

# Christmas Eve Service

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening. Welcome to Christmas Eve at One Harbor Church. Tonight we're going to be looking at Luke chapter 2 and telling the Christmas story with some brief reflections as well as singing some Christmas songs together.

We certainly hope when we sing, your whole family joins in together as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Luke chapter 2. In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.

Because there was no place for them in the inn. And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them.

[ 1 : 07 ] And the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were filled with great fear. Jesus was born into the same messed up world that we were born into.

His family was from Nazareth, but he wasn't born in Nazareth. He was born in Bethlehem. That means that even though Mary was nine months pregnant, they had to travel. Nobody wants to travel at nine months pregnant.

But the king said they had to do it, so they had to do it. But it wasn't the Jewish king that said this. It was the Roman emperor who demanded this. A decree went out from Caesar, it says, that the world should be registered.

See, the Jewish people were conquered by a foreign government. They couldn't make decisions for themselves. They were required to be registered. And so Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem for the census.

And this census was not to collect demographic data so that the government could make sure that the poor people of Israel received adequate social services. No, this registration was to make sure that nobody got missed when the tax man came around so that the rich and powerful Caesar could get even more rich and powerful, often at the expense of the poor and the weak.

[ 2 : 16 ] That means that Jesus was born into the same world of taxes and oppressive government powers that you and I live in. The kind of government that makes you travel when you're nine months pregnant.

Because Jesus was born as one of us to endure the same kinds of things that we endure in this world which is broken by sin. Ironically, though, it was this uncomfortable journey to Bethlehem which seemed like the kind of thing a king should never have to do with his pregnant mother.

It was actually what proved his kingship. We read in the prophetic passage of Micah 5.2, And so this humble place, Bethlehem, which was too little to count much at all, would be at the center of God's kingdom breaking into this world.

We can see that Jesus is the ruler of Israel whose coming is from ancient days. He's the Messiah, and we know this not in spite of his lowly birth, but actually because of it.

See, God's king was always going to be different than the kings of this world. As if an uncomfortable, fully pregnant journey to Bethlehem wasn't enough for a lowly birth, to add insult to injury, the inn was full and our king would be laid in the feeding trough fit for animals.

[ 3 : 42 ] It's always interesting to me that the story of the birth of God's king begins by first mentioning the world's king, Caesar. But the contrast between these two kings couldn't be greater.

Caesar, of course, had more power and more wealth and more authority than anyone on earth. Some even worshipped him as a god. And he's mentioned at the beginning of the story right off the bat, but then the story moves past him and he won't be mentioned again because there's a new king in town.

And even though everything in the whole world of that day revolved around Caesar, God is telling us it's not that way anymore. From God's point of view, Caesar actually plays a very minor role in the world.

The story of the world is truly the story about Jesus. The true king of the world is the one lying in the manger. In fact, even the shepherds are more important in this story than Caesar.

The angels could have appeared to anyone, after all. They could have appeared to the rulers of the Roman Empire and announced, there's a new king in this world, O Caesar. But they didn't. They could have appeared to King Herod, who was the official representative of the Jewish people before Caesar.

[ 4 : 48 ] But they didn't appear to him. They could have appeared to the Pharisees or to the religious leaders of the day to let them know that their religious king was coming. Or at least they could have appeared to the good and faithful Jews worshipping at the temple.

But they didn't appear to any of those people. They came to these shepherds. In that day, shepherding was the job you did when you couldn't find a respectable job because you weren't a respectable person, at least in the eyes of the world.

But God says over and over again in Scripture that he is no respecter of persons. Jesus was born in a lowly place, and he was born for lowly people.

Of course, Jesus was born for all people, but it seems very clear that he was poor and born poor with a special eye towards those that society leaves out, with a preferential option towards the not very respectable and the lowly.

God is much less impressed with the wealth and power of this world than we are. And if we will be those that hear the good news of the birth of the world's true king, then we must hear that good news as lowly people.

[ 5 : 56 ] Diedrich Bonhoeffer said, May the humility of our king humble us as we hear this good news of his birth.

Come and stand, amaze you people. See how God is reconciled.

See his plans of love accomplished. See his gift, this newborn child. See the mighty weak and tender.

See the word who now is mute. See the sovereign without splendor. See the foolish destitute. See him.

[ 7 : 21 ] Creation rules the wind by His commands.

You see Him lying in a manger without sign of reasoning. Word of God to flesh surrender.

Be His wisdom's crown, our King. Oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh.

Oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh. Oh, Jesus, God incarnate.

Who assumed this humble form. Counsel me and let my wishes to your perfect will conform  
Light and life dispel my darkness  
Let your frailty strengthen me  
Let your weakness give me boldness  
Let your burden set me free  
Oh, amen, you will my Savior  
Let your death be life for me  
Oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh  
So let your meekness give me boldness

[ 9 : 18 ] Let your burden set me free  
Oh, amen, you will my Savior  
Let your death be life for me  
Oh, oh, oh Oh, let it be life for me  
We look to you, Jesus  
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  
For unto you is born this day  
in the city of David a Savior  
Who is Christ the Lord  
And this will be a sign for you  
You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes  
and lying in a manger  
And suddenly there was with the angel  
a multitude of the heavenly host  
Praising God and saying, glory to God  
in the highest  
And on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased

And so God gives this incredible, wonderful, amazing birth announcement  
And it's all saying this  
Jesus was born to save his people and bring peace on earth  
Now on first read through it might look like God is this proud parent  
And really wants to show it  
Come, look at my boy  
And when kids are born, we get that as parents  
We want everyone to share in our joy, right?

Our announcements, right? We make them and we want people to like  
Ooh and ah over our kids  
Over our newborns  
But what we see in this birth announcement is something very different  
See,

God's son Jesus, he was being born for our sake This was good news for everyone This birth announcement is much more than just an invitation to go look at a cute baby An army of angels break out into a gospel choir over these awe-filled shepherds And they're singing this Glory to God in the highest Peace on earth And this wasn't done for its entertainment value No, this was a declaration of restoration and redirection Their song was declaring a restoration of peace But it was also declaring something It was a redirection of glory And the two are inseparable See, peace is tied to who and what we give glory to And this all started with Adam and Eve in the garden They sought the glory only reserved for God They sought a glory that they could take with their own hands By their own effort And what has been the result of that?

Well, definitely not peace on earth We live in a world where we seek glory for ourselves This is the normal Consider this quote from a relatively recent thought leader That shaped modern culture If human beings are ever to reach their full potential They must realize that they should really ascribe the glory they give to God To themselves And our cultural moment we live in has been built on this foundation We long to be great We long to be significant And to have supreme value And that's what it means for you and I to ascribe glory to ourselves But let's be honest We don't want this glory in a vacuum We want others to see it and recognize it So that they will glory in us But what has all this glory directed toward people in creation gotten us?

[ 12 : 54 ] Well, again, definitely not peace on earth If you look at the arc of history It's a repeated song of man-made heroes That we put our hope in That we glory in It's a sonnet of sinking glory for ourselves And all the while we are blinded to the fact That we are just repeating Adam and Eve's original sin All the while expecting a different result So this song that we look at That the angels are singing at Jesus' birth Is remarkable It is an interruption to the unbroken chorus of humanity It is the redirection of glory to God alone And so it follows then That it is also the restoration of peace on earth But this change in direction of glory Is impossible for us to do on our own We cannot pull it off Because it requires a change of heart And that's something that we can't get to

With our own hands and our own effort Or any surgical tools Those things are worthless And our hearts What they do is They will always drift away From giving glory to God alone So we needed a savior And this is the great announcement God sent his son Jesus to save us He sent his son to save us So we could have a new heart A heart that burns For the glory of God alone And this salvation goes even further What it does It brings us back into favor with God Just like the angels sang Among those with whom he is pleased God is pleased with us Because Jesus is our savior Jesus our savior means that God's favor is restored to us His glory resonates in our hearts His peace rules our hearts And so we can join with the angels In a new song Glory to God in the highest And let's join with the angels And sing glory to Jesus our savior

Lord Jesus our savior And let's join the angels Hark the herald angels sing Glory to the newborn king Peace on earth and mercy mild God and sinners reconciled Joyful all ye nations rise Join the triumph of the skies Joyful all ye nations rise Join the triumph of the skies We evangelic hosts proclaim Christ is born in Bethlehem Hark the herald angels sing Glory to the newborn king Christ is born in Bethlehem Oh the newborn king Christ by highs heaven adored

Christ the everlasting Lord In time behold him come Offspring of the favored one Veld in flesh by Godhead see Held the incarnate deity Peace is man who has been to dwell Jesus our Emmanuel Hark the herald angels sing Glory to the newborn king Jesus we worship you For you are worthy Hail the heaven born prince of peace

Hail the son of righteousness Life and life through all he brings risen with healing in his ways Mild he lays his glory by Born and man no more may die Born to raise the sons of birth Born to give you the second birth Hark the herald angels sing Glory to the newborn king For you I bail bail bail When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

[ 18 : 19 ] Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger.

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them, but Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart and the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

And so we want to take this piece of the Christmas story that we're celebrating this time of year. And now we want to talk about how Jesus' birth leads us to worship. This is a lesson about worship.

This is what we call to be if we know Jesus as our King and our Savior. Well, actually, all mankind is called to worship Him. And for those of us who know Him, it makes a big difference to us.

So worship is meant to be our primary attitude. It's our primary activity. It's the way that we love on God and enjoy Him. And everything we do actually should be worshiped Him.

[ 19 : 21 ] It's not just about songs that we sing, but it's every action. It's living a sacrificial life. It's to be consecrated and holy to Him as His willing subjects in His kingdom.

It means to agree to lose our rights, lay down self, pick up the cross daily and follow Him. And I guarantee we've been challenged in those areas over this year in very difficult ways.

And so I want to pull out a few things from the story. And number one is this. They cease being afraid and find joy and security in Jesus. 2020, what a crazy year. And one of the biggest factors has been fear.

It's been COVID. It's been the election that's brought that, the economy, riots, our kids in school, and so much more. The shepherds, the story told us, they were fearful in front of this group of angels.

But they have to lift their eyes to get out of that state of fear. And we have to too. We could look to the vaccine. We could look to the family times we're going to enjoy over Christmas.

[ 20 : 20 ] The break that we're going to have from the craziness of life. The good food we're going to eat. The nice presents, hopefully, we're going to get. But we can't lift our eyes to something and lose our fear.

We've got to look to someone as they did. That person is Jesus. Secondly, they follow the angels' instructions. They search for Jesus until they find Him. Nothing is going to stop them.

Nothing. Nothing. What stops you and me searching and finding Jesus? And you say, well, Tom, how are we going to do that? We have all these tools. Fellowshiping with one another. Spending time in praise to the King.

Time in prayer when I drive from where I live to here to do stuff at the office. I spend a lot of time praying. I find Him. He's there with me in the car in my heart. The Word, digging into the Word and discovering truth.

And, you know, the Word's like a photo album of who He is and what He can do. And then it puts us in that photo album as well. Eastern North Carolina, the nature here. Are there not too many places around the world that are as beautiful as this?

[ 21 : 22 ] And then that small voice, when He comes and talks to us with His small voice. We can find that whenever we want. We've got to go find Him. Number three, they tell others about the experience, sharing the invitation to worship Jesus.

We've all got stories about all sorts of things we can tell. But the story that lifts our soul and edifies is when we tell the good news of Jesus Christ to our kids, to our wife, to ourselves, to unsaved friends and family.

Number four, they return to carry on their work. Their work seems really mundane to us. They were shepherds. They maybe weren't that wealthy, looking after a bunch of little sheep. But we don't just hang out with Jesus.

We go back to where we come from because there's a mission for us there. And they were looking after the little sheep that were slaughtered on the days of sacrifice. That the blood that those little sheep would spill would pay for the sins of those who brought the sheep and paid for them to be sacrificed.

It wasn't that mundane. It was helping people restore their relationship to God. And when I go to work, wherever that might be, when you go to work, wherever that might be, telling the story of Jesus is not mundane work.

[ 22 : 31 ] It's the most important work. There's a bigger story to tell. And then the last point, we see that Mary pondered everything that she was told. And she matures. As you watch, it says often that she pondered different things about Jesus.

When he was at the temple, she pondered these things in her heart. And so in the story, she's a very young lady, has her first baby, and then you get her standing before the cross. And she's this mature, Jesus-loving woman, heartbroken but understanding God's ways.

And we need to take time to ponder. These shepherds would have pondered this. And they would think, man, these little sheep that we're slaughtering for the sacrifice. Now we get it. We've seen the one who is the true shepherd, who's going to be the true paschal lamb.



it is.

Often, once you have it, you usually start wanting something else. I don't know if you've ever met a hero who turned out to not be so heroic. People, in particular, don't often live up to our expectations. And so much of life's brokenness and pain come from that, come from us expecting something out of someone, only to be really let down. Which is what makes Jesus so unique.

He's the one person who, the closer you get to him, you realize he only gets bigger and he only gets better. Jesus' followers said after years, years of doing life together, every day, eating likely every meal, sleeping nearby, camping nearby each other, for years.

[ 31 : 36 ] Jesus' followers said to Jesus, you have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know you are the Holy One of God.

What are they saying? Well, we believe in the beginning, but as we've spent these years, day in and day out with you, it has only confirmed what we believed in the beginning. We have come to know you are the Holy One of God.

Years of daily, nightly interactions left him to only believe more that Jesus was God. Now, my wife has spent a lot of the last 13 and a half years with me, most days and most nights, and I feel certain that her assessment of me would not be, you are God.

It's like, it's laughable. I mean, the more she's gotten to know me, the more that, I mean, any concept of what, I mean, the reality really sinks in after all these years. Often, the more we get to know people, the more we realize how disappointingly human we all are, all of us struggling in some way or another, but not Jesus.

He is the exception. Jesus does not fail to meet our expectations. In fact, Jesus always exceeds our expectations. And Simeon sees Jesus, and immediately he says, this is the consolation of Israel.

[ 32 : 54 ] The consolation, we use that word console to comfort. He's saying, this isn't just a comfort, a consolation. This is the consolation. And not just of me, but of Israel.

Then he goes on to say, in the Gentiles, like the whole world, no matter how far you are from God, this is the consolation. This is the comfort of God. The consolation, the hope of God, that God would rescue his people, that he would bring joy, that he would bring comfort, that he would bring salvation.

Simeon picks up baby Jesus, and in the moment sees all of that. In the last battle of the Chronicles of Narnia, there's a mysterious stable. And when you go into that stable, it actually leads into a whole other world.

And one of the characters says, it's bigger than it is on the outside. It's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. And then Lucy responds, the little girl, she says, in our world too, there was a stable once that had something inside of it that was bigger than our whole world.

And that's this moment that's happening here. Jesus is the one who even as a baby is bigger than the whole world. And then Jesus, as he grows up, only goes on to confirm this bigness, his magnificence all the way to the cross.

[ 34 : 11 ] We've been let down a lot this year, and we need hope more than ever. But not just hope in things that once we get them, we'll just start looking on Amazon for the next thing.

Not even people who will inevitably, even if they mean the best, will inevitably let us down. We need to put our hope on someone that can deliver. And Jesus is that someone.

He's the someone who always exceeds our expectations. The more you get to know him, the more you realize how amazing he is. He is our consolation, our comfort, and he does not disappoint.

And whatever Simeon was longing for, he didn't get to see the fulfillment of all that. He didn't get to live to see all of these things work themselves out. He saw Jesus as a baby, but then what he said was, he said that everything was gonna be put right.

He said that peace could now come to him. He could live in peace because he had seen Jesus.

He'd just gotten a glimpse, and just that glimpse of Jesus meant that Simeon knew everything was gonna be all right.

[ 35 : 18 ] Like Simeon, we too are longing for, I think, really a lot of the same things. Hope and peace and joy and comfort and salvation. And like with Simeon, we're not likely to see everything change in our own lifetime.

But like Simeon, we have seen Jesus. If we have seen Jesus for who he really is, man, we can live in this world at peace. We don't get to see everything transformed necessarily before our eyes, but because we have seen Jesus for who he is, we can have peace.

He's what we're all waiting for, and in him is the fulfillment of all our expectations. So let's, together, let's turn to him. Let's fix our gaze on him. For some of you, maybe you're right at the beginning. Maybe you are just kind of checking Christianity out, just exploring who this Jesus really is. And maybe this is kind of like that Simeon moment where you just, you're starting, you see him for the first time, and there's just this glimpse of there's something more to this, this man than meets the eye.

For some of us, we are like those disciples who years down the road, we believed at one point, but man, we've come to know, we've come to know he is indeed the Holy One of God.

[ 36 : 35 ] Wherever you're at on that journey, let's turn to Jesus now. This Jesus who, as we said, was born in lowliness for lowly people who born to save his people and bring peace on earth, whose birth leads us to worship, who fills our greatest expectations.

Let's turn our hearts and our attention to him as we close. Let me pray for us. Jesus, help us to see you for who you really are. This year has pushed us and pushed us in so many ways, and some of us feel desperately in need of hope, and some of us may have drifted into a kind of cynicism, a kind of just giving up.

Simeon was still holding on to hope, but likely there were many others who had just thought, God must have forgotten us. And then Jesus comes, and he's more than anyone could ever imagine. Jesus, would you reveal yourself to all of us in new ways, in powerful ways. We honor you. We look to you. We're so thankful for you. Be our comfort.

Be our consolation. And then this message wasn't just meant to stay with Simeon or even the people of Israel. Right away we see it was meant to go to the Gentiles.

[ 37 : 47 ] It was meant to go to those who no one ever thought would come to God. Lord, we pray that as we see you for who you are, you would use us to point others to you.

People who right now in our family, our friends, our neighbors who are far from you that as we find more and more, we find out how amazing you are, you would use us to show them as well.

In Jesus' name, amen. Have a great Christmas, guys. We love you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.