

The Birth of Our Saviour

Journey with Jesus

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Welcome once again, and we are involved in a brand new series of messages entitled "Journey with Jesus." So this is more than just studying the Christmas story this month, we're really on the runway taking off into a study of life of Jesus Christ and today we're going to have the wonderful privilege of seeing where it really all began back in Bethlehem and what a great time to be here. I want to encourage you to get onboard with us in the new year and study every step of the life of Jesus Christ verse by verse through Luke's Gospel which is a chronological study of the life of Jesus and that's what we're doing on Sunday mornings at Lancaster Baptist, all about Jesus, and I'm so glad you're here.

Let's stand together and make room for folks still coming in, and we're delighted you're here. We had a great service at 8:30 and I trust that your hearts are ready as we turn to Luke 2. I was having a wonderful Christmas season until Friday, I sat down and was having dinner with my grandson, Camden, Camden's three and he's been talking about lots of stuff, he talks about our dog, our cat; he talks about his cousin, and he loves basketball but we were sitting there Friday night and he was just sort of staring at me and I got the impression he had something on his mind, he wanted to say something, and sure enough he did. He looked at me and he said, "Poppa, you have no hair on your head." Then he said, "I have no hair on my forehead but you have no hair on your head." I thought after three years of spoiling him, that's his comment to me about me? I'm taking all his Christmas presents back. But, no, I'm doing alright. I'll tell you what, it's a blessing to just teach the next generation what this season is all about and that's a part of why we want to be good students today.

Luke 2 this morning. You'll find the outline in your bulletin and I'm going to read verses 1 through 7 of God's word today. Luke 2:1,

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing

was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Shall we pray.

Our Father in heaven, how we thank you and praise you for your infallible word and for the story and the revelation of Christ that we see in your word today. I pray, Lord, that as we study this passage and as I preach this morning, that you would fill me with your Spirit. I pray that you would help everyone here, Lord, to lay aside the things that would clutter our minds and burden our hearts and that each of us would seek to know and to apply your truth to our lives today. And Father, if there's someone here today that has never truly received Christ as the supreme gift, as the only way to eternal life, Lord, that today they would realize what Jesus meant when he said, "I am the way, the truth and the life," and that they would trust Christ today is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

You may be seated.

We have learned so far in the Gospel of Luke that there was a period of time between the last book of the Old Testament and this Gospel of about 400 years. Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet, prophesied that there would be one who would come and tell of the coming of the Messiah and that one was a man by the name of John the Baptist, and in fact, we read and studied a few weeks ago that while Zacharias was in the temple at Jerusalem, he was there praying, he was a priest of the course of Abia, a holy godly man, and Gabriel came to him in this temple and Gabriel announced that he and his wife Elizabeth, though they were elderly, would give birth to a child and that his name would be John the Baptist, and that John's ministry would be to foretell and to preach that Christ the Messiah is coming. Surely he did that and John the Baptist was spoken of by Jesus as the greatest ever born among women. He was a great prophet of God and a great foreteller and a prophet of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, the fact is that as Gabriel had come to Zacharias, he also came to a young woman who we met a few weeks ago named Mary. Mary, the Bible tells us, was betrothed to Joseph, she was engaged, but she had not known Joseph intimately. She had not known any man, she was a virgin, she was pure. She's not the object of our worship but she is highly favored and highly revered among women. God chose her and God said to Mary that he would use her in bringing his Son to the world. The fact was that even though there had been 400 years between Malachi and Luke's Gospel, God had not forgotten his people, he had a plan that was unfolding just on time, and aren't you glad today that God does not forget his people? That his plan is always unfolding?

You see, we need to remember that God had written his plan out. In fact, in Isaiah 7:14 he had prophesied several hundred years before that the Messiah would come, that Jesus would be born. The Bible says, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The name Immanuel means "God with us," and Jesus Christ is Immanuel, God with us. Sometimes people act as though it's hard to understand the Bible, sometimes people say the Bible does not speak to the deity of Christ, but the name Immanuel speaks to it very specifically, God with us. So the way that Jesus would be born was prophesied, he would be born of the virgin, his name would be Immanuel.

The place where Jesus was born was also prophesied and this is one of the reasons we believe in the infallibility of the Bible, because of the prophecies that were foretold and that have happened exactly as they were told. So look in your notes there at Micah 5:2. Micah 5:2 says, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Micah prophesied exactly where Jesus would be born, he would be born in Bethlehem, he would be the one who is from everlasting. In other words, he is eternal God and we read that in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus Christ is eternal God. He took the form of man, as we'll see, in Bethlehem's manger but he is eternal God and the Bible prophesied not only that he would be born of the virgin Mary but that he would be born in Bethlehem.

Now in chapter 1, the angel Gabriel had come to Mary and he had said to Mary in chapter 1, verse 35, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." And so it is that Mary was told that she would have, under the superintending of the Holy Spirit, a miraculous conception not of man but of the Holy Spirit of God, and that her son would be Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. And remember, Luke is giving us this account not only as the Holy Spirit moved on him, for all Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but Luke also was one that knew Mary, he was one that lived in Ephesus in the later days with Mary and would have physically taken down the history. This is recorded literal history. We're not preaching this morning a part of the Christmas fairy tale or some good theory or some good poetry but we're hearing revealed documented history from eyewitnesses who knew Mary, and here in this case Luke is writing for us the story of God and the delivery of the Son of God and what we're going to learn today is that God is always at work, and even when we think he's delayed and his timing is not our timing, and in this case a 400 year delay from the Old Testament era to the coming of Christ, still God is always at work, he is always on time, he is always fulfilling prophecy. I don't know what you're waiting for today and I don't know what you wish God would hurry up with today, but I want you to know this: he loves you, he knows you, and he's working on your behalf even today.

So let's dig into this and see that lesson unfold. Notice, first of all, a prophetic order. I want you to see the prophetic order that is given and it's given in verse 1. It says,

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

Now here we see an order that is given. It's a decree or an imperial order and every 14 years Rome would tax her citizens, and the reason for this taxation was because of the fiscal cliff that they were about....no, I got my news mixed up. Alright, the reason for the taxation was because of the fact that they would learn from the census how many people should pay taxes and also how many Roman soldiers to place in a given area such as the land we now call the Holy Land. So they took the census for that purpose. Caesar Augustus ruled from 27 BC to 14 AD. He was the first emperor of the Roman Empire. The man was in many ways a genius. There were more than 170,000 soldiers in his army. He had police departments in the major cities and the first fire department in Rome was established by this man Caesar Augustus, a man with a great vision as well as great military insight. He was the adopted son of Julius Caesar and he was a man literally that was worshiped by Romans. This was the object of their worship throughout the Roman Empire and so when he made a decree that all the world should be taxed, that's exactly what he meant, and when you think of all the world in that moment, the Roman world was vast and, in fact, when you study the Roman world even at that first century, you can see the entire Mediterranean region was under Roman rule and you can visit places in northern Africa, obviously Italy and throughout all of Europe today and still find the remnants of this Roman world. You can see the coliseums, you can still the library in Ephesus, you can visit various different cities in all different countries throughout this region and be reminded of the power and the presence of this one we read about in the Bible today, Caesar Augustus. So he said, "I want all of the world to be taxed," but what I want you to remember is that while that taxation would have been unpleasant and unwelcome just like it is for us today, the fact of the matter is it was still God's plan and God was allowing this circumstance into their life for a purpose, and please remember, nothing takes God by surprise and God was using this particular task, as we're going to see in just a moment, to bring Mary and Joseph to the city he prophesied 700 years before. That's the greatness of the God we worship today.

So I want you to see, first of all, that there is an order that they could not control. There is an order that they could not control. This prophetic order was something completely out of Joseph and Mary's hands and I believe that all of you could agree today that life is filled with unavoidable circumstances; that in this life there are things that we face that we would never have planned that way, we are completely surprised, sometimes taken aback and even discouraged, and if you're like me, sometimes you even wrestle with the Lord about certain news that comes into your life and sometimes you wrestle with the Lord and it's had to accept some of the challenges that come. It reminds me of Isaiah 40, and I put it in your notes, verse 13 which says, "Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?" Sometimes we want to tell God, "God, excuse

me, you're making a mistake here with this taxation, you're making a mistake here with this political situation. Lord, wait, wait, wait, my family, you don't understand what you're allowing to happen." And yet this was something that Joseph and Mary could not control and what we learn in the Bible is that many times those things that are at first so inconvenient and so difficult are, in fact, a part of God's plan for our usefulness later in life.

I think of the story of Joseph. You remember Joseph was sold by his brethren into slavery and that he was taken into Egypt's land and what a trial he went through and he was in prison and suffering for so many years, but then God allowed him to be elevated in Egypt and God allowed him to have power and authority over all of the food in Egypt, and when famine hit the Holy Land, it was Joseph that rescued his family, it was Joseph that God used to bring food back to his family. God took a trial and God took what they meant for evil and turned it into good, and I want to remind you this morning that anything out of our control is in the will of God. Things that we can't control are not necessarily things that catch God by surprise. God had a plan for Joseph and Mary.

A lot of times people get frustrated when circumstances are out of our control. I remember years ago in one of the Charlie Brown Christmas videos and Charlie Brown was just having a terrible time getting into the Christmas spirit and his little friend Linus said, "Charlie Brown, you're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem." You know, there are a lot of people like that, they can take a wonderful time and turn it into a problem because they fail to see that God's hand is still at work no matter what time of life we're in.

So this was an order they could not control. Notice, secondly, there was a ruler they could not convince. A ruler they could not convince. Verse 2 says,

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

Cyrenius sometimes called Querinius was twice appointed the governor of Judea. This man was ruthless. In fact, the Jews on one occasion revolted at his taxation and had an uprising against him and he was cruel toward the Jewish people, and yet this ruler was in charge and this was someone that Joseph and Mary had little power to persuade, and sometimes we feel that way and we feel like we may not agree with this ruler or that ruler and we can list the rulers and we can list the issues and, yet again, we see the sovereign hand of God and we see that God was still at work even when Cyrenius was in charge.

I think all of us need to remember that God is always working. Look at what the Bible says in Proverbs 21:1 in your notes. It says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Would you read that verse with me this morning? Let's read, read it again, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." So think about this prophetic order and get it in its now historical context. God is using the most powerful man in the world, a wicked, ungodly, idol-worshiping man, I might say, and God is using this man to bring about his purpose in the bringing of his Son into the world. That is what

we refer to as the sovereign, powerful, all-knowing hand of God and the same God that had a plan for the first century has a plan for the 21st century and his prophecies are still unfolding even today. So this was a prophetic order whether Cyrenius understood that, whether Caesar Augustus understood that or not. The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord.

Notice, secondly, not only a prophetic order but notice in your outline a planned place. Now we're going to visit a planned place today and I want you to see it beginning in verse 3.

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

Now here we see the hometown of Joseph, if you will. He was of the house and lineage of David and so God is going to send him back to the city of David which is known as Bethlehem. Once again, we're reminded of Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." At first, Joseph and Mary could have said, "We have to travel 95 miles to Bethlehem?" From Nazareth to Bethlehem when Mary was nine months pregnant, how could anything good come from this? But again, God was working and God needed to bring his man Joseph, and Mary, to the city of Bethlehem according to his prophecy. You see, really history is his story and what we are seeing is God's history and the story of God before us and how we thank him for it. Joseph and Mary, this young couple, would travel 100 miles in great discomfort simply to show us the mighty hand of God.

Well, notice if you would, first of all, it is a prophesied city. This city, as we saw a moment ago, was prophesied in the Old Testament. On several occasions we see God prophesying about the coming of his Son. Notice in John 7:42, "Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So again, the Scriptures foretold this and we see it in this map here. From Nazareth, they would have traveled south, they would have crossed the Jordan River, they would have gone into what is known as West Bank territory today, into Jericho. They would have come through the city of Jerusalem and about four miles to the south of Jerusalem was this tiny shepherd's village known as Bethlehem, the city of David. Ninety-five to 100 miles they would have traveled in order to see God's will accomplished.

It was a prophesied city, the city of Bethlehem, but also it was a provisional city. This city was known for its provision in the region. Bethlehem, for example, provided much physical bread for the region. It was a place where crops were grown. It was a place where sheep would graze. And they were leaving the town of Nazareth, which means "the guarded one," the city of Nazareth was a Roman outpost of military sort, but they were coming to the city of Bethlehem and Bethlehem means "the house of bread." The

house of bread. And isn't it amazing that the Lord Jesus would come as the bread of the world to the house of bread to be born. And when you think of Bethlehem, you're mindful of the fact that it's a pastoral type of a place, that it was a place where the hillsides were terraced to avoid erosion and allow the sheep to climb. It was a rough-hewn place and it really still is today, somewhat not tropical, but somewhat arid as Southern California, and rocky and rough-hewn, and this was the place where Joseph and Mary traveled into this hilly, v-shaped type of situation.

Bethlehem was a provisional place, providing physical bread but now Bethlehem would provide spiritual bread for the world. In fact, look in your notes at John 6:32. The Bible says, "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." And so it is that Christians since that very first century have looked to Bethlehem, have worshiped in Bethlehem, have remembered what God did at Bethlehem when he sent his only Son to be the bread of life for all who would partake by faith in Jesus Christ.

So we see this morning a prophetic order given by Caesar Augustus. He didn't realize he was simply a pawn in the hand of God. Secondly, we see a planned place. Bethlehem, God's place, foreordained. That was where Jesus would be born. But that brings us, really, to the heart of the matter this morning and I want you to see with me a perfect Savior. I want you to see the perfect Savior. Notice, if you would, in verse 6,

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now let's look, first of all, at the presentation of Christ in Bethlehem. Just think for a moment about how he was presented in Bethlehem. The Bible tells us he is laid in a manger, sometimes we call it a trough, and I want you to get a picture of this and I took this picture outside of Caesarea a few years ago, and it was a great illustration of a first century manger, really a limestone piece of rock hewn out with a place where the animals would feed and, of course, the straw would be placed in the manger and Jesus Christ, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the perfect Son of God, was laid in a manger like this. Then, of course, not in a hospital room or not in the comforts of home but, really, in what most scholars believe would have been somewhat of a cave, and when we visited some of the caves in Bethlehem, we saw some like this now being held up with some pillars, but you could have fit maybe 15 or 20 different animals inside this cave and this is where many times the farmers would bring their animals for shelter at night, and it's believed that Jesus would have been surrounded at that time by animals and in an agricultural setting where Jesus was born.

It reminds me of the story of the little boy who got some hamsters for Christmas and, man, his room smelled, but after a while the hamsters got used to it but it was really an adjustment for them. And if you've ever been around animals and you ever get around situations, an agricultural situation, you understand what I'm talking about, just kind of trying to keep them clean and so forth. And if you're like me, when your children were born, you wanted everything to be very well sterilized. I mean, we painted the room for Danielle when she was born, our first child, and we cleaned the carpets and, I mean, I sprayed Lysol on everything and everybody that wanted to go and see Danielle. I wanted to make sure that no germs touched our baby. And you should hear some of the mothers when they come into these nurseries and we have about 250 babies in the nurseries at this hour, and when they bring those babies in, they ask questions, they want to know not only who's working in that nursery but are these toys sterilized, and what kind of cleaning process do you have for these floors? I mean, they go through an entire list and I understand that, that's just the way we are, but I'll remind you that's not the world that Jesus came into and the wonderful thing about that is that when we consider Jesus in the manger, we're mindful of the fact that anybody can have access. You don't have to be from the high and noble family, you don't have to be from a Baptist lineage, you don't have to be from a religious lineage at all, you don't have to be the most important or the most educated, you simply come with humble child-like faith and Jesus will meet you there.

Jesus came down to us and he came, first of all, as the son of Mary and in the Luke Gospel, we see that Jesus Christ is presented not only as the Son of God but also as the son of man and truly that is appropriate for he was the God-man, 100% God, 100% man, and we see him here as the son of Mary. "So it was," verse 6, "that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son."

Now sometimes the kids in Sunday school have a little trouble figuring all this out. I heard about a 10 year old boy that was becoming more and more knowledgeable, he kept asking his grandmother questions and that's why you need to pay a lot of good attention to this message and go to the Lancaster Baptist website and log on to "Journey with Jesus" and get the study questions emailed to you this week and kind of stay up with us because your grandkids are going to ask you questions and your kids are going to ask you questions and you'd better have the answers. I'm telling you. And this little fellow said to his grandmother, he said, "Now, grandmother, which virgin was the mother of Jesus, was it the virgin Mary or the King James virgin. I can't remember." Now please don't get that wrong, okay?

Now the fact is that Jesus Christ was born to Mary as the son of Mary and we refer to that in the sense of the son of man, Jesus was the son of man but we also know that he was the Son of God. The Son of God and it's so very important, then, that we would understand today what the meaning of the term "Son of God" is.

There's a word that we don't like to use a lot anymore so let me give you a context for it. The word is the word "fundamental." It seems like in the last 20 years that's become kind

of an abused word and anything fundamental is weird and radical and scary and all that type of thing. It's kind of funny to me. You can talk about the fundamentals of coaching basketball or the fundamentals of computing and no one gets nervous, but you attach that word with religion and people get really scared. But I want to tell you that this truth, the virgin birth of Christ, that the Holy Ghost conceived in Mary and that this child was the Son of God, this truth is fundamental to our faith. It is cornerstone for our faith that Jesus Christ was not just some other guy or some other prophet, but that Jesus Christ is the very Son of the Highest.

So look in your notes there are Luke 1:32, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David." He is also called God in the flesh, 1 Timothy 3:16, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Now look at that verse there, 1 Timothy 3:16, it says God was manifest in the flesh. This eternal one, the one that was from the beginning and from everlasting, who was pre-existent, now in Bethlehem takes the form of a man and we refer to that as the Incarnation and it says in verse 16 of 1 Timothy 3, that God was manifest in the flesh. Would you say that phrase with me, please, "God was manifest in the flesh," and that doctrine is called the Incarnation and it is from the Latin which means "in flesh," and Jesus Christ who is eternal God, a person of the Trinity, now took on flesh and dwelt among us, John 1:14, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father. Jesus Christ, then, was the son of Mary and Jesus Christ was the Son of God because of the virgin birth, because of the Holy Spirit coming upon him.

Please understand this morning that Jesus did not become God. You may have, as I do, some Mormon friends that you talk to about the Lord Jesus and they need an understanding of what the Scripture says because when you read through the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price, the teaching goes that Jesus was a man who became God and with all sincerity that is taught, but I want you to understand what the Bible says this morning is that Jesus was not a man who became God, he is God who became man. That's the order, that God became flesh and dwelt among us. Hinduism teaches that through karma we can become like gods and New Agers teach that there is a spark of the divine in all of us, there's a little bit of God in all of us. Let me tell you what was in me: nothing spiritually to offer God. I was a sinner, fallen and away from God but by his grace Jesus saved me. But many religions in an attempt to create a system of belief have taught that you can become like a god but the fact is Jesus did not become God, he was God. By the way, Jesus did not begin his existence in Bethlehem's manger, "In the beginning was the Word," Logos, Jesus Christ, "and the Word was with God and the Word was God." By the way, the teaching of the Incarnation did not begin as one professor recently said in a comparative religions class, this teaching did not begin with paganism. In fact, the truth of the coming of Christ predates the paganistic teaching of the Greek mythology and when you go back into the Bible in Genesis 3:15, you'll find a promise all the way in Genesis that God's Son would come forth of the seed of the woman, though the woman produces no seed, yet miraculously and prophetically God said, "I will bring forth my Son through the seed of the woman," prophesying what would

happen in Mary's womb and so it is, Colossians 2:9 says, "For in him," Jesus, "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Ladies and gentleman, Jesus Christ, the Savior that we worship this morning, is not just another prophet, he's not just a great teacher, he is God bodily come down to this earth that we might know and that we might be saved, you see. This is the teaching of the word of God and how we thank God for him.

Now liberal churches and they abound today, emphasize the manhood of Jesus and they emphasize that he was a good model, and they take some of the good things that Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and the things that they find in the Bible that are relative in certain senses of the teachings of Christ, but they deny the fundamentals of Jesus Christ's existence and of his personhood and the fact is we can't select some of the Bible that's inspirational and neglect other parts of the Bible that are doctrinal because in doing that we compromise the whole reason he came, and the reason he came is to provide salvation and there's no salvation if Jesus wasn't the God-man, otherwise the blood that was shed on the cross was just blood like yours and mine, but if he truly was conceived of the Holy Spirit, then the blood that he shed was efficacious, it was good enough for everybody who would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the presentation in Bethlehem's manger is a presentation of the son of man and a presentation of the Son of God and I want you to see something else this morning, I want you to see the picture that we find in Bethlehem's manger. Look as we close at verse 7, "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes." Now some of you have studied this perhaps before but the Bible tells us that Mary and Joseph, no doubt they didn't have the provisions of home, Mary and Joseph take the baby Jesus and wrap him in swaddling clothes which are a linen that was commonly used in the Bible for burial purposes. When someone was buried, they would be wrapped in this type of swaddling clothing, there was perfume and ointment placed around the body on this clothing and they would be placed inside of the tomb and it is significant because we see a picture here, a prophecy here, a teaching here, and we understand from the very first day of the life of Jesus that he was born to die; that Jesus Christ on his birthday shows us that there would be but 33 ½ perfect years where he would be tempted in all points like we are yet without sin; that as the perfectly sinless Son of God, he was born to die, and that there would come a day when he would be laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea and that he would be wrapped in the same type of swaddling clothes but, thank God, three days later up from the grave he arose, he left the swaddling clothes there in the tomb and he's sitting today at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

Yet we see in the swaddling clothes a picture, a reminder that he was born to die. Why would he die? What's the purpose of the death? Why does the Bible speak of that? How come so much destruction and bloodshed? Why the bloodshed? Why did Jesus die? Notice if you would in your notes, Matthew 1:21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their," what does it say? "Sins." No doubt the Jews thought, "Oh, the anointed one has come. Political deliverance,

that's what we need." And aren't we funny today, we still look for political deliverance and we look for our burdens to be lifted in political parties, but the fact was Jesus did not come merely to bring political reform, though one day he will rule and reign and we thank him for that, but I want you to understand he came that we might be saved from our sins. You see, I owed a debt I could not pay. There was no way I could pay for my sin. All of my righteousness is as filthy rags. But the Bible says without the shedding of the blood there is no remission of sins, and so the Son of God came and shed his blood so that all who trust in him can have their sins forgiven not by the Baptist church and not by the Catholic church and not by anyone's church, sin is forgiven by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. "Oh, there is a fountain filled with blood and sinners drawn beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains." Thank God today that the baby born in the manger lived a perfectly sinless life and allowed the Roman soldiers to place the nails through his hands and through his feet and the crown of thorns upon his head.

Yes, the baby in the manger is celebrated this month but we also celebrate the fact that he died on the cross for our sins and this is the joy of knowing Christ, that God would love us so much. That's why when you hear that one verse, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life," it ought to be precious to your ears and precious to your heart. You see, the Bible says in Philippians 2:5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Jesus Christ fashioned himself as a man, became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.

The presentation was the son of man and the Son of God. The picture is a picture of salvation, the picture of the swaddling clothes. But notice, finally, the problem and I'm sure you saw it when we read a moment ago, there's one problem as we end, "because there was no room for them in the inn." Would you say that with me? "Because there was no room for them in the inn." Now we're not talking Holiday Inn or Marriott, I've got to tell you that. We're probably talking about the additional room of a thatched structure or maybe a cave with a little fire, but it certainly would have been better than being out with the animals.

No room in the inn. Have you ever tried to picture that in your mind like I have? Have you pictured Joseph saying, "Please, sir," to the innkeeper, "Ma'am, just a little corner. She's nine months pregnant. We think the baby could come tonight. The prophecy was given, this is the God-child. Please, ma'am, my Mary is ready to give birth." "No, no room. No room. You go out there in the cave there, if you'd like. There is no room in the inn." Have you ever tried to talk to somebody about inviting Jesus into their life only to get that response? "No room in the inn. No, all roads lead to the same place. Don't try to give me that. I did that before, I got burned by a church. They're all hypocrites. Nope. We give at work." Have you ever had someone tell you, "No room in the inn"? It seems to me that increasingly that's the message of America, no room in the inn. It seems more and more that with the concepts that come in, the pluralistic ideas, there is somehow this

diminishing of the message of Christ or an attempt to diminish it in the marketplace. By the way, thank God we have a city where we were encouraged to have the choir sing praise to Jesus last night but that's not the norm.

More and more people are just saying, "Hey, we've had enough of that. We've had about 200 years of it but times have changed. No room in the inn." And it seems like a lot of men make that statement, it seems like the material man makes that statement, it seems like there are men and they've got their first job, their second job, they're climbing that ladder, they want to get one more thing, they want to buy one more investment, they just are working so hard materially and they just don't really have time for God, for church, to accept Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life, there's just not enough room for that. "I used to believe it when I was a kid." But the Bible says in Mark 8:36, "For what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" Listen, a red Ferrari is not going to take you far on your funeral day but the material man constantly has no room.

It seems like the intellectual man has no room. In his pride and in his perception of his own knowledge, he's gotten much bigger than all of that. The Bible speaks of it in 1 Corinthians 1:18, it says, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." There are many men today who say no God. In fact, the Bible says, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God," or no God and they've come to the place with their computers and with their advanced degrees that they just see themselves as not needing God and some have even said there is no God which means they have become god themselves; it means that they are omnipresent; it means they've been to Mars and Venus and to every planet and they've turned over every rock and they know that there is no God. And my friend, there is no one who can say that except Creator God, and yet the intellectual man has reasoned himself away from God, but God says after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Then I think about not only the material man, not only the intellectual man, I think about the religious man and this is strange to me because some people have just enough religion to be dangerous, just enough to salve the conscience to think that they're okay, and sometimes people will even say to me, "Well, I believe in God," and that's a good start but the devil believes in God, in fact, one verse says the devils believe and tremble, they're even emotional about it. Religion never saves. A relationship with Christ is what brings salvation. In fact, look at John 5 in your notes, John 5:17, "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." By the way, if Jesus made himself equal with God, we should as well, and when he did the Jewish religious leaders sought the more to kill him. They had religious tradition but they had no faith in Christ. John 1:10 says, "He was in

the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." You see, he came to his own and they had their religion but they did not want him. Ladies and gentleman, may we get this this morning, that salvation does not come through a denomination or a church, salvation comes through the finished work of Jesus Christ and as many as believe on him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God. You see, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life," and so he is a perfect Savior, the perfect presentation of God's love to this world.

Now the question is this morning: what do you do with all that? What are you going to do with that, this wonderful gift of Christmas, this wonderful gift of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, coming down in such a humble, miraculous way? Well, the first thing I want to encourage you to do today if you've never done this is to receive the gift. I'm not talking about church membership or Catechism or grandpappy was a Baptist preacher, I'm talking about you personally making a decision just like when you get on an airplane and trust that plane completely, trusting in Jesus only and saying, "Lord Jesus, I know that I'm a sinner. I confess that to you. I fall short of your perfection. I ask you to come into my heart and be my Savior." Listen, this isn't about joining the church, lots of people are members of churches that will not spend eternity in heaven with Jesus Christ, it's not about a church, it's about trusting Jesus Christ to be our Savior. The Bible says in John 4:10, "Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Listen, when it comes to being saved, when it comes to knowing your sins are forgiven, it's a gift. You don't have to buy your way into heaven. You don't work your way into heaven. You don't have to get baptized umpteen times to go to heaven. It is a gift and it was paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ.

If I were to give you this gift, if you were to consider that gift yours, you knew that and would open it and you would enjoy it. Kristen, come here for a second. Let me illustrate this. This is Kristen. Tim, would you mind helping as well? Come right on up here. If I said to Brother Tim, "Tim, I got you this gift here. I want you to have a Merry Christmas." And if he gave it to his wife and said, "Look what pastor gave us. Look at this silver box and the bow." Isn't that nice? Are you impressed? You want to open it, don't you? You should. But if they never opened it and if they just put it over here on the shelf and 365 days, "Boy, look at that gift. It's a silver gift. Isn't that a nice gift? That's a nice bow." By the way, how many of you are like me, even when you get a gift and you're trying to act like you don't want to open it, there's still an eight year old inside that wants to open it? You just want to rip the package off. But if he did not rip the package off and if five years from now you go to their house and, "Hey, pastor, there's the gift you gave us. Thanks for that gift." And 10 years from now it's just sitting there with crystal and vases and you never open it, some of you would go, "You know, this guy's a few fries short of a Happy Meal. He never opened the gift." Thank you, Kristen. To hear what you're hearing this morning, to see what we're seeing, to hear the songs and not to open

our heart and by faith accept Jesus Christ as our Savior is like seeing the gift but never receiving the gift.

The Bible says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Now listen, this sounds simple but I'm glad God made it simple because Jesus saves. Now some people make fun of those words, "Yeah, those Christians." I like both words, I like the word Jesus and I like the word saves, but I love it when you put them together, Jesus saves, and when you call on the Lord and ask him to come into your heart, he saves. If you've never done that, at the end of this service I'm going to invite you to make that decision by faith. You may not see angels and hear angels but in your heart you can know this, the Bible says in 1 John 5, "He that has the Son has life. He that has not the Son of God has not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life," and there is no greater gift in life than the gift of knowing that Jesus is your Savior and that you have eternal life.

Yesterday we had a funeral for a wonderful man from our church and I did what I always do when I prepared for that funeral, I got a biographical description, I looked at the eulogy, but I kept looking until I found it and there it was, that April 1977 that man whose wife is with us this morning, made the decision after hearing about the gift to open and to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior. Nothing else I said yesterday at that service was anymore important than telling that crowd, "This man had accepted the gift. Jesus Christ is his Savior."

What are you going to do with it? Receive it. If you have received Christ, isn't it about time you started enjoying the gift? I mean, when I was a kid I can remember at about three or four years old my first gift, it was a Texaco truck. I ran the wheels off of that truck, I enjoyed it so much. A few years later I got some other little cars and toys and a race track. A few years later I got a BB gun. Oh, I loved that BB gun. I shot everything in sight: windows, my brother, communists. I mean, I just shot things up. Just enjoying all those Christmas gifts. Hey, the Christian life isn't something you put on a shelf and then you take it down here and there. Jesus says, "I want to walk with you and I want you to walk with me." The Bible says in Hebrews 4 that Jesus Christ was tempted in all points like as we are and the Bible says that he can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Hey, he wants us to tell him about our burdens. He wants to walk with us. He wants us to enjoy a relationship with him. If you've never received the gift, receive it today. If you haven't been enjoying the Christian life, why don't you come back to the Lord today, back to his word, back to his house, back to a walk with him. And let me say this, let's worship the gift this month. Listen, not the package, not the church, not the programs, I mean Jesus, the gift. Let's worship the gift. Matthew 2:11, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." Whether it's in our giving, whether it's in our singing, whether it's in our preaching time, it's all about him, it's all about worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, he was presented in Bethlehem's manger but we need to make sure we've received him, we need to make sure we're walking with him, we need to make

sure we're worshiping him this Christmas season. I don't know where you need to grow but if it's toward Jesus, it's in the right direction today.

Thank you so much for joining us today. If this message has helped you, we hope you will share with a friend or family member. We always love to hear from those whom God has changed through his word. Share your story with us at lancasterbaptist.org/contact.