

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
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Series: It's Complicated  
December 24, 2022

Christmas Eve – It's Complicated

Luke 2:1-20

**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Cornelius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So, Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God, and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**

Christmas for me always started with the Nativity. And so, after Thanksgiving, mom was adamant you couldn't decorate for Christmas until after Thanksgiving. And so, we were there. (Folks in the crowd cheer.) OK. Yeah, we who know you're here. And so, after Thanksgiving, that was time to - a couple days after - that was time to get everything out of the attic. And it was always my job. She would pull out this box. We would go up in the attic and she pulled this box out. It was always the same box that had this nativity. They were always wrapped in newspaper like this, and we would set it up in the “good” living room. The Christmas tree was always in the “good” living room. I don't know why it's called the good living room, but we had one. Anybody else have a “good” living room? OK. I don't know. We had a good living room. And I would go

out there and I would just carefully, you know, I took great joy in figuring out placement. OK, the wisemen, they are coming in. The shepherds are there on bended knee. There's Mary and Joseph. I am setting them up, but I took care to do this right and so really at the beginning of the Christmas season when we began to celebrate, it was like all attention on the nativity. That was the focus. That's the only thing that was under that tree.

Now the "good" living room also had the front door to it. And so, when people would come to visit us, they would ring the doorbell to that front door. As December progresses, they would bring gifts. You know they would come, and they would bring fruit baskets and just different gifts and so as the days continued on, gifts would begin to pile up around this tree. And when you would wake up on Christmas morning and Santa had come and you're a little 8-year-old boy - I run in there - and all you see is just gifts. The Nativity scene is covered up. There's no focus on Jesus. This has become a metaphor to me throughout my life of how we start things with Jesus, but they end with us. We really quickly move the attention to us and what are we receiving and the hectic and the chaos and the complications of this season.

And so, we're in a series at Harris Creek - if you're a guest with us - we're wrapping up a series today called It's Complicated. Where we're celebrating this season, and today I'm going to look at the story that Weston read to us and talk about the complications that they felt, the complications that they experienced, but also the complications that you and I are living in right now as we celebrate the Christmas season.

It can feel like this day has been hijacked by an overweight man in a hat and a red suit. And in fact, there's a yard here in Waco where they have all of the inflatables. (Picture on the screen.) Yeah, like all the Christmas inflatables. And so, they have the red man in the suit with the hat. What's his name? (Kids shout out: Santa) Yeah, you know his name. And then they have the reindeer with the red nose. What's his name? (Kids shout out: Rudolph) That's right. And then they have the snowman. The snowman, what's his name? (Kids shout out: Frosty) And then there's the green guy from Doctor Seuss, Cindy Lou Who's friend. (Kids shout out: Grinch) The Grinch! And then right there beside all of those other characters, is Mary, Joseph, and the one whose birthday it is. (Kids shout out: Jesus) That's right, Jesus.

But I want you to know not all of those are created equal. OK? It is not a level playing field, there is Santa and Rudolph and Jesus. No, no, no, no. That's our culture. This day is all about that baby. This day is all about that baby. And so that's what I hope to do as we move through this text is just to bring your attention to what distracts us, what complicates us. Even tomorrow, even the next day, as we move into celebrating this baby, what tries to steal our attention from it?

What makes Christmas complicated? And I feel it. I just don't want to play any games. Like, I got here, I was 15 minutes late here. I was like, OK. Mom had to bring Weston separate, he was getting a haircut by the time we were supposed to be here still. And I was short with Hannah, my friend, I was short with Joel. That's why it's crazy. It's hectic, it's chaotic. It's Christmas.

Dale, last week, if you were here, he was talking about how busy this time is, and he was reading my mail. He's like, we have basketball practices. Check. We have Christmas cards. Ours haven't even gotten to us yet, like they got there yesterday. Our Christmas cards that we're going to send to you guys, we got them yesterday. OK? They showed up in the mail yesterday. I've got presents that I don't know where they're at. They're lost in the, you know, United States postal

system somewhere. Travel - we have to figure out some time to see your family, to see your parents your cousins and my parents and my siblings. How do we fit all of that in? I feel that.

And God is like, "Hey." Yeah. I don't know. I'm projecting on Him, you know. He is God, He's not like me. But I just think like it's His birthday. I feel like we try to take His birthday and make it our birthday. "Got to make this about us." And so how can we bring our attention back to the one who came to save us?

I am going to look at the story Weston read and I'm going to talk about the complications from the story. And what I'm going to try to do is to teach you something. I hope you learn something about a story that you've heard probably hundreds of times. And then I'm going to talk about how we have complications that are similar to the ones that they face at that time. I'm not trying to read us into the text. I'm just trying to make a comparison to us because I think you probably feel some of that stress. And we're going to try to do it in a short time because we have lots of kids here. But all of those complications are going to be represented by a gift. And so, I'll kind of bring out a gift and we'll talk through the complications, and I'll hopefully teach you something from the text.

And so let me read to you Luke 2: **In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius (Weston said Cornelius) was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So, Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.** Luke, he is a legit historian. Secular atheist historians read Luke's writings as credible sources to understand history better. He is going out of his way to tell you what happened here. He's giving you context. This person was the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. This person is the governor of Syria, Quirinius. This is the first census, because there were more, but this is the first one that they took. And we know that they went there to pay taxes and you probably have heard that. But what you may not know, and Josephus gives us this clue. Josephus is a Jewish historian. That they went there and both Mary and Joseph both had to go because they both came from the line of David. So, they both had to return to Bethlehem to pledge allegiance to Caesar Augustus. They would have been particular characters of interest because their son, being from the line of David, would have claimants to the throne of Israel. The Maccabean Revolt is in the rearview window, and Caesar Augustus does not like the Jews. So, there is political unrest that Jesus is born to and there is much division and oppression. And as you move into Christmas, we talked week one, you might be sitting around the table with people who do not believe as you. They may have different ideologies than you, maybe even a different faith than you.

I can tell you. You know, I've said it before from this stage, there's more division than I can remember since I've been alive. It seems as though we're looking for things to be divided over. And so, in some ways we can even relate to what they were experiencing or feeling in that story. And people, it seems, are increasingly hostile to Christians. I was with Nate. We were traveling South to plan out the year and we stopped to get donuts. Anybody like Donuts? OK, we don't have any, but we stopped to get donuts. It was a place I had never been to. And there they had all of the flavors. All of the wonderful flavors, like these were crazy donuts. These were not your normal donuts. The expensive kind. There they had a whole holiday flavor list and then over here

they had another side – it was the Hanukkah flavor list. And I asked the person, “How does the Hanukkah flavor list not fit into the holiday flavor list?” And she said, “Well it's just more flavors for Hanukkah”. And I go, “Well is there a Christmas flavor list?” And she said, “No, that would be offensive.” And I say, “Christmas is offensive? Help me understand why.” She said, “I don't know why. I told the lady earlier today Merry Christmas and she got upset with me.” And so, we have all of these things that are going on in the peripheral for us to get irritated by, agitated by, to distract us from the baby and the manger.

They had to travel. Nazareth to Bethlehem is 90 miles. They're going by foot. This is the distance from Waco to Dallas. They're walking, right. (Map shows on screen.) Yeah, there it is. So, they they've got some complications in front of them to go from one place to another. They have to go there for the census to the town where their ancestors were from, where their family lived.

Now, some of you, your guests with us today because you traveled here. You don't live in Waco. You're staying with somebody. You're in town for the holiday if you will. Some of you, you have travel right in front of you. Like as soon as you leave here, the car is already packed. You already played Tetris in the back, trying to get everything in place. Some of you have already traveled and you've returned home now. So, you can understand why this time, when we're to focus on Jesus, the baby, and the manger, we have all of these things to distract. “We got to go!” We got to travel. We got to get there. Make sure you have the address and know where we're going to stop along the way.

It says that there was no room for them in the inn. Mary's pregnant - complications. It's not Joseph's. She could literally be killed for this. It was according to the law. It's hard for us to understand that they could take her, and they could stone her to death. Because it seems to the public that she had been unfaithful to the one that she was betrothed to. This is why in Matthew it says that he was going to leave her quietly because he was a man of honor, and he didn't want her to die. He didn't want to shame her and so they had plans and then they had changes to those plans. Unforeseen Circumstances. Some of you, you are enneagram one, you got it together. You know the menu tomorrow, OK? It is in the refrigerator already. You've got plans. You know what time you're going to leave. You know what time people are showing up. You know when you go, you know what time you're going to open presents, when you're going to do all of the things. You've got your plans together. And I want you to know there's going to be some curveballs, and I hope they're not hospital visits or anything like that, but there are going to be some things that go wrong. Everybody's got a crazy uncle that shows up or you know something, right? You have your unforeseen circumstances. I don't want it to distract you from the baby in the manger. It starts with Jesus. And it's so easy to end it talking about us.

It is His birthday. One year it was my birthday and Monica was throwing me a surprise party. I didn't know about it. It's the surprise. And it was that evening. It was the evening of my birthday and she had invited all my friends and you know she's not a good liar and so she was avoiding me like the plague that day. That's a good quality in a spouse, to not be a good liar. So, I just noticed like on my birthday she was particularly stand offish and it just hurt my feelings. I mean I felt under celebrated. Now in the back of her mind she's like, ‘No, I know I've got the party planned. It's coming.’ I noticed like all my friends; nobody made a big deal about it. In their minds, they are thinking, ‘Hey, we're going to go to your party.’ Hesitant to say happy birthday because they didn't want me to know that they knew it was my birthday because they think they might know that there's a party and they don't want to give it away, you know? And so there it

was, it was my birthday and I just felt like my feelings were hurt. Everybody seemed focused on what they had to do. And I think about this and I'm like, how crazy it is. It's the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and we have totally hijacked it with all of the chaos of presents and travel and everywhere we got to go and what we've got to do and all of the things. I can't help but think, I am not not trying to shame us, I don't mean for this to be heavy-handed, but I can't help but think, how does God feel about that? Like what is He thinking?

Verse 6, **While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.** We often think about the manger as this wooden kind of you know cross beam made of wood with some hay in it. Even today, you don't see wooden mangers in Israel, but especially in the 1st century wood would have been used for cooking and to stay warm. It was not readily available. The manger most certainly would have been a stone trough just like they are today. It would have looked more like this. Now think about the irony here, that they take this brand-new baby, and they wrap him in swaddling clothes, and they place him on a stone platform. This would not happen again until 33 years later when they wrapped Jesus in linen cloth, and they placed him on a stone platform. Luke 23:52 says, **Going to Pilot, he asked for Jesus' body, and he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock. One in which no one had yet been laid.** But why was there a manger?

We always think about Jesus staying in a stable. He was born in the stable. But if we study 1st century architecture, right, the house, the people, the living quarters were upstairs. It was just a ledge. There was not a place where you would actually have room to give birth to a child, especially in the guest room. Now the downstairs was reserved, especially in winter months, for the animals. So, the animals will be able to come into the house. I think we have a picture of this. (Picture of what a home would have looked like at this time.) So, there you go. You have that kind of ledge that would have been the living quarters. Right? This room with that is sometimes translated inn, we talk about the innkeeper, the innkeeper saying, "Hey, there's no room at the inn." It's not the word inn. It's different than what we see in the story of the Good Samaritan. That word is translated living room or guest room, and it's translated correctly here in the NIV. And so, they're downstairs where the animals would be, because that's where she would have room to give birth. And they lay him on a stone feeding trough.

As I think about that for us, like what are the connections? I think about the word accommodations. Like with the travel, you're trying to figure out where everyone's going to sleep. "Hey, you get this bedroom." "Hey, our family of six will stay in this bedroom." "Your family of five stays in that bedroom." We will go to my mom's and there will be blow up mattresses and pallets. We just came back from my mom's for Christmas and all the guy cousins here, all the girl cousins here. Just trying to figure out the accommodations and it adds to some of the chaos and the craziness that makes for our holiday.

And then I think about the shepherds. It says, **And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.** They were working. We always think about the shepherds as kind of middle-aged men with beards. They were most likely children, teenagers. Guys and girls, boys and girls watching over the flocks. And so, the Angel of the Lord appeared to these shepherds and said, "Hey, this is what is happening, and this is going to be your sign." And as I think about what the shepherds were doing, they were working. They left their work. They were tending the flock. And as I think about distractions for you and I

tomorrow, it's the end of the year for you. It's not just the end of the month. At the end of the year, you got quota. You have got things to do, things to tie up. There are tax implications to consider. And you're going to have your iPhone and it's going to be a distraction. And so, kids, just as the shepherds were younger than we think, I want to incite your help. Children, do I have your attention? Guys? OK. So tomorrow, will you help Mom and Dad's focus to remain on Jesus? You're going to wake up and what do we get to do in the morning? (Kids shout: Open Presents) That's right. Sing baby Jesus happy birthday. (Crowd laughs) You nailed it, right? Bake him a cake. Read the story again. Look at the child who came to save us and help them keep their minds off of work. We have so many things to distract us from that.

What was not represented in this story here in Luke but is represented in Matthew, as the shepherds came to worship Him, we know the magi came. We don't know exactly when they came. There are probably more than three, but we always think of three because there were three gifts. One of those gifts being an embalming ointment of myrrh, of foreshadowing that this baby came to die for you and me. So, as I think about the magi coming to Him, it probably most likely was much later. We typically in church tradition celebrate it as 12 days later, but it could have been anywhere from 40 days to two years later - because we know King Herod killed all the children, all the male children under two. I think about gifts.

And so just as you came to church tonight and we said, "Hey, don't be distracted by all of the things that you have to do, focus on Jesus." And some of you are like, 'Man, I've got last minute wrapping to do.' That's what's going to happen tonight. We got to get home, we got to get the bows, the wrapping paper. We got to make all of these things happen. And we're distracted by the gifts, not for Jesus, but for us.

To be transparent with you as I think back through Christmases what I remember are the gifts. I mean, I remember when I wanted the remote-control car called the Lobo. It didn't have this kind of controller; it had this kind of controller that was a big deal at the time. I remember when I wanted a scooter, not like a razor scooter with the rollerblade wheels, but it had like real wheels that you put air in. You could take this thing anywhere. And I was so excited to get my scooter. Then one year I wanted a transformer bike. That wasn't a thing, but I liked Transformers and I wanted a bike and so my parents transformed my brother's bike into my bike with some paints. You know? I just think back on the memories of Christmas, and it wasn't so much, "Hey, here was the story we read. Here was the song we sang. I remember learning this about Jesus." It was the gifts. And for some of you, it's the same thing. And now as parents, we've got another shot. Like we can make it about something different. We can tell them, "Hey, here's what it's really about and not sell out for the materialism." I'm all for having fun and I'm all for gifts and Christmas gifts and we will open them tomorrow too. But we've got to focus on what this day is really about.

**Verse 16, So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.** Our job is to do as the shepherds do.

If you are here and you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have a story to tell. And I am amazed at how many people say they believe this story and don't share it. I was talking to someone this week in their 70s. A person who's been in church their entire life. Had great worldly success that has built empires if you will. Had houses, and lake houses, and things, and all of the stuff. I said,

“Hey, can I ask you a question?” I said, “Between 1 and 10 - 10 being certain, and 1 being not so sure, if you died today, how certain are you that you would go to heaven?” And he said a 7. That’s exactly what I said 20 years ago in a moment where God used to change my life. He said, “I am a 7.” And I said, “If you stood before God and he said, ‘Why should I let you in?’ What would you say?” And he said, “Because I’ve tried hard. I’ve done good. I’ve sought to be generous with what God has given me. I... I... I... This is what I have done.” And then he goes, “It’s not for me to judge. That’s up to God. God is the only one who can judge who gets in.”

That was my son – pointing to where Weston had quoted Luke 2 earlier. That is my son. I love this congregation. I look out there, I see people that I love dearly. But I can’t imagine letting him die for you. And if he did...if he did die for you. Like you needed a heart and he said, “Daddy, they can have my heart.” And so, we put him on the operation table, and we pulled out a heart for you. And then right then you said, “Nah, I can just be good. I’ll just be generous. I’ll just try hard.” I can’t imagine! Like As a father, I’m like, “Wait, what!? That’s my son!” God paid the way for us to be with Him forever. Kids, what’s His name? How can we be with God forever? What’s His name? (Crowd – Jesus) Jesus. That’s right, Jesus. His name is Jesus. And all of these things, these distractions if you will. He was the greatest gift. Jesus was the greatest gift you are ever going to receive. And he did the work for you. You need to stop trying so hard to get to Him because our God came here! Every other world religion out there has you trying to work your way up to God. Our God – the one true God, the God of all gods – He came here to rescue you. He did the work, and he tells Thomas, “I have gone to prepare a place for you.” I have made accommodations for you. That is what he is doing right now, He has created a place for you in heaven. His unforeseen circumstance wasn’t unforeseen by Him. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross. He came here. Want to talk about travel? He put on humanity and became a human – fully God, fully man. And he is the price of peace, Lord of lords. So, as we are talking about division, He is the one who gives true sustaining peace.

Every week in this series we have finished by telling you a story around the nativity and I am just going to stay here in Luke 2 and tell you that we don’t have a lot of references of Jesus as a child. Just one really – when he was 12 years old. His parents visit the temple and at this time you would travel communally, and you would have all your friends and family going together. So, they go into the temple, and we have one little shot of Jesus’ life as a child, and it is here in Luke 2. The very same chapter that we read from. In verse 44 it says this, it starts with these words, **Thinking He was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. And when they did not find Him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for Him. After 3 days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers and listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers. When His parents saw Him, they were astonished. His mother said to Him, “Son, why have you treated us like this. Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” He said, “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I Had to be in my Father’s house?”** It says, ...**thinking He was in their company...** tomorrow you are going to wake up Christmas morning and you are going to tear into presents and you are going to go about your day assuming Jesus is in your company. It’s all about Jesus, it is His birthday. But it is not unless you make it about that. And if we are honest, there have been Christmases where we didn’t. And you have a chance tomorrow to make it about Jesus. Because you have relatives – neighbors and friends – who are anxiously

searching for Him. You know the story. People all throughout Waco and the town you are visiting from are anxiously searching for Him and you know where He can be found.

Some of you, you visit us on Christmas and Easter because your life is busy and chaotic, and I just want to invite you home. I am not mad at you, and I am not here to shame you, but He is found in God's house. Amongst God's people and I want to invite you in to belong to a church. If it is not Harris Creek, find a great Bible-teaching church and belong there and serve there. Use your gifts there! It changed my life.

So, we are going to sing a song and as we do, we always at this point in the service do a candlelight. I don't want you to pull out lighters right now. The room is going to get dark, and I want you to feel the angst as the flame spreads from right here. And it is going to feel like it takes forever to get up there. I want you to know there are people in the darkness of the world who are waiting for you to bring that to them. To bring them the hope of Jesus Christ.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of a baby in a manger; that you put on flesh for us. That you are the solution to our pain. You are the solution to our suffering and our chaos. Lord, we just confess that we have made plans in our lives that don't include you. We have rushed on ahead of you. Assuming that you were with us, but not taking the time to make you a priority – to fix our hearts and minds on what you have done for us. That Jesus lived a perfect life and died the death that we deserve – giving us the hope of eternal life, not by our own works, but by His. In Jesus name, Amen.