

A Tale of Two Saviors
Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

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!"***

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Introduction:

1. Setting the Stage

a. Timing

Paul said in Galatians 4:4 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman.” The timing of the Messiah’s birth was not arbitrary, and neither were the circumstances surrounding the event.

So, as for the timing, it was as Luke reports, “in those days”. What days? The days according to chapter 1 verse 5 when Herod was king over the Jews. Self-governing was a privilege afforded to the Jews during Roman occupation given by Caesar Augustus, who was the sovereign ruler of the Roman Empire at this point.

Caesar had decreed to the known world that all people be registered. This particular registration was for the purpose of taxation. Luke tells us that it was the first registration during the time when Quirinius who was governor of Syria. The only reason Luke mentions Quirinius and the fact that it was the first registration was for the sake of dating the event and explaining the circumstances. I’m going to quote John MacArthur as he explains how these two pieces of information are crucial in dating this event even though we cannot pinpoint the exact date of the birth of Jesus.

Quirinius was known to have governed Syria A.D. 6 to 9. A well-known census was taken in Palestine in A.D. 6. Josephus, the great Jewish historian, records that it sparked a violent Jewish revolt which is mentioned by Luke who quotes Gamaliel in Acts 5:37. So Luke refers to this census which provoked a revolt which occurred in A.D. 6. Quirinius was responsible for administering that census. He also paid a major role in quelling the subsequent rebellion. However,, that census can't be the census Luke has in mind here because it occurred about a decade after the death of Herod. It's much too late to fit here.

So we know there was a census in A.D. 6. We know that Quirinius at that point was a leader in Syria. But here you have a little indication that that is not

that one in Luke 2, "this is the first census." So if that one occurred in 6 A.D. and they were normally at fourteen-year intervals, all we need to do to find the first one is back up Fourteen years. That would take us to 8 B.C.; Indeed archeology has vindicated Luke. A fragment of stone discovered at Tivoli, which is near Rome, in A.D. 1764, it contains an inscription in honor of a Roman official who it states was twice governor of Syria and Phoenicia during the reign of Augustus. Somebody was governor twice. Once in A.D. 6 to 9 and another time previously back in the B.C. time when that first census took place as what Luke says. The name of the official is not given on that fragment, but among his accomplishments are listed details that as far as is known can fit no one other than Quirinius, and we do have some historical records about him.

In summary, This census most likely took place in 8 to 6 BC. The limited information Luke records would have been perfectly sufficient for his original audience to know the exact date and circumstances that surrounded the event. In God's providence, he also provided just enough for us to determine with some degree of accuracy, the timing and circumstances with this information.

The takeaway here is that the timing was exactly according to God's eternal plan. God was orchestrating the timing of this event down to the very second.

b. Circumstances

As for the circumstances, every participant in the event was playing their part exactly how it had been ordained even though they had no idea. The shepherds were exactly where they were supposed to be doing exactly what they were supposed to be doing; keeping watch over their flock by night (8). Mary and Joseph were also exactly where they were supposed to be, doing exactly what they were supposed to be doing, going to Bethlehem to be registered just as Caesar Augustus had decreed. Also, exactly what Caesar was supposed to be doing.

The decree to register led Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem which happened to be during her ninth month of pregnancy. There are a lot of questions we could ask here. I'm going to throw them out and try to answer them quickly so we do not spend a lot of time here.

- Why did they go to their hometown? Records show that it was not a Roman requirement. It was likely a Jewish requirement for the sake of keeping ancestral records accurate, as they were big on that. So it was likely Herod who laid that burden on the Jews.
- Why did Mary go with Joseph? We know that the male heads of households could register the entire house. There could be several explanations for this. Perhaps Joseph wanted to be present when the Son of God was born. Perhaps it was not safe for Mary to be left alone to give birth because of the suspicious circumstances behind her pregnancy. Or, perhaps they knew in their hearts this was the way God had ordained it to happen and they were being faithful and obedient.

The thing that matters the most is that it did happen and it happened in Bethlehem, the city of David. It was long ago foretold by the prophet Micah *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days (5:2).*

c. Setting

So here we are in the little town of Bethlehem. Mary is nine months pregnant. They arrive and there are no rooms open in the inns. We are not talking about commercial hotels, by the way. We are talking about homes that would accept travelers. Most would provide food and lodgings like our bed and breakfasts.

So, unable to find a room they find themselves staying outside where the animals would be kept. This was probably outside of an inn where the travelers would keep their animals while they visited the area. We can all agree that if we were the ones planning the birth of the Savior of the world, God in human flesh, we probably would have arranged things a little differently. However, God knew exactly what he was doing. God had a purpose in all of this. There are several different angles that we could look at this text from but this morning I want to focus on one particular aspect that I believe God was preaching a beautiful message to the world concerning the Divine Savior verses the worldly savior.

2. Contrasting the Saviors

You may be thinking or thought when you saw the title of this sermon, that there is only one savior. You are correct. However, in this particular event, there were two who were called Savior. I believe as we have seen thus far, this was purposeful on the part of God.

Let's focus our attention on one of the key players in this drama, Caesar Augustus. This particular Caesar was:

- Born September 23, 63 BC as Gaius Octavius. He would later become known as Octavian.
- He was the grand nephew of Julius Caesar. He was adopted by Julius Caesar in 43 BC when he was 20 years old.
- Julius Caesar declared him to be the heir to the Roman empire in which he would begin his rule, one year after this declaration, when Julius Caesar was murdered.
- Octavian would change his name to Gaius Julius Caesar in honor of his grand uncle.
- During the beginning of his reign, he shared power with Lepidus and Mark Anthony. Lepidus fell away, rather quickly, leaving Mark Anthony, and Octavian to rule together.
- Mark Anthony married Octavian's sister and would eventually leave her for Cleopatra queen of Egypt. Mark Anthony soon became more concerned with the welfare of Egypt than with Rome.
- These two events led to a battle between Rome and Egypt, the naval battle of Actium, (31 BC) in which Rome, won handedly. This victory solidified Octavian's reputation as a great leader and marked the beginning of the Pax Romana, Roman Peace. More on that in a moment.
- Devastated by their defeat, one year later, Mark Anthony and Cleopatra would commit suicide leaving Octavian to rule alone.
- He ruled independently for 45 years beginning in 31 BC until 14 AD.

- In 27 BC, the Roman senate changed his name to Caesar Augustus. Caesar, as you know means King. Augustus means highly esteemed, honored, revered, sacred or holy. It was a title used only of the gods. This was the birth of the Caesars being given divine status.
- There is an inscription found in a place called Halicarnassus in the Mediterranean, that reads, "Caesar Augustus, savior of the world."

There is a reason the people felt that way about this man. He was one of, if not the greatest leaders, the world has ever known. He was highly skilled politically, socially, and militarily. He was a remarkable man, whom not only did God use to orchestrate the birth of Jesus, but also to facilitate the spread of the gospel to the known world. His accomplishments in infrastructure development, territorial expansion, administrative and legal reforms, social reforms, and monetary reforms were all tools that God used to advance the gospel in the first century.

Perhaps his most well known feat was the Pax Romana (Roman Peace), which was often referred to by many as Pax Augusta as a tribute to this man. The Pax Romana refers to a time of unprecedented peace to the known world, which lasted approximately two centuries.

This man's accomplishments and the timing of his rule were no accident. Every minute detail of his life, from birth to death was being knitted together by the hands of our Sovereign Father. God wants the world to see the difference between the futility of an earthly savior (even the greatest we have ever known) and the immeasurable worth of our Heavenly Savior. So let's contrast the two.

a. Appointed and Anointed

Gaius Octavius was born into royalty. His grand uncle Julius Caesar saw something special in young Gaius. As I mentioned earlier, when he was 20 years old Julius Caesar adopted him and one year later declared him to be the heir that would rule the Roman Empire. He was loved and adored by his own people.

Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough, called a manger. He was wrapped in dirty cloths. When he had grown he came to his own people but his own people did not receive him (John 1:11). *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not* (Is. 53:3).

BUT GOD...

Philippians 2:9 God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The true Savior of the world was not appointed by a man who recognized his giftedness, but by God who appointed Him before the foundation of the world. *Ephesians 1:4-6 even as he chose us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons **through Jesus Christ**, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* Its all about Jesus and always has been and always will be.

But God spent 4000 years writing a book we call the old testament about the Savior who would be born that silent night in Bethlehem and will be the Savior, the Messiah, the Anointed One.

b. The True Prince of Peace

The crowning achievement of Caesar Augustus was the birth of the Pax Romana. Caesar Augustus inherited a world of chaos, violence, political division, and continual threats of civil war. With this achievement Augustus was referred to by the Romans and historians as “The Great Emperor of Peace”. However, there is a caveat. The Romans did not define peace as simply the absence of war but the absence of war due to all opponents being conquered and unable to put up a significant resistance. In fact, historian [Walter Goffart](#) wrote: “The volume of the [Cambridge Ancient History](#) for the years AD 70–192 is called 'The Imperial Peace', but peace is not what one finds in its pages”. Caesar Augustus deserves credit for creating what at least appeared to be “peace on earth” but the truth of the matter is, it was just that; an appearance of peace.

That is not true of the real Prince of Peace. It was announced by a heavenly host that the purpose of the infant in the manger was to bring a true and lasting peace on earth and an eternal peace to all those with whom the Father is pleased (14). There are two aspects of peace the True Savior brings that Caesar Augustus was not capable of delivering. A universal peace to the chaos and

disorder caused by the fall and a personal peace between God and his chosen people.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
far as the curse is found,

Everyone who has come to faith in Christ has experienced the personal peace between them and their Creator. *Romans 8:7 says that those who are not in Christ are at enmity with God. Romans 5:1 says, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

You may ask, “Where is that universal peace that puts all things back into its created order? Why do we not see the lion lying with the lamb, the restoration of all things, the end of all sickness, death and disease? No more tears?” The answer is, it’s coming. It’s a promise. *Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

Ep. 2:14 Jesus is our peace

The people witnessed the Pax Romana and it lasted about 200 years. That is remarkable. However, even though we cannot lay our eyes on the fulness of the Pax Christi (Peace of Christ) we will and it will be complete and it will last for all eternity.

How can we know?

c. The Affirmation (of the two Saviors)

When Caesar Augustus was given the opportunity to select his own name he chose Gaius Julius Caesar in honor of his grand uncle and adopted father Julius Caesar. This indicates that he didn’t personally choose to affirm himself as the

August one (although he did serve on the senate that made that decision). It was the affirmation of the Roman senate on January 16, 27 BC to deem him a deity. As you may have noticed there were many titles given to Octavian by other people, contemporaries and historians, so we can say that he was sufficiently affirmed to be a great leader, heavily revered, and endowed with many great attributes and divine qualities. However, what value is there in worldly affirmation?

On the other hand, let's look at the affirmation of the Heavenly Savior.

- He was prophesied from the very beginning to be the true Savior. *Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*
- The entire Old Testament pointed to him as the True Savior. *Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*
- His birth was affirmed by an angel and a heavenly host. *Luke 2:8-20.*
- His was affirmed by the Father and the Holy Spirit at his baptism, which marked the inauguration of his salvation ministry. *Matthew 3:16-17 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*
- Jesus' earthly ministry as well as the subsequent ministry of the apostles was filled with miracles that affirmed he was the true Savior.
- Last and certainly not least, he was raised from the dead to affirm once and for all he is the only real Savior. Caesar Augustus is dead and his body is lying in the Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome, Italy as we speak. Jesus is alive and well actively saving souls to this day. Unlike Augustus, Jesus will return in bodily form and finalize his salvation, affirming his title as the One True Savior of the world, once and for all.

3. Implications and Applications

- Don't put your trust in earthly rulers. The best this world has to offer will only ever be a cheap imitation of the One True Savior. As we are entering an election season and our country is in disarray, do not forget, the True Savior is already on the throne and no earthly political leader can thwart his plan.
- Although we do not yet see the completion of the story, we can know that 6000 plus years into this story the hero is still alive and he will finish the task. We know the end of the story and our God wins. We win. But in the interim we live by faith and not by sight. *Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Be strengthened in your faith. Stay strong and continue the good fight, and consider it all joy.
- For the unbeliever. God is in complete control. He wrote this story and he will complete it. If that could be proven false it would have. Stop rejecting and denying. Humble yourself before the True Savior and trust in him.

Lord's Supper

CG Discussion Questions

1. What are some details about the timing around the birth of Christ that are significant as it concerns the providence of God?
2. What are some details about the circumstances around the birth of Christ that are significant as it concerns the providence of God?
3. What are some details about the setting around the birth of Christ that are significant as it concerns the providence of God?
4. What were some of the reasons Caesar Augustus was called a “savior of the world”?
5. We discussed a few ways that Jesus is superior to any earthly leader. Can you think of some other ways?
6. In light of this sermon and Luke 2:1-20, how should this affect how we view an election season?
7. What do we mean as Christians when we say that we know the end of the story and our God wins? Can you describe that scenario from a biblical perspective?
8. In what way did this sermon affect the way you think and perhaps a behavior you may change?

Daily Devotion - Feb. 12-16

Mon, Feb 12th - Read Luke 2:1-20 and Galatians 4:4. The “fullness of time” indicates that it was a very specific date and circumstance in which the Christ would enter the world. Clearly God’s providence was at work to set the stage for the birth of Christ. What are some the things that God was doing to prepare the world for the Christ?

Tues, Feb 13th - Read Luke 2:10. In what ways was the birth of Jesus good news of great joy? Spend some time pondering on how the Savior has been good news and great joy in your life.

Wed, Feb. 14th - Read 2 Samuel 7:1-17, Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2. What prophecies were fulfilled through Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem? Spend some time contemplating how this should encourage your faith.

Thurs, Feb. 15th - Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. Clearly Jesus was not rich in monetary value before he came to the earth. What did Jesus give up to come to us as a baby in a manger?

Fri, Feb. 16th - Read Luke 2:8-14. The angels brought a message of peace. What kind of peace does Jesus bring on earth? How does this differ from worldly views of peace?