

# The Deep, Quiet Joy of Christmas

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Take your Bibles and go to Luke 2 as we are going to be covering some expositional messages on the coming of Christ, the Incarnation, well, all the way through December 24, and we come to Luke 2 this morning, we will look at verses 1 through 7. I entitled this exposition "The Deep, Quiet Joy of Christmas." Luke 2, beginning in verse 1,

1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Some introductory thoughts, first of all. Some joys, in fact the deepest joys, are often quiet joys. Under common grace, we see it with any mom and any newborn child as that little newborn baby nuzzles up to his or her mom. There is just something wondrous about that. There is something blessed there and something that's beyond words. How much more this mother in our text this morning. This is Mary. She's a virgin. She's with child by the Holy Spirit and she has been through quite an ordeal. By the decree of Caesar Augustus, she and her betrothed husband, Joseph, are ordered to go to the city of Joseph's ancestral birth, and there while they are in that city, Bethlehem, she finds a place to have her child in a cattle stall and she lays this child in a feed trough. She realizes, she has heard it from the angels, she understands the Old Testament prophecy, that this is not just any child, this is God Incarnate, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Later in our text next time, the Bible says Mary treasured these things. She pondered them in her heart.

Now this is a very different kind of joy she is experiencing now than what she experienced a few months earlier when she ran to her relative, Elizabeth's house. Elizabeth finds out she's miraculously conceived and she is caring John the Baptist, the

forerunner of the Savior, and Mary has found out she has conceived and she is going to give birth to the Lord God Savior himself, and they have just an exuberant praise and celebration of joy there together. But this is very different. This is more of a deep, quiet, contemplative joy and that's a part of Christmas joy for us. When you are converted and the Spirit of God lives in you, there will be times when the things of God revealed by the Spirit are so marvelous and so holy that the capacity to comprehend and properly express your emotions will just be brought to a profound stoppage. This is true often when the Spirit is revealing the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Incarnation is certainly one of those truths that brings us to such a place of wonder and awe that silence is all you can express. It's a Spirit-wrought, deep, quiet joy.

In 1818, a monk in Austria captured something of the awe of this moment and how we contemplate on it and he wrote a song for the Christmas Eve service to be accompanied by a guitar and he wrote "Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright. Round yon virgin, mother and child. Holy infant, so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace." Now Christmas should have some real exuberance about it. Christmas should have some outward expression and certainly celebration but there are times at Christmas when it's only proper to worship in a deep, quiet joy.

As we unpack the text here, let me give you this big picture of what's happening here. In 1 Peter 2:6, the Bible says, "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." Jesus is born on this night and in his birth is the laying of the corner stone. It's the corner stone of another kingdom. Jesus is the stone made not by human hands. His kingdom is in this world but his kingdom is not of this world. All the spiritual leaders of the day clambered toward Jerusalem. It was the cultural, intellectual and thought to be the spiritual center of the world, but in Jerusalem where men traveled to seek the will of God and the hand of God and to find God's kingdom, God was not really active at all. Yet at this time God was at work in tiny insignificant Bethlehem where he was laying his immutable, unthwartable, eternal kingdom through a corner stone. All the pieces were coming together and God on this first Christmas night was laying the foundation of his eternal kingdom. No, not in Jerusalem but in Bethlehem. The Lord of the kingdom is born, born of a lowly virgin, and laid in a trough for feeding livestock.

You say, well, he did not come as a king. No dignitary has welcomed his arrival. No royal palaces furnished his stay. He had no throne to sit on, no sceptre to hold in his hand, no court to rule with or no empire, at least humanly speaking, to reign over. It was just a common man named Joseph and a common woman named Mary and some common barn animals and a feed trough for his bed, and he comes almost completely unnoticed. You see, he comes first as the corner stone. On this first Christmas night, the corner stone was laid just as the prophets foretold. Later on the cross at Calvary, the corner stone will be set and secured. Then three days after his death, it will be beautified and glorified as he exits the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

His kingdom will be built upon the work of his church, that's where we come in, and the preaching of his Gospel. Then at the set time, he's going to return again not as the corner

stone but at the second time he'll come as the crushing stone. Remember in Daniel 2:44 through 46, Daniel is asked to interpret a dream that Nebuchadnezzar has. Nebuchadnezzar knows not what this image means, an image with a head of gold, and chest and arms of silver, and a belly and thighs of brass, and legs and feet of iron and clay. Well, each of those pieces of metal represent different kingdoms that ruled the world, and here's what Daniel says, "In the time of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed." Whose kingdom is it that will never be destroyed? It's Jesus' kingdom, this corner stone, born the first Christmas night. Nor it, "will not be left for another people; it will crush," all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, "but it will itself endure forever." This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of the mountain but not by human hands, a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy. Jesus is the corner stone laid in a manger, corner stone of a new kingdom and he is coming again one day to be the crushing stone that will consume all others. When you take all this in, but he's born in insignificant Bethlehem, even in a barn stall and his mom is just a little Jewish girl, his bed was a feed trough, but he's the corner stone and the crushing stone of the eternal kingdom of God. Sometimes when you contemplate these things, God leaves you with just a deep, quiet joy.

Two points. I. The precision of providence. God is at work. He is bringing all this together as he sees fit. First of all, verse 1 of our text says, "Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus." In those days. That means more than just in those days, it means at the exact appointed set time from the foundation of the world. As Paul says in Galatians 4:4, "in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son." That means at the precise moment divine providence ordained, Jesus was born. You see, Jesus is not only the centerpiece of all history, Jesus is the centerpiece of the entire universe of all that is. In his person, he is center of the universe. In his coming, he's the centerpiece of history. As Colossians 1:18 reminds us, in all things he must have the preeminence. When Jesus came to the earth, it was the most brilliant time in history, the exact time God had precisely ordained in his providence.

Then verse 1 says not only in those days, it says a decree went out. Now, this didn't just happen, God brought all of this to pass. You see, history is the story of his glory. God is orchestrating all of the events of history for his perfect ends and for his own exceeding glory and what great glory is under God in the story of the birth of his Son, Jesus Christ. God works through the sovereign decree of an earthly tyrant, Caesar Augustus, and what an instrument this Caesar Augustus is. Think about it: he's the first of the Roman Caesars; he's the most morally corrupt man you could imagine; he's a treacherous man; he's a man given to pagan superstitions. Historians tell us Caesar Augustus rose every morning before the sun came up to worship his idols. He is full of vanity and ambition. He's an exceedingly cruel man. He had 500 members of his own court murdered because he thought they might be out to get him. He's an egomaniac. Once when he lost a battle at sea, he had Neptune, the god of the sea, taken out into the ocean and drowned. It sounds like people today, doesn't it? "Jesus doesn't fit my agenda. Jesus is out." Well, that's the way Caesar Augustus was. He had all these Greek gods and if they didn't help him out

the way he liked for them to help him out, he would just get rid of them. So we have this egomaniac tyrant who issues a decree simply and solely for the advancement of his own reign and for the extension of his own glory, yet he, in effect, is serving a lowly, pregnant, Jewish girl in the high purposes of the one true God. By the web of providence, a monarchy, a kingdom begins that will one day absorb Caesar Augustus and Rome and every other kingdom that has ever existed. You see, Caesar Augustus here is but an unintentional official in the kingdom of God.

Verse 2 tells us he issued a decree that all had to go to his home town for the census. Not a taxing, taxing was the result of it, but for the census. This was all just to demonstrate what power he had. "Watch me make all these people leave where they are and go to their home towns." And it gave them an opportunity to show their allegiance to him, Caesar Augustus.

In verse 3, we see Joseph, a descendant of David, had to travel to register to the birthplace of his forefather, David. And Mary, of course, goes along with him. She is very very with child. She could give birth at any day. It's highly likely the journey from Galilee down to Bethlehem below Jerusalem took about a week, about 90 miles of travel. You think your pregnancy is hard, she could give birth at any time, she is riding on a camel, she is walking and probably sleeping on the side of the road traveling with her husband, Joseph, to Bethlehem.

Van Doren speaks of what glory is shined forth in the divine providence of all of this. He says we see divine power in the Incarnation. We see divine wisdom in the time and the place and the circumstance of Jesus' birth. We see divine faithfulness that came at the fullness of time, the exact time God ordained. We see divine holiness in that God hid this from everyone but Joseph and Mary. We see divine love in that the driving force of everything God is doing was his love for sinners. So we see the precision of providence in all of this.

Summarizing, we see a pagan tyrant's decree. A common poor couple, Joseph and Mary. A journey to their ancestral homeland, Bethlehem. And all participants are in the hands of providence to achieve God's perfect end and to bring him glory. When you take all this in, it's just beyond words. It's just unfathomable. It just causes the true saying of God to be filled with such awe and such reverence but the only thing fitting is a deep, quiet joy.

II. The perfection of prophecy. The perfection of prophecy. Beginning in verse 4, the Bible says, "Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David." So here they go, Joseph and Mary, from the region of Galilee to Bethlehem. So here comes the humble carpenter representing the royal house of David. Bethlehem is six miles south of Jerusalem. Bethlehem is where King David tended his father's sheep. Bethlehem was where David was anointed king of Israel. But by the time of Joseph and Mary, Bethlehem had lost all significance. It wasn't much more than a wide spot in the road, if that much, maybe with a caution light.

But the prophecy said this is what would happen. Micah 5:2, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little," too little, "to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." Who possibly could be born in too little Bethlehem who was such a King that his days are recorded for eternity? No man is from eternity. Only the Christ child could fulfill that prophecy. The precision of prophecy.

Verse 4 reminds us that Joseph was of the house of the family of David. Of course, the Savior, the Messiah, had to come from the line of David. Isaiah 9:7 speaks of him reigning on the throne of David. Jeremiah 33:15, he is a righteous branch that sprouts from the line of David, or from David's line. And as Revelation 22:16 reminds us, he is the root and the offspring of David. He is the bright and morning star.

Now look at verse 5. They are traveling, they are leaving Galilee, they are going to tiny, insignificant, wide place in the road Bethlehem because that's the ancestral homeland of Joseph. That's where King David was from, verse 5, "in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child." So it was lust for power and control and for his own glory that drove Caesar Augustus to impose a decree that sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, but in doing this, he, Caesar, unconsciously serves not the decree of Rome but the decree of heaven. From the regions of heaven, this one of transcendent holiness, absolute authority, and invincible power, is born to a poor virgin, literally wrapped in scrap strips of cloth and he is laid in a feed trough. Does not the wonder and glory of it all rush through our hearts with crushing humility and at the same time with resplendent joy? A poor young girl confined to a cliffside shelter for animals in the throes of childbirth? That would evoke the pity and the sympathy of any human observer, but to understand that this was the King of glory, the Lord God Almighty, this is beyond a human mind to grasp for all emotions to embrace and weak tongues to declare. If we were there, would we not just bow in worshipful silence?

The birth of Christ speaks of a lot of things but here's a truth I want us to think on. Hebrews 11:38 I think gives us an insight here. Hebrews 11:38 speaks of men of whom the world is not worthy, men who wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. What's it talking about? Well, these men wandered about in the desert and slept in caves and holes in the ground not because these men were unworthy but because they were godly prophets of God and the world was unworthy of them. The world didn't deserve them and I think that's something we learn here. This one born this night in Bethlehem is beyond the tarnished dignities and the so-called excellencies of this world. His holy dignity exceeds the treasures of this world. He is one of whom the world simply is not worthy.

So he comes into this world not with ceremony and not with celebration but in meekness and in obscurity. The innkeeper could not find it in his heart to find a place for this expecting mother and her soon to be born newborn baby, but this was not ultimately the decision of the innkeeper. The Lord of glory is the highest of honor and the innkeeper was not worthy of his presence. But none are. No wonder the angel Gabriel told Mary in chapter 1, verse 30, "You have found favor with the Lord." No wonder her relative,

Elizabeth, exclaimed to Mary in chapter 1, verse 42, "Blessed are you among women." Joseph and Mary, the only humans privileged to welcome the arrival of the Redeemer King, Joseph and Mary being educated in Old Testament prophecy and receiving the promises of the angel concerning the birth of Christ, treasured these moments more than a lifetime of worldly treasures and pleasures.

Then finally we come to verse 7, "And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." One author said Jesus being born there in that, it's actually a cutout in the side of a rock hill that they made a livestock stall out of, him being born there means he has already consecrated all the hard places you and I would journey in following him.

In Luke 14, Jesus gives a parable of a banquet and he invites all these guests, and in inviting these guests, one man says, "Well, I would come to your banquet but I bought some land and I need to go and check on the land I bought." Another said, "Well, I would come to your invitation but I bought some oxen and I need to test out the oxen." Another said, "Well, I would come, I would receive your invitation and come to the banquet but I have taken a wife and I need to care for my wife." And in that the Lord said, "Well, go out into the highways and the hedges and invite the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame." Then in verse 22 the slave master said, "Well, I've done that. What you said has been done and yet there is still room." The innkeeper had no room, the world most of the time has no room for him, but in his heart there is room for any who will repent and believe.

When we begin to take in all the holy wonder and glory of his birth and the reason he came in such a way, that he might in grace save us all from the miry pit and the throes of sin, we can't help but be cast into a wondrous state of deep, quiet joy. Some of the greatest moments of worship when it's just you and God and in your heart as you meditate on the truth as the Spirit reveals it from the text, there is just nothing to be said. It's too marvelous. It's too wonderful. It's too holy. And you are slain with a deep and quiet joy and that's part of the joy of Christmas. And all the business and all the brightness and all the noise and all the celebration, may you have those moments this year where you marvel, marvel in quietness at the wisdom and the power and the beauty of God in sending his Son to save us.