

12/24/20 - Luke 2:8-14 - "Rethinking the Manger"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] So Christmas, Christmas is a time that marks sometimes consumeristic lurings. Sometimes we can hear the mystical tales of the man with the red suit, overweight, coming down impossible narrow chimneys.

And sometimes for families is designated time for assembling together with your family. But in the church, in the Christian church, we designate Christmas as a time of profound and designated reflection, as a day that marks, commemorates the time when God became a baby.

And we do specifically united as his church among each other. Throughout the past Advent series, the past specifically four weeks within the word ministry of this church, we took a four-week, it started with a four-week look at the life of Ruth in the book of Ruth from chapter 1 to 4, which led to Judah and Tamar, which then led to Rahab, which then led to Bathsheba and David.

And all of these narratives would be unlikely to ever be found in such a messianic line mentioned in Matthew chapter 1, the lineage of Jesus Christ.

We have to remember that genealogies aren't just those parts in the Bible that we skip over, and we just bank those on our Bible reading plan.

[1 : 43] Genealogies trace not only the historicity, they trace backwards in the Bible. They also are a connector of tracing the prophetic fulfillment of Jesus Christ, that he came just according to the scriptures say that he would come.

And they also tell a story, I think, as this Advent series has revealed. Through Judah and Tamar, those broken narratives. From Rahab, the prostitute.

David and Bathsheba, really, Matthew, you include these genealogies in this storyline. This indicates to me, I don't know about you, that genealogies tell a story.

They tell us a story about who God is. A story of his grace and his mercy. Of everyone included in that. We made this connection as being a tapestry in God's plans and his providential guiding of history.

That just as we look at the chaos and the mess of Bathsheba and David, Tamar and Judah, Rahab and Ruth. And all of their broken narratives.

[2 : 55] We look at that and saying, God, are you sure you know what you're doing? Similar to a tapestry. Where you look on the backside of that tapestry and you see all these tangles, all these random colors and cords interlocking together.

God, do you know what you're doing? But God is on the other side of that tapestry.

The display side that broadcasts this grand masterpiece that he is weaving together that began long ago in the Garden of Eden.

This year, as we reflect upon the advent of Jesus Christ, which is the arrival of Jesus Christ, we see a continuation of the unlikely means of God's deliverance.

And specifically tonight, we ought to see the prophetic significance of this young God-man who lay in a manger. Before we get started, we must pray before we turn to Luke chapter 2.

[4 : 02] So please join me in a word of prayer as we begin. Father, thank you for this gathering again. Thank you for the talents and the gifts. I marvel at how you've equipped your church to glorify you, to serve in various capacities within your church, and to display the complexity and intricacy of the masterpiece that you're weaving together, even in our lives.

Father, help us trust you at this time to turn to your word and submit to the teachings of your word and the implications that are found within. Help us to detach from the world and society and come together united in this book, the supernatural book with supernatural implications within our lives to change a sinner's heart and bring it to life.

Father, we give you this time. We say, make it yours. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. You know, I never know if I put people to sleep, but that's a good indication when I get no amens. Let's read Luke chapter 2, verses 8 through verse 14. The narrative picks up, saying, 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, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 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.

[5 : 45] 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 cloths 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. This is the word of the Lord. I imagine we've all received somewhat of an invitation at some point in life, whether it's in the mail, snail mail as it's known today, or maybe Facebook, an invitation on Facebook. Within such an invitation, it includes some specific details similar to who, what, where, why, and how.

And it was on this spring day, a certain spring day, when Jesus had been born to Mary, as we see the passage that it just concluded from in verse 6 and 7.

[7 : 06] He has been born in the spring day. And we received some great insight into this pronouncement of his arrival to unexpected shepherds in verse 8.

An invitation. However, only half of that invitation is to be known to these shepherds at this point in redemptive history. We still have a lot of pages to come within that storyline. So if you can imagine, during the coolness of this spring night, beneath the dark blanket of a sky with stars poking through, all of the sudden, an angel of the Lord appears to shepherds. Mere shepherds watching over their flock at night. If you could imagine, we have young children, as you can tell, and sometimes we open that door to a dark room, and that hallway lights on, it's like blinding, suddenly blinding, and then the kids are awake. Welcome to our household. But if you could imagine just that darkness that consumed these shepherds in that field, and then within an instant, an angel of the Lord and sudden brightness.

[8 : 26] It is at this moment, these shepherds receive a grand invitation that the Lord has been inaugurating since the Garden of Eden.

The skull crusher has come. They say to these shepherds, in verse 10, 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. This is specific fulfillment of what God promised through the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 9, verse 6, that we read, opening the service. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. In other words, this baby is known as Mighty God. This baby is known as Mighty God.

[9 : 40] There is no other truth that I believe this world can offer to us that can instill such wonder and mystery than God becoming a child.

Weak, frail, helpless, dependent upon food, upon air, bound to time, having flesh and blood. In light of God's sovereignty and providential guiding of history through all the several unlikely situations and people, we have to behold the fact that the poverty of Christ's manger is actually God's might. To be coming, to be born under the law, to save those under the law. This is the moment of the canvas of God, the tapestry, picking up where numerous minor prophets left off in the first section of this book. This is the skull crusher, the new and the better Adam who would come and restore the void between God and his people.

[11 : 03] And these angels knew exactly what was going on at this moment in time. These shepherds may have been fearful and confused. These angels knew exactly what this meant as they resounded in Luke 14.

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased. Now the passage does not detail much of the response of these shepherds other than fear followed by hasteful curiosity in verse 15 and 16 and in which they set out immediately to Bethlehem to see what is happening.

Invitation accepted. And so from the shepherd's vantage point, if you could imagine, upon arriving to the scene in Bethlehem, the birthplace of this mighty God as a baby, they brought forth the testimony of the angel of the Lord once they saw everything that had been told to them from the angel of the Lord.

They confirmed it to Mary in this manger scene. Everything that has been described to them in verse 17. Now, I want to paint a picture for you.

Maybe that we haven't seen or heard before as we rethink the manger this Christmas season. I want us to consider some historic elements to what we read in this passage today because there's quite archaeological significance in what they actually saw.

[12:49] Jeffrey Chadwick spent a majority of his life working in Israel as a researcher and field archaeologist in order to connect what is written with what they find.

And he suggests, quote, in the ancient land of Israel, animal troughs were not made of wooden planks or poles lashed together.

Limestone was much more plentiful in ancient Israel than lumber. As you can imagine, Israel is very dusty, very rocky, lots of stones.

And he concludes that there is great evidence to support reorienting our perspective and the emblematic significance derived thereof. Because if verse 7 is true, if there was no guest room available, as our Bible says, an inn, if there was no place to rest, it's not like they're going to walk into some barn crafted with wood.

This would mean very well that they rested on this night in a cave-like structure made of stone.

[14:02] And the resting place of this young god-man would not be a wooden cradle, it would be more like a crafted stone-feeding trough used to water for water for animals.

Wrap our minds around that imagery for just a moment. And imagine the imitation of the shepherds that they received from the angel of the Lord.

And this only reveals half the picture. We still have a lot of pages within the biblical narrative, of the redemptive narrative found in the Bible. It's only half the picture when they arrived at Bethlehem.

They got the who, they got the where, and they got the what. However, what these shepherds saw may have actually been prophetically significant.

Glimpses of the mission and the purposes, the how and the why this baby would come. The reality of those details of the how and why have not yet come to these shepherds, but they got the first half of that invitation.

[15:13] And so as we observe Christmas, it may not be anything new to us. This service might be another check on your list for your Christmas gatherings.

Maybe this is the one of two times that you actually come to church. And if that is you, welcome. It's great to have you. But if we could see what these shepherds saw knowing what we know because we have the second half of that invitation revealed to us, this baby boy would grow up one day to be despised and rejected by his own people.

And so it's not simply a manger scene that we would observe at this point. This would be a picture of redemption unfolding and fulfilled in this first advent of Christ.

So if Chadwick's evidence that he's uncovering in Israel of this stone trough, of this stone resting place kind of looking like a cave, this has tremendous significance of the redemptive narrative that we see.

Because when we look upon a manger, might we see clearly the cave-like structure of Christ's first arrival that is actually pointing to a tomb-like structure of his departure?

[16:37] Might we see clearly the cloth that swaddles this newborn baby actually pointing to the blood-stained cloth that would embalm his broken body after the crucifixion?

And even the folded cloth that rested upon the stone within the cave upon his ascension. And might we see clearly that the stone trough that provides water and sustenance to sheep actually is the reality that Jesus is the living water that would be drawn for his sheep, the church.

When we can see clearly and observe the significance of Christ's first coming, we can depart from this over-sentimentalized wonder of mighty God as a baby.

And we can unite in the salvific wonder of the mission and the purpose that God intended to fulfill through this baby. As we come to a close in our time, this baby's mission and purpose, the how and the why of that invitation, is far from the googly-eyed fascination of, oh, look how cute the baby is resting in this stone trough.

It goes farther than that. This baby resting within the stone trough would be the living water that all who drink upon it will find life and they will never quench their thirst once again.

[18:16] It's far from the googly-eyed fascination of a newborn baby, but rather, it's quite an inner reflection of the great plans God would see through this baby's life.

And actually, this passage may point that Mary actually did have quite an understanding of what this meant because she had some inner reflection in verse 19.

Mary knew the reality. Unlike the popular Christmas song, Mary did know. The angel told her. It's not a question in her mind. So for God's people, known as the nation of Israel, it meant that this birth narrative indicates the restoration of this nation and a foreshadow of their new exodus renewal.

And for those outside of that nation of God's chosen people, like us, we are then grafted into the promise of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Not all of us may know what grafting plants may entail. Maybe five or ten minutes on YouTube, you'll be an expert just like me. But grafting in is something where you take a perfectly healthy plant or a tree and you cut a limb off of it.

[19:42] You slice it down and make a little space for a wedge. And you take another species that you graft into this plant and this species and you put, you insert it into that slit of that branch and then you wrap it tight.

And then over time, over the course of a year, new roots will take shape. The life-giving source of the grafted in species is now found within that main species.

And so now that grafted in plant is abiding in that vine. Through that union, you receive a new status. You receive a new nature.

You receive new fruit, new life through that grafting. This is what the manger scene indicates of what God is doing for the people.

And the invitation that drew the shepherds to seek Jesus is still available today for us. In fact, the entire world, the day after Thanksgiving, you will find it in Walmart.

[20:50] Joy to the world. The whole world is disturbed by the hope of Jesus. when this invitation, within this invitation, we have the full outline of events that are planned for those who receive it.

We have the who, what, where. And we don't stop there as a church. We continue with what God has been continuing to do through this baby as he grew to a man.

And it is a 2,000-year-old invitation. And it is not promised to be available for response tomorrow. or later this evening. If you are not in Christ, this is your time to come to him.

Whether you are here today gathering with us or on a live stream, now is the time to have faith in him. Because deep within, the Holy Spirit makes it known to us something that is missing in your life.

It is a haunting reality, really. Any of us who can describe that converting experience. But if this is you today, if you realize that there is something missing in your life, you have tried everything the world has to offer, and it's fallen dead short, leaving you empty.

[22:15] If this is you, God is calling you to faith in his son. God is a God who gives sinful mankind a new name, a new purpose, a new status through that grafting in.

We saw that in the narrative of Ruth the Moabite, an outcast, an enemy of God. Ruth the Moabite, Naomi, the abandoner of God's people who strayed from the Lord.

We see Judah, the sexual scoundrel in this Advent series. We saw Tamar, the deceiver, Rahab, the prostitute, Bathsheba, the adulterer, and David.

We could create a laundry list for David, the corrupt king, the homewrecker, and the deceiver. Hell is the most awful place that you could imagine.

And it will be filled with a lot of people with good intentions in this life. However, the offer is here and now to trade those good intentions, those compromises, and your sin with a contrite confession.

[23:34] There is hope. Only in Jesus. There is no hope apart from Jesus Christ. And we are bankrupt apart from him. We can have this whole world. We can have every dollar that is upon this earth and we can still have nothing if we are apart from Jesus Christ.

We probably actually have more in common with Bathsheba, with David, with Rahab, with Naomi, all these broken narratives we've observed this Advent season than we might actually like to admit. But in Jesus Christ, he takes our sinful status. He grafts us in, cleans us, takes our debt, which was waiting for the wrath of God to come.

And Jesus Christ took upon himself the wrath of God. I ask you, declare bankruptcy this Christmas season and allow this time to mark the end of your old life, living as a separated species from God and that coming in to begin new into the vine of Christ.

This is the good news that the shepherds heard about in verse 10 of great joy. joy. This is joy to the world, church.

[24 : 48] Bonhoeffer says, all over the world today, people are asking, where is the path of joy? And the church of Christ answers loudly, Jesus is our joy, joy to the world.

And if you are in Christ, if we are in Christ, let us be assured in the work that God is continuing to see through you. Whether you struggle in your faith or you are on fire for your faith, faith is not a feeling.

It's a reality. And it's rested upon the inerrancy of God's word and what is written and promised, regardless of how you feel about it. If you are in Christ, you are secure of the hope of receiving an inheritance in heaven waiting for you.

in the next life. Christmas is a reminder of that. That we can lack all resources in this life, but we have everything in Christ.

Maybe I'll leave today with the great same splendor of the shepherds as they returned in verse 19, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as had been told to them.

[26 : 11] The invitation of faith is available for us today. Let's pray. Thank you.