

Good morning! This morning we will be in Luke chapter two looking at THE most well known Christmas story of all time. I decided a couple weeks ago that we would be here, genuinely not realizing that I preached this exact text just a year ago in our Advent 2014 series. Honestly, my first thought was, “Well, that’ll be pretty easy to repeat.” Then I was in the office with JD when *he* realized I was preaching the same text and said, “Wow, that’s actually not the easiest thing to do. Coming up with a new sermon on the same text. I mean, you would never preach the same sermon just a year later. I was like, “Yeah....what kind of a preacher would do that??”

But I’m really thankful for that conversation because it forced me to go back and look at this text some more and the Lord really showed me a lot I didn’t see last year. Many of you know this text is where we get much of the information we use in our nativity scenes we put out this time of year. We always enjoy getting our nativity scenes out in our house with our blond haired, blue eyed anglo baby Jesus. My kids always enjoy telling us who each of the people are. But it is easy to forget that this little manger scene is designed to point us toward something much, much bigger.

My one year old, James, doesn’t yet understand what it means when I point. I’ll see a toy I know he is looking for and I’ll point to it. But he doesn’t know what pointing means so he will just point back at me. If we look at this scene and only see a manger scene... only see heritage or traditions...we become just like James looking at my finger because we don’t see that this narrative exists to point us to something bigger. To Someone bigger.

This is a story about God. About who He is. About His nature and character. So I want us to see what this story points us to. What we can learn about God in the Charlie Brown Christmas story. I think we can see three things very clearly:

- 1) The Providence of God
- 2) The Promise of God
- 3) The Purpose of God

Yes, I alliterated that myself:) And I hope that a better understanding of these aspects of God make Christmas this week all the more special. All the more significant.

I. The Providence of God

When I say the word ‘providence’ I simply mean divine guidance. And we see this divine guidance in the words *this day* and *the city*. *This day* and *the city*. Look at verse 11.

Maybe the most well known part of the story:

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

I love how Luke starts out this story with ‘this day.’ He doesn’t say ‘Once upon a time.’ It isn’t ‘A long, long time ago.’ Those are ways to begin fairy tails and myths. ‘This day’ is how you begin a true historical story. Look at verses 1-3 and see what we can learn about the providence of God in the timing of the birth:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. [2] This was the first registration when(1) Quirinius was governor of Syria. [3] And all went to be registered, each to his own town. (Luke 2:1-3)

All historians, Christian and atheist alike view the timing of Jesus' birth as absolutely pivotal to the success of the religion. Any earlier or later and it might not have been nearly as successful as it was. The main difference is did it occur like this by chance? Or is there a providential hand in all world events to bring about a Savior?

Paul tells the Galatians..

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (Galatians 4:4)

The fullness of time. So how exactly was 'this day' over 2000 years ago now the fullness of time? How were world events coming together in a way that perfectly paves the way for billions of people to claim Jesus as Savior.

1) First was the Pax Romana. The great Roman peace. There was a stability in the world that simply had never existed before. This is the significance of Caesar Augustus. You could travel around from town to town and country to country and tell people about the birth of the Messiah and later His death and resurrection without fear because Caesar Augustus ensured stability and safety empire wide. The peace made it the right time.

2) Secondly, there were the Roman roads. So we had safety, but if there aren't any roads to travel on, the news about Jesus doesn't go anywhere. But the Roman's had connected themselves with the known world through an incredibly advanced network of roads. And I don't mean trails. I have seen these roads. 2000 years later and you could still drive a car on them at a fairly high speed. The roads made it the right time.

3) Thirdly, there was a common language. With everyone traveling and making international business deals, there had to be a way to communicate. Well, in God's great providence, Alexander the Great, just over three hundred years earlier had brought one language to the known world: Greek. The common language made it the right time.

4) And fourthly, The Jews had had time to understand what the Savior would do. They understood the role of the high priest, the role of the king and the role of the prophet. All roles Jesus would fulfill. They also understood the condemnation of the law, and the need for sacrifice. The establishment of the Mosaic law and the completion of the Old Testament made it the right time.

But it wasn't just in the words 'this day' that we see the providence of God. It is also in the words 'this city.' In God's providence, Caesar Augustus ordered a census requiring Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem, the town of their family. Now this might not

sound like a huge deal if you don't know that this was all prophesied by Micah, likely over 700 years earlier.

**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. Micah 5:2**

In God's providence, prophecy is perfectly fulfilled in Jesus being born in Bethlehem. And Jesus was only born there at this precise time because of the order for the census.

So what do you think? Coincidence or providence? I'm convinced the more you study all the tiny and huge 'coincidences' that came together at just the right time, providence begins to be the more logical conclusion.

So why does this matter? How does divine guidance affect your life? It matters because it brings purpose and peace to everything event of your life. It brings purpose in the loss of a job. It brings purpose to failing health. It brings purpose to success. And it brings peace to anxiety, uncertainty and fear.

I'm sure Joseph didn't know what was going on when he was sold into slavery and imprisoned, but as God providence unfolds, we see Joseph move from a prison to the palace and all of Israel saved in the process.

The God of the nativity scene is a God sovereignly guiding the biggest of events in human history and the tiniest events in a barn. All for His glory and our good.

Not only do we see God's providence thought, we also see God's promise.

II. Promise of God

Let's go back to verse 11 again:

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

God keeps His promises in three very specific ways here in this text: 1) A Savior is born, 2) this Savior is the Christ and 3) This Christ is the Lord.

1) A Savior is born. I didn't grow up in Mississippi, but I have lived here for almost eight years now. And no where have I seen so many people acknowledge Jesus as Savior, yet denying that we need saving. I hear students say, "I accepted Jesus as my Savior when I was 8." I then ask how you get into heaven and they say, "obey the ten commandments" or "go to church" or even "do more good than bad." They don't think they need a savior, because they have just told me how they think they can save themselves.

This birth in Luke two only matters if you need saving. So what do we need saving from? We need saving from our sin. Matthew 1:21 says,

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

For many this is a hard thing to hear. I know it's totally normal for many of you, but for many more, this is terribly offensive. It's not easy to hear that we are so bad off in our hearts and our actions that there is nothing we can do to fix things. We are too far gone. We need to be saved from our sin. And our sin is so bad off that it even prevents us from seeing our need to be saved.

But I think if we are all honest with ourselves, we know this is true. And we can trust a God who tells us the truth even when it is hard.

And the mind blowing thing here is that this was all predicted. The verse we just read from Matthew 1 that Jesus will save His people from their sins is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy:

**“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel” Is. 7:14**

The name Immanuel means 'God with us.' Everyone at that time knew that only God could forgive sins. Going to church won't forgive sins. Getting baptized won't forgive sins. Doing enough good won't somehow offset the bad. We have sinned against a holy God and only He could forgive sins. So the Savior had to be a God-man.

Do you realize this is exactly why Jesus was killed? It's crazy to me that so many people call Jesus a good man or a good example, but don't follow their logic to conclusion. a good man wouldn't have been tortured and crucified. The reason Jesus was killed is because He claimed to be God. Remember Pilate's exchange with the Jews at Jesus' trial?

Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.” [7] The Jews(1) answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.” (John 19:6-7)

The apostle Paul calls Jesus the image of the invisible God. And I love that Luke, the diligent historian doesn't stop there. He doesn't only say that we have been given a Savior, secondly, he adds that this Savior is the Christ.

2) God's promise is fulfilled not only in the birth of a Savior, but the coming of the Christ. This word Christ means anointed one. This is the one long-predicted, long-awaited, anointed one above all others in psalm 45. The final anointed King. The final anointed Prophet. The final anointed Priest. Sleeping in quietly in a barn in Bethlehem.

In Him all the promises of God are yes. He would fulfill all the hopes and dreams of godly Israel. And he would do even more. Because He isn't only the Savior. He isn't only the Christ. Thirdly, He is the Lord.

3) **For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ *the Lord*.** This baby is the Lord! The ruler, the sovereign, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father. The Lord of the universe promised so many centuries before by Isaiah:

**For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon(1) his shoulder,
and his name shall be called(2)
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)**

And the birth of this Savior is such good news that the only fitting announcement is the sudden appearance of a multitude of angels singing in the dark to the shepherds. And these angels don't even need saving. How much more should we sing as we sinners gather together to worship our Savior?

Our God has fulfilled his greatest promise to us. He promised and provided a Savior who would choose to trade places with us. Try and imagine that. He lived a perfect life and traded the rewards of that life for the punishment of our rebellion. On Him was laid our sin and on us is laid His reward. That is what the manger scene is pointing to.

I love watching someone process the gospel for the first time and ask, "why? why would Jesus do this?" Well, in this story, we don't only see the providence of God and the promise of God, but also the purpose of God.

III. Purpose of God

And we see the purpose of God in what the angel's sing:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

The purpose of God is simple: His glory. There is no way for me to overstate the influence of John Piper on me in this final point. First and foremost, God is for His glory. And He is glorified, first, because this child has been born and secondly, because peace is spread everywhere this child is received.

The old King James Version translates this verse "and on earth peace, good will toward men." Virtually all modern translations are that this is not an accurate translation. The NIV says, "...and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." The NASB says, "...and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased." And of course we have already seen what the ESV does with that verse.

The point is that even though the offer of peace goes out to all, only those who receive Christ and trust Him as Savior and Messiah and Lord, will experience the peace He brings.

So how do you know if you have this peace? How do you know if you are one of the people that will receive the angels' promise? Simple. You welcome the Peacemaker. You receive Jesus.

My great desire for you is that you experience this peace and all that come with it this Christmas. And I want to finish by showing you three specific relationships where God wants you to pursue and enjoy this peace. 1) Peace with God, 2) Peace with yourself and 3) Peace with others.

It's important to define peace well. Many people think of peace as simply the absence of conflict and animosity, but that alone isn't peace. The peace the angels are talking about also has the presence of joyful tranquility.

So let's look at these three kinds of peace and not make the mistake of separating what the angels kept together: God's glory and the peace we all long for. God's purpose is to give you peace by being the most glorious Person in your life. Do you realize what this means? Peace will only rule in your life if God rules your life.

God rules in our life when we believe that Jesus has made peace possible. Romans 15:13 says:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

And this is true whether we are talking about peace with God, peace with ourselves or peace with others.

1) Of the three kinds of peace, the most basic need we have is peace with God. This is foundational to all of our pursuits of peace. If we don't go here first, all other experiences of peace will be superficial and temporary.

The key passage here is Romans 5:1:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith [there is the pivotal act of believing], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Justified means that God declares you to be just in His sight by imputing to you the righteousness of Jesus. And he does that by faith alone. Not by works. Not by tradition. Not by baptism. Not by church membership. Not by piety or any other thing you can do. When we believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, we are united to Him and His righteousness is counted by God as ours. We are justified by faith.

And the result is peace with God. God's anger at us because of our sin is dealt with. Our rebellion is overcome. God adopts us into His family. And from now on all His dealings with us are for our good. He will never be against us. He will never bring up old stuff. He will forever and without exception be our Father and our Friend. We have peace. And this is the foundation for all other kinds of peace.

2) And because we have peace with God because of being justified by faith, we can begin to grow in the enjoyment of peace with ourselves. We don't have to be paralyzed anymore with guilt or anxiety. God doesn't hold any of our past against us, so why should we?

And I love how Paul says just this to the Philippian church:

Do not be anxious about anything [anxiety is the opposite of peace], **but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God** [send your anxieties to God]. **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)**

The picture here is that our hearts and our minds are under assault. Guilt, worries, threats, confusions, uncertainties - they all threaten our peace. And Paul says that God wants to 'guard' your hearts and minds. He somehow guards our hearts and minds with His peace. How this happens goes beyond what human understanding can handle. But it is God's peace that comes in and gives us peace with ourselves.

Don't limit the peace of God by what your understanding can see. He gives inexplicable peace, supra-rational peace. And He does it when we take our anxieties to Him. When we do this, when we come to Him - and remember that we ALREADY have peace with Him! - and trust Him as our living and almighty heavenly Father to help us, his peace comes to us and steadies us, and protects us from the disabling effects of fear and anxiety and guilt. And then we are able to carry on and our God gets the glory for what we do, because we trusted Him.

Do that this Christmas. Take your anxieties to God. Tell Him about them. Ask Him to help you. To protect you. To restore your peace. And then to use you to make peace.

3) The third relationship where God wants us to enjoy his peace is in our relationships with other people. This is the one we have least control over. So we need to say it carefully the way Paul does in Romans 12:18.

If possible, so far as it depends you, live peaceably with all.

For many of you when you get together with family for Christmas, there will be some awkward and painful relationships. Some of the pain is very old. Some of it might be new. In some relationships you know what you have to do, no matter how hard it is. And in some of them you are baffled and don't know what the path of peace calls for.

In both cases the key is trusting the promises of God with a deep awareness of how he forgave you through Christ. No where is this more clear than Ephesians 4:31-32:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Especially at Christmas we need to continually cultivate a sense of amazement that in spite of all your sins, God has forgiven you through Christ. Be amazed that you have peace with God. It's this sense of amazement, that I, a sinner have peace with God, that makes the heart tender, kind and forgiving. Extend this to others seventy times seven.

It may be thrown back in your face. It certainly was thrown back in Jesus' face on the cross. That hurts and it can make you bitter if you let it. But don't let it. Keep being more

amazed that your wrongs are forgiven than that you are wronged. Be amazed that you have peace with God. You have peace with your soul. Your guilt is taken away.

Conclusion:

Do you see how much the manger scene in Luke two is showing us? What it's pointing to. To a God who is in control of all things. Who uses the most significant and insignificant events and people to accomplish His purposes that He announced would happen hundreds of years before they did. That He would be glorified through the birth of a baby who would bring us what we most deeply long for: peace.

Let that story change you this Christmas because you know what it is really saying.