds watching over their flocks...they certainly didn't have perfect lives. See it again...

Luke 2:8

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Now, Luke tells us: "in the same region." Where is that? Well, take a look at this map:



You'll see Bethlehem, circled in red, is about 6 miles just to the south of Jerusalem. So, Bethlehem and Jerusalem are very close and that's interesting to note; because, according to scholars, many of the sheep these shepherds raised would potentially end up at the Temple and used for the daily sacrifices. Interesting isn't it that the Lamb of God, Jesus...had been born and these shepherds would be invited to go see this wonderful Lamb, the Christ-child.

Now, try to park your mind around the fact that an ANGEL appeared to a bunch of shepherds. Not priests, not kings, not aristocracy, not the rich and famous...but, to shepherds...the bottom of the economic social order of that day. Men and boys, who were uneducated and barely known by anyone who had no power and no authority. Just ordinary, albeit, smelly. They just...watch sheep...see the depiction...



And so, while the occupation of being a shepherd was at the bottom of the occupational ladder in the first century, it's still pretty amazing to consider some of the greatest men in the Bible were shepherds. Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus described Himself as the "Good Shepherd." These shepherds were just common men...doing their job...protecting and caring for their flocks.

So, you might ask, (and it would be a fair question): "So, why did the angels reveal to shepherds the birth of the Son of God? Why not to the religious elites: the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Synagogue Rulers?" Well, there's no way to know for sure...we're simply not told, but I'll give you my hypothesis: I'm convinced those shepherds were looking for the Messiah. I believe they were expecting the Messiah's arrival. I believe they had been praying all of their lives for the Messiah to come. I believe these shepherds were living with expectant eagerness. And isn't that how we're to be living? Aren't we NOW also waiting for Jesus to come? In our case: for Him to return. Do you think about that much?

If we're honest, probably not. We've got too much to think about in this life. We want so much out of life. We want comfort, fun, excitement. We want wealth, marriage, children...a house. We look to those things to make us happy. What about those shepherds? What did they have to look forward to? They would work all of their lives. No retirement for them. No trips to the mountains or the beach for them. No scrolling the internet, \$8 cups of coffee, or Chick Fil-A.

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 6. As you're turning, I'll ask this: Could it be that the shepherds actually had it better than we do? How's that? Well as they long for the Messiah, they probably relished in the ordinary. The ordinary... a hot meal, roof over their head, a place to sleep at night. Can we be okay with just those things? Might we today, learn the secret of the shepherds. I believe they had learned the secret of living a fulfilled life. What is that? Contentment.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, and^[c] we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and

harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Contentment. Brothers and sisters, when we get to the place of contentment in our lives...that's when we really start living. Oh...it's okay to want things...but, that can't be our driving force. We need to learn to be satisfied with what we have...and stop lamenting and whining about what we don't have. That's contentment, and that's great gain!

So, here are these guys and they've seen an angel and you know they had to be scared to death!

Luke 2:9-10

⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Wouldn't you be scared to death if you saw an angel? Wouldn't you be afraid? Of course, you would. So would I! And that's why the angel had to say, "Fear not..." And isn't this exactly what happened for Joseph and Mary? Hadn't they also been visited by an angel, (Gabriel), and told not to be afraid? And so, here's the take-away: When you are a follower of God...**Don't Live in Fear-Trust His Plan.** Yes, there will be experiences, (like with the shepherds), that come out of nowhere...that can be scary and intimidating, but we know the One who holds the universe together...so we...

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Well, for those shepherds, they were getting ready to be told about a straight path to Jesus.

Luke 2:11

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And there it is: The proclamation that the long-awaited Messiah had come. The seed of Abraham...the Lion of Judah, the offspring of David...the Christ...the anointed one of God...He's here! Would they believe that?

Let me ask you something? When God speaks...haven't you often found what He says to do almost seems...kind of crazy? So, often God speaks and asks us to that which is illogical. That's where the faith comes in. The trust...the confidence in God...not your intellect. Church, when God speaks into our thoughts...our circumstances...through someone or something in such a way that seems almost preposterous...well, that's usually a tell-tale sign it's God. God asked me to leave a very lucrative, well-paying job (truth is I could probably be retired by now if I had stayed in the business world), but He called me to totally change career at the age of 37, while at the same time adopting a little girl from China... Those things don't make sense...

But I'm telling you...God doesn't stutter when He speaks... When He speaks it's profound, clear and unmistakable. There is no confusion with God! When He speaks, there is a profound weight to what He says and it will be very clear. Yes...to others, it will probably sound crazy...but, it will be as plain as day to you. Then, the angel said:

Luke 2:12

¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

The King of Kings in an animal feeding trough...remember from last week...



So strange. So peculiar. And yet, Jesus came with no fanfare, but instead, in total humility...no pretense...no pomp and circumstance...not this time...He comes humbly, but when He comes again, He'll come in power, majesty and glory! And then a multitude shows up:

Luke 2:13

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“A multitude of the heavenly host.” What did that look like? I found this painting...



I'm not saying that's how it happened. But I did find that painting mesmerizing...like all of those angles coming from pin-prick punched into the sky...coming right from the throne of heaven...woosh...and there they were... How many was it? What is a multitude? Well, the phrase, “heavenly host,” can be translated “army.” In other words: “a multitude of the heavenly army.” How many would that be? Again, I don't know, but we're told in the book of Revelation, chapter 5:

Revelation 5:11-12

11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud

voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

“Myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.” The Greek word for “myriad,” is *murion*, which is the highest number for which there is a word in the Greek language. There isn't a word for any higher number. Maybe it's hyperbole. Point is: the Apostle John had no way of counting them all. But let's just say there were millions. I think that's probably a safe to say. And what were they doing?

Now notice...they're not singing...they're “saying.”

Luke 2:13-14

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

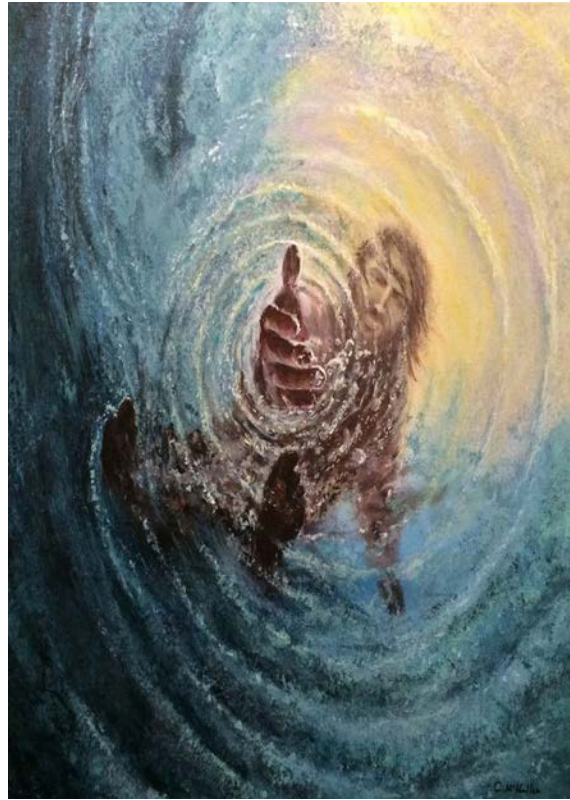
I know we have “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” But that's not what verse 14 says. It says they were “saying,” meaning that we're not told that angels actually sing. It's something else that is a tradition.

They're praising God!! Because Jesus was born. They're praising God because the Savior has come. Church, these angels knew Jesus. Jesus had been with them in heaven. They know Him and now He's here on earth. “Emmanuel, God with us,” the “Prince of Peace.” And that's why they said, “And on earth, peace.” You know, there will never be true peace on this earth or in any human heart...your heart, until you know Jesus. What kind of peace is that?

Peace that only comes through salvation. No, it's not a peace that this earth can know...where people try to have peace through the stuff of this earth...peace through possessions, prosperity, position and prestige. No, those shepherds would never know anything about that. We're talking about comfort and peace for the soul. God sent His Son to bring peace to men and women, boys and girls from the highest place...the throne of heaven, to the lowest place, the sin-stained soul.

Listen and we're done: Jesus didn't come to save you to make you rich. He didn't come to a stinking animal trough to make all your dreams come true. He didn't come to give you the perfect marriage or the perfect kids or so that the faucet will never leak again, so you'll never have another flat tire or burn piece of toast in the toaster. You may struggle the rest of your life with a disease or an ailment, some sort thorn in your flesh. Well, welcome to the life to the Savior, who suffered thorns rammed down on His glorious head...and spikes in His hands and feet.

The Good News is this...Jesus came to rescue you from yourself and your sin! He came to save you from Hell. See it...



He's reaching down to you today. Be saved. Through faith, take His hand and receive complete forgiveness for your sins, total victory over death, divine escape from hell, and total peace from the Savior.

Fasting Principles for Friday, Dec. 15, 2023

On Friday, December 15th we will be fasting as a congregation. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that has been largely neglected in our indulgent society. But it is a biblical practice and helps focus and intensify prayer. Perhaps the following notes will provide a starting point for your own study of this topic in God's Word and a new, or renewed practice of fasting for God to work in powerful ways in our day.

Definition-Fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food and other legitimate enjoyments for spiritual purposes.

"To make the matter complete, we would add that fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not only be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some spiritual purpose." -D. Martin Lloyd-Jones

"Whenever men are to pray to God concerning any great matter, it would be expedient to appoint fasting along with prayer." -John Calvin

Fasting helps the believer to concentrate the mind and body on spiritual concerns so that fervent, extraordinary prayer might be given to those concerns. Various kinds of fasts are mentioned in the Bible:

1. -A **Normal Fast** involves abstaining from all food, but not from water. (Mt. 4:2)
2. -A **Partial Fast** is a limitation of the diet but not abstaining from all food. Daniel ate only vegetables. John the Baptist ate only locusts and wild honey (Dan. 1:12; Mt. 3:4)
3. -An **Absolute Fast** is avoidance of all food & liquid, even water. (Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9).
4. -A **Private Fast** is the one referred to most often by Jesus, and should be done without calling attention to oneself. (Mt. 6:16-18)
5. -**Congregational Fasts** involve the church participating together. (Joel 2:15-16; Acts 13:2)
6. -A **National Fast** is a call to the nation to fast. (2 Chron. 20:3; Neh.9:1; Jonah 3:5-8) (The US Congress has called 3 national fasts, under John Adams, James Madison and Abraham Lincoln)
7. -**Occasional Fasts** which occur on special occasions as the need arises. (Mt. 9:15)

Again, we will be fasting this Friday, December 15th meaning you should consider eating supper on Thursday evening at your normal time and then not eating again until Friday evening for supper. Your physical and medical health should be taken into consideration before fasting. Some may not be able to "fast" food for medical and/or health reasons, but you may consider fasting TV, social media, internet browsing, recreation, entertainment, etc.

Fasting Should Be Done with Intentionality and a Purpose:

- To Strengthen Prayer (Ezra 8:23)
- To Seek God's Guidance (Judges 20:26, Acts 14:23)
- To Express Grief (1 Sam. 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:11-12; 1 Jn. 1:9; 1 Sam. 20:34)
- To Seek Divine Deliverance/Protection (2 Chron. 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16)
- To Express Repentance and a Return to God (1 Sam. 7:6; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8)
- To Humble Oneself before God (Ps. 35:13)
- To Express Concern for the Word of God (Neh. 1:3-4; Dan. 9:3)
- To Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Oneself to God (Matt. 4:1-2)
- To Express Love and Devotion to God (Luke. 2:37; Zechariah 7:5)

Remember, Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights before He started His ministry. Fasting is something that's done to abstain from a natural appetite the Lord has given to us in exchange for our desire to see people saved. We are praying and fasting for the lost on our Prayer Tents and for those who will be coming to our Celebrate Christmas on Dec 16-17. Understand this: as we fast and pray, we are not seeking to twist God's

arm to do what we ask, nor are we trying to earn something from God. God moves by His Spirit as He chooses. All we are attempting to do is to show Him our desire to beseech His throne and intercede for the lost. Fasting is simply saying, "Dear Lord, we desire to be holy and to see souls saved more than we seek to feed our appetites." We trust Him and know that He is worthy of our total devotion as we pray in faith!
