

Christ the Lord • Luke 2:1–14

Ryan Perz • December 24, 2023

One of the men who influenced my life would always go back to a key question: “How have you seen God at work?”

- It’s a good question to ask regularly.
- It’s a great question to ask when looking at the Bible.

We are looking at the Christmas story from Luke’s pen this morning.

Luke shows us how God’s work is utterly amazing — faith increasing work.

- Ch 1—has two miraculous births (Elizabeth and Mary)
- The entire Christmas story, the story of Jesus birth, is the story of God’s work. Down to every detail, our text today is proof of it.

In Jesus’s birth, God works through a decree to display and declare the gospel for his glory.

—God works through a decree

—God works in a display

—God works by a declaration

God works through a decree (1-7)

- One of the overlooked characters in the Christmas story is Caesar—yet even God was at work through this man who held the most power in those days.
- Caesar is a title for Roman Emperor -- this is Roman emperor Octavian.
- The census would have been ordered for military and tax purposes.
- The average Jew saw it as a way that a foreign power oppressed God’s people .

- For Mary and Joseph, this would have been a 90 mile trip (about 3 days).

Some details have been embellished.

E.G. You may have imagined or seen on a film that Mary and Joseph was going from one vacant hotel to the next; that they finally land in the barn to deliver the baby.

The word translated “inn” can mean guest room (same in 22:11).

Likely a relative’s house and it was already full when they arrived.

For us: every detail has a purpose and is God’s Work.

- There is almost a subtle irony in Caesar’s character.
- To appreciate this, we need to know how highly people viewed Caesar.

—The poet Virgil “the son of the Deified, who will make the Golden Age again”.

—Caesar liked to flatter himself, and said “I found Rome bricks, and I made them marble”.
(Sproul)

But here in the text, ironically, he plays such a minor role, and God’s Providence overshadows.

Proverbs 21:1 ESV

The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD;
he turns it wherever he will.

**God’s Providence reminds us that he is the true governor of the world.

The same hand of Providence at work then, still works now—and this helps us avoid “candyland theology”.

(Article from Pittsburgh City Paper *Candyland: A horrible metaphor of life’s mundanity*)

The article tries to convince why CandyLand is the most depressing game one can play.

“The game requires no reading, and minimal counting skills...there is no strategy involved...the winner is predetermined by a shuffle of the decks...”

Article closes:

“The more I think about the game, the more I appreciate it. It actually mirrors life quite well...your vacation may be ruined by rain..., you may hate your chosen career, you may burn that dinner. Life is really just flipping the top card off the deck and making the best of what you got”.

Without seeing a God at work through providence, I guess that is all we got.

- God’s Providence was guiding Joseph to Bethlehem.

The specific reason that God’s providence guides them to Bethlehem is for a specific reason.

—Ancient prophecy that awaits:

Micah 5:2 ESV

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 5:4-5 (ESV)

And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD,

in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great

to the ends of the earth.

And he shall be their peace.

There is much packed into this promise.

- People like Joseph and Mary felt that the peace that Rome offered was veneer. When God brings about this peace ...there will be true peace.

He ...the Messiah...shall be their peace.

When we say “God at work” we are talking about his hand of providence guiding.

It’s not an abstract thing but should give us a sense of personal peace that he brings by his hand.

He is not a chaotic god who has organization failures.

God’s work of providence is meant to bring his people peace.

The reformer Martin Luther used to have to continually tell a friend who easily got anxious:
Cease trying to govern the world.

› *That might be a word for a few of you—*

Isaiah 26:3 ESV

You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.

God works in a display (8-9; 13)

- One of the striking things about the birth of Jesus is whom God chooses to let in.
- It’s not the well-known, higher-ups. In those days, shepherds were viewed as strange — they spent too much time alone, out in the pasture, awake at night.

*The shepherds were not the elite, influences of the day; they were the nobody’s.

Francis Schaeffer said that in God’s work, “there are no little people, no little places”.

The Christmas story proves that.

- V8. God's work is small and overlooked. V9—shows us the display.
- Even though God comes to the ordinary, notice that there is nothing casual about this encounter.
- Think about it. To be a shepherd, you need one thing: courage.

It's been observed that people fall into two types of personalities: fight or flight.

You can't be a shepherd with a flight wiring—you have to be ready to take that club against wolves or thieves.

- When the glory of the Lord shines....*they were filled with great fear.* (NASB: terribly frightened)

My wife made a keen observation once that there is probably an overlooked 3rd category in danger: fight, flight, but also faint.

- › That gets us pretty close to what happens when frail creation meets the awesome display of God!

None of us would stand casually (like some do in worship), if God's glory was truly on display.

You would not have time to grab your phone to start a video: we would all be terribly frightened/paralyzed with fear.

God works by a declaration (10-12)

- A strong declaration is sandwiched between the heavenly display.
- Notice that the great joy is set in contrast to great fear.

Good news is gospel: It's defined at the end of Luke.

Luke 24:46–47 (ESV)

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

› Main ingredients: Death and resurrection; repentance and forgiveness; a gospel that must go out...not stay hidden.

• 3 Titles for Jesus:

—Savior: deliverer

—Christ (messiah): king

—Lord: master/ruler

It's been said before:

—If our main problem was financial, God would have sent an economist.

—If our main problem was mental, a psychologist.

—If our main problem was boredom, an entertainer.

—If our main problem was organizational, an administrator.

› *But our main problem is sin: so he sends a Savior-Christ-Lord...who can actually do something about that.*

The striking thing is that all of these titles would have been applied to Caesar.

The Roman world saw him as Savior and Lord.

• Inscriptions found during that time say things like “savior of the common folk; savior of the world”

I know this: A man who died in AD 14, named Octavius, with the title Caesar Augustus, *is doing nothing for the common folk of the SC Midlands in 2023.*

He has no geopolitical influence in the world of 2023; will not solve war in the Middle East; will not be invited to any peace talks.

But, I know a man who died, rose from the grave in AD33—he truly saves common folk.

He has worshipers and followers from places all over this world.

He is ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5)

His Kingdom shall never end.

- Notice the emotional repose to Jesus's birth: joy.

The physical encounter with the Savior, Christ the Lord begins and ends with joy.

The gospel ends with this focus on joy.

Luke 24:51–52 ESV

While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

—Joy is often our emotional reflex when some circumstance turns out well.

—Joy can also be a natural disposition; some people just seem to be wired with it.

But this joy described here is unique: It's origin is the work of God.

It's a supernatural, spiritual joy that transcends circumstances and personality.

- Notice finally, it's personal: unto you this day—comes in real time.
- Toward the end of the gospel, when Jesus is a grown man at the hour of death—he encounters a man who has a final cry of faith:

Luke 23:40–43 (ESV)

“Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done

nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”
And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Today you....

Unto you, *this day*

God works by a declaration—declares that rebels who turn to Christ and look at the cross....have a place in Paradise.

Maybe you feel more like the thief on the cross this Christmas. In reality, we all should.

If we only suffered the true reward of our deeds!

But this is the hope of Christmas and Christ:

The King invites and declares that crucified criminals *who turn in faith.....* are welcome into his Kingdom.

You and I are welcome...but need to come in the same way: Looking to Jesus Christ in true faith and trust.

In Jesus’s birth, God works through a decree to display and declare the gospel for his glory.

The final verse is a picture of it: a vast army praising.

Expository Thoughts on Luke, Vol. 1 Luke 2:1-7: The Birth of Christ at Bethlehem

“It is unspeakable and unsearchable. Never let us forget that through this humiliation Jesus has purchased for us a title to glory.”

Let’s never forget that Jesus came down so low.....so we can be brought so high—high into the presence of God, and enjoying his everlasting peace.