

**Text: Luke 2:1-20**

**2** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to his own town to register.

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. – NIV84

**Prayer of the Day:**

Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of true light. Grant that as we have known on earth the wonder of that light, we may also behold him in all glory in the life to come; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Verse of the Day:**

Alleluia. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. Alleluia. (Luke 2:11 cf. NIV)

**Sermon Text:**

So, what's new? That's kind of a weird question isn't it? It almost implies that there isn't a unified experience that is captivated every discussion, every news stream, every part of life right now. What's new? Nothing is new and that's the problem! Oh, I know the world has been turned upside down by pandemic. Depending on who you listen to the country is in crisis for any number of reasons. People are tired and afraid, hopeless and fed up with the whole thing. But it's nothing new. Sin has been harassing this world of ours in all of its various forms ever since Eve and Adam ate the fateful fruit. The consequences of that sin, and all the sin which has piled high thereafter has caused a mountain of trouble and heartache that has plagued us ever since. What's new? Nothing and that's the problem. Of course, it's also the reason, the reason that God did something new in the course of human history. One time and for all people, literally the stars aligned, the heavens sang, and something, well someone, who was entirely new, and eternally present, entered the scene of human history. This event, this child, this Jesus will make everything new and He does it for you! So this evening, let's heed the words of the shepherds who heard the word of the angels and **LET'S GO TO BETHLEHEM AND SEE THIS THING THAT HAS HAPPENED, WHICH THE LORD HAS TOLD US ABOUT.**

God moved heaven and earth! That's how the lesson begins. God moved the mind and the edict of Caesar Augustus to evaluate the strength and number of the kingdom and all had to go their own towns to register for the census. A census, nothing major, I mean they happen all the time right? Tell that to Joseph and Mary who would have to travel on foot or the bouncing back of an animal the entire distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem while pregnant and ready to pop. But this wasn't just a nuisance caused by the power of Rome. This was the will of God getting everything exactly the way He wanted. Micah hundreds of years earlier had foretold it at the command of God, "*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times*" (Micah 5:2).

Of course, that's the heavens that move too here. God who is as ancient as they come, more ancient than time itself, takes on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, in the babe born in that manger. God becomes one of us, just like us in every way but new too, He is without the virus of sin, untouched by its wretched stain. The author of the book of Hebrews will announce it, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin*" (Hebrews 4:15).

This, dear friends, is the good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For on that first Christmas *in the town of David a Savior was born to you; He is Christ the Lord.* He comes because we are tired and fed up. He comes because we are hopeless and afraid. He comes because sin and its consequences were more than we could handle and because on our own death, both physically and spiritually had become our lot as sinners. He comes because it is not God's will that we should perish. He wants *all men (all people) to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2:4).

So this babe born in the humility of the manger and wrapped in cloths will allow Himself to be humiliated for you. He will be disrespected and abused, abandoned and betrayed, He will face the cruelty of the cross, even the punishment of hell we had earned for ourselves. And once he has breathed His last, (He will give up His spirit nothing will take it from Him) cloth will once more wrap His body in the cold darkness of the tomb.

Ah, but then we said this story, this history, would be new and so it is. Death cannot hold Him for it had no claim upon Him to begin with. Having paid the full price for our sin, He will burst forth from the grave that you and I might have an assurance more rock solid than the tomb which could not hold Him. His own Word announces it to His disciples trouble and confused by His prophecy, *Because I live, you also will live* (John 14:19).

And so dear friends, you are new. *For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come* (2 Corinthians 5:17)! There is no longer any reason to fear. Oh, I know the world has been turned upside down by pandemic. Depending on who you listen to the country is in crisis for any number of reasons. People, okay so if I'm honest, I am tired and afraid, hopeless and fed up with the whole thing. But that's just the old sinful self which will always cling to me this side of heaven and with which I will struggle every day. But, because of this birth, because of this baby's life, death and

resurrection, sin and its guilt are washed away in Calvary's crimson flood, death is defeated as surely and soundly as the tomb that could not contain Him, heaven has been won, announced even to Satan and the demons in prison who held no power over Him.

Oh surely, God still would have us use our reason and the manifold gifts and talents He has placed at our disposal so, no jumping of cliffs to prove God is in control (I'm pretty sure that was one of Satan's temptations, but then that's a lesson for another time in the church year). Yet, we need not shy away from doing what Christians have always done and will continue to do until God returns, treasuring up the truths, even as we spread the news. You see, even the angel hosts had to get in on the joy and amazement of it all, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.*"

So dear friends gathered here for worship this evening or joining us from home, "What's new?" Everything is! In pandemic and crisis, in hardship, even in death we have a lasting hope, a Savior, and through Him, an eternity which transcends the troubles of the world. We know it because **THE LORD HAS TOLD US ABOUT IT! HE HAS SHOWN US! WE HAVE BEEN TO BETHLEHEM. AMEN!**