

Good news, great joy... today!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 December 2023

Preacher: Alex Lee

- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray together. Father God, we praise you again this Christmas morning. The depths of your love, the riches of your mercy and grace, all through your Son, Jesus Christ, they are all worthy of our praise.
- And now as we sit under your word, pleased by your Holy Spirit, give us understanding that we might rejoice in you again for the good news of Jesus.
- In his name we pray. Amen. What news will bring you joy? What news will bring you joy? Many years ago, I saw the news that brought my mother great joy.
- I came back from school with a piece of paper, which was my Form 5 SPM exam results. Now others did much better than I did.
- I was sort of happy with my own results. But as I read my results out to my mother, I saw a reaction that I had never seen before.
- [1 : 1 8] She was smiling at my results. Actually, she was very happy. I just showed you what a terrible student I was before that, giving her so much sadness from my results.
- Also, she said, actually, I'm very proud of your results. No one in my family, none of my sister's children, have ever done this well.
- Now, I still have that piece of paper at home. But I don't think it will have the same effect on my mother anymore. Also mainly because my younger brother's results were even better than mine.
- So she won't be happy with mine anymore. But at least initially, at least initially, news of my results gave her great joy. What news will give you joy?
- Perhaps it's the safe delivery of a newborn child, like Pastor Brian's third child. Maybe it's a yes to the answer to a marriage proposal.
- [2 : 3 1] Or a yes to going on a date. Or maybe it's the promotion that you've been working hard for so long. Or the unexpected pay rise.
- But what news will give you great joy, today? What news can make you joyful this Christmas, next Christmas, every Christmas, every day of your life?
- What kind of news will give you that kind of joy? Well, it's the news, the good news, that the ultimate Savior has come, bringing perfect peace.
- The ultimate Savior has come, bringing perfect peace. Now to some, this news may be familiar. This is old news.
- News that no longer give you as much joy. But as we listen again to these words of Scripture, as we listen again to the words of God's angel, and to the words of the heavenly host, I hope you'll be given reason to rejoice again.
- [3 : 4 2] Reason to praise God. Now if I can set the pace a little bit, the first point in your outlines actually will be the longest section, but the second and third points will be a bit shorter than the first point.
- So let's begin with the coming of the humble yet ultimate Savior. The coming of the humble yet ultimate Savior.

But the scene of this coming begins with someone that is not so humble, someone that is not so humble. Look with me at verses 1 to 3. Starting from verse 1, In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own town to register.

Now this doesn't seem like much. It just seems like a historical remark. But actually what we have here is an opposite figure to Jesus that is being set up.

[4 : 55] An opposite figure to Jesus. Evidence show that Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor at the time, Caesar Augustus claimed to be God.

He claimed to be the son of God. He claims to be the Savior who ends war and brings peace. He claims that his birth is supposed to be the beginning of the good news for the world.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? But what sort of Savior is Augustus? What sort of king is he? Well, he is one that puts a heavy burden on his people.

He is one that puts a heavy burden on his people. Here you see he orders a census, an official count of the population, a bunchy Roman empire. Why?

So that he can impose taxes on them. So that he can force them to pay money. And he forces everyone to register in his hometown.

[6 : 08] Now I'm sure you don't want this kind of Savior. But in the midst of this, a humble king is born.

Look now with me at verses 4 to 7. Starting from verse 4. 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.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him, and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. What's going on here?

Here Joseph is the royal descendant of King David. So he brings Mary to his hometown, to Bethlehem, to the place where God promised in Micah chapter 5 that a ruler will come from it.

[7 : 26] That's one of the earlier readings from this morning. Mary herself is pregnant, but not because of Joseph, whom she has not yet married, but because in Luke chapter 1, Mary has conceived by the Holy Spirit, and God's angel announces that her child is to be called Jesus, the Son of God.

And so, for this Son of God, what is the appropriate birthplace? What is the nice place to be born in for this King, for God's Son?

Maybe Sarawak GH? Maybe Timberland Medical Center? KPJ Specialist Hospital? Well, I can choose a single room or not.

Or can I choose a VIP suite? No. How about an animal shed for God's King? And then for a baby, as a baby crib, why not use a food container?

A food container for animals, a manger. such humble conditions, but actually, perfect for a humble king.

[8 : 51] Perfect for a humble king. And then the first audience of this humble king are shepherds, humble shepherds. In verses 10 and 11, an angel of the Lord tells them of Jesus' birth, but listen to the theological significance, the theological importance of what has just happened.

The angel says, in verse 10, do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. What's the good news that will cause great joy?

A Savior has been born. He's the Messiah, the Lord. Here, all three titles are packed with meaning here. The Messiah is the Hebrew word for Christ, and Christ is not Jesus' surname in his IC.

If he had an IC and an entity card, it would have been Jesus, Anad Joseph, or Jesus, Anad Tuhan. Jesus, the Son of God or Jesus, the Son of Joseph. But no, Christ is not his surname.

[10 : 14] Christ is his title. The title means God's chosen king. Here's the king that God had long promised before, the one who is to be in charge of God's kingdom, in charge over all things.

Jesus is that Christ, God's chosen king over all. Not only that, Jesus is the Lord. Lord, not just in a sense of being in charge, but also Lord in a sense of being God.

Jesus is the second person of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus is fully man, but also fully God.

He's a God that has taken on flesh, and he is the God king. And here, the long-awaited God king has come to save, who is the saviour.

That's the third title. He's not a political saviour like Augustus, but a saviour on a more important level. In Luke chapter 1, as Zechariah prophesied about his son, John the Baptist, he spells out the kind of salvation that Jesus brings.

[11 : 39] If you flip a few pages back to Luke chapter 1, verses 76 and 77, there it says, verse 76, And you, my child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.

Verse 77, To give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. What kind of salvation does Jesus bring?

Well, it's one where our sins are forgiven. Sin is any form of rebellion or resistance against God, whether it's ignoring him like he doesn't exist, or whether it's disobeying him, doing evil instead of good, or whether it's wrongdoing against others, which is ultimately wrongdoing against God.

A sin, therefore deserve God's righteous judgment. They deserve his fair punishment. That's something that we cannot save ourselves from, no matter how hard we try.

We can't save ourselves from God's punishment for sin. For when the angel says, Jesus is the Savior, Savior, and that he will save us from our sins, it means that he will save us from God's judgment.

[13 : 20] Jesus will suffer the punishment we deserve. He will die on the cross so that God can forgive us. Jesus Christ is this kind of Savior, the Savior that brings about forgiveness for us.

forgiveness. Now, I'm guessing that you know how good forgiveness can be. I, myself, learned the goodness of forgiveness in my teenage years.

A good friend and I got into a fight and we didn't talk to each other for months. Obviously, we were both wrong. but when he was very sick in hospital, when my mom brought me to see him, he said, Alex, you're here.

And he was friendly towards me, but I wasn't. He seemed ready to forgive, but I wasn't.

I still had a grudge against him. But my friend died a few months later after that. And my heart was filled with so much regret, so much guilt.

[14 : 44] A regret for not responding to his forgiveness. Guilt for not forgiving him also. But his forgiving words are still very significant.

I can still remember his voice and his words. Alex, you're here. He had forgiven me.

He no longer held anything against me. God's forgiveness is like. That's what it's like, to be saved from our sins, only on a much, much deeper and bigger scale.

Someone shared a quote with me, and the quote says, sin is the heaviest of weights. Sin is the heaviest of weights.

forgiveness is the greatest deliverance. Forgiveness is the greatest deliverance. God no longer holds any of our sins against us if we receive forgiveness in Jesus' name.

[16 : 01] It doesn't mean that we can live any way we like. His grace of forgiveness means we now live for God. God no but it does mean that God doesn't hold our sins against us because Jesus is our ultimate Savior.

When we trust in him, he is the one who saves us from all our sins. He is the one that enables God to forgive us.

Jesus' coming doesn't only mean salvation and forgiveness of sins, it also means perfect peace. The costly yet perfect peace, that's the second point in your outlines.

Look at a loud praise from a choir of angels. Look now at chapter 2, verses 13 and 14. Verse 13, suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests.

Surely, this is the high point, isn't it? After a series of angel appearances in chapters 1 and 2, the great praise of a large group of angels, they now mark the coming of the Savior Jesus.

[17 : 34] Jesus. Why do they praise God? Why do they suddenly all come together to praise him? Because God is fulfilling all his promises with the sending of this Savior King.

It's because he's blessing and saving people from every nation. It's because he is loving and gracious to forgive. So the angels praise God to the utmost.

Glory to God in the highest. Gloria in excelsis deo. This God deserves nothing less than the highest praise. And the heavenly angels model that for us here.

Will you give your highest praise to God? And as the angels praise God in heaven, they also announce the blessing, the blessing that will be on earth.

Verse 14 again, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests. What's the blessing?

[18 : 51] There will be peace on earth. Now, this doesn't refer to the calm and quiet kind of peace, but refers to relational peace, peace between two parties, peace instead of enmity or war.

This is the peace that comes from being forgiven by God, from being reconciled to him, no longer being his enemy, but now his forgiven friends.

If you were here yesterday, as we reflected on Romans 5, this is the same peace with God that comes from being justified, being declared righteous through faith in Jesus.

This is the same peace that comes from being justified by Jesus' death on the cross, peace that cost the life of God's only Son.

But notice also, in verse 14, this peace is not extended to everyone, but also only to those, only to those on whom his favor rests.

[20 : 14] Only those whom God has granted favor, only they will have peace with God, through Christ. Now, this raises all kinds of questions, doesn't it?

It raises questions about God's decision and God's fairness. I only have time for a few brief comments, but I hope that there are enough of a starting point for further reflection.

So, first, we are helped by Jesus' own words, Jesus' own words about God's favor. Jesus uses the same original word in Luke chapter 10.

So, in your Bibles, flip further back, Luke chapter 10, verse 21, and there it says, verse 21, at that time, Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. So, God the Father is pleased, same word as favor, to reveal things to the lowly, those like little children, and his wise and pleased to hide things from the proud, like the wise and the learned.

[21 : 47] Jesus goes on to say in verse 22, the verse after that, verse 22, all things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Friends, the point is this, God the Father and Jesus the Son, chooses who to grant favor, who to reveal the Father to. This is God's sovereign decision, his sovereign will, not based on anything that we have done, not based on any good.

He alone decides. That's the first comment. Second comment, we are also helped by the context of the same chapter.

In Luke chapter 10, at the start of Luke chapter 10, you see that Jesus sends out his disciples to every town and place where he is about to go.

Everyone will have a genuine chance of responding to him, either to listen to him or to reject him. And those on whom God's favor rests, they listen and God grants them peace.

[23 : 16] But those who reject him, however, they are entirely accountable for their responses. Everyone has a genuine chance to listen or to reject this message about Jesus.

Let me leave you with those for further reflection. question. But the main point here is this. The angels greatly praise God because his forgiveness and peace is now available, available through Jesus, the Savior that has come.

One last question. One last question to think about. Why is this such joyous news today?

Why should Jesus' coming be good news that causes great joy today, Christmas Day 2023? Well, imagine with me, imagine an alternative universe where there was no first Christmas.

So, no miraculous conception, no birth, no manger. Imagine, no angel, no savior, no forgiveness.

[24 : 48] Imagine, no cross, no justification, no peace with God. So, therefore, no gospel, no blessing for the nations, no apostles, no missionaries, no Borneo Evangelical Mission, no brothers and sisters in Christ, no church family, no personal relationship with the Father.

Friends, what will we be left with? What else do we have then? Nothing. We will still be in our sins.

Anything we put our trust in will be futile or useless. hope we have about the future will only be wishful thinking. Worse still, God's fair judgment will await us.

There will be no escape from punishment for our debt of sin. Friends, without the first Christmas, without the coming of Jesus, we will still be sitting in darkness now, sitting under the shadow of death.

That would be a desperately depressing, hopelessly dark place to be in. But by the mercy and grace of God, we are not in that alternate universe.

[26 : 19] by the grace of mercy of God, we are here. Jesus Christ, our Savior, has come to shine light into our darkness.

The first Christmas has happened. Jesus did go to the cross. He did die for our forgiveness. God's favor does rest on you, and you have accepted and believed in this good news.

Even if you haven't believed, you can do so today. You can put your trust in Jesus now. By the mercy and grace of God, He has entered into peace with you.

You have a relationship with the God of the universe. You have a rock-solid hope of salvation, an eternal future in God's presence.

a future to enjoy all His blessing and goodness under the forever King Jesus. Brothers and sisters, we are here in this history, where the first Christmas really has happened, by the grace and mercy of God.

[27 : 42] So, let this good news spark joy in your hearts. Let your hearts overflow with thankfulness. Let this good news cause you to praise God to the utmost.

Let us join our voices to rejoice loudly in our great God. Friends, He deserves nothing less than the highest praise.

peace. Please, please, don't let this news become familiar or old. Don't let this news, this good news, leave you unmoved or unchanged.

Friends, Jesus, the Christ of Christmas, our Savior and God, has come into the world, bringing, bringing you complete forgiveness and perfect peace.

Gloria, in excelsis Deo, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace on those, peace to those on whom his favor rests.

[28 : 59] Friends, let's pray and praise God together. Heavenly Father, our glory to you in the highest. Together, we praise you to the utmost.

Our glory to you because Jesus, the Savior and the King that you've promised, has come. And as your favor rests on us, we're able to believe him.

We're able to be forgiven by you. And we've been drawn into a peaceful relationship with you. Thank you that you've done all this through your son Jesus, through his death and resurrection.

Oh, what joy it is that that first Christmas really has happened. So fill our hearts with joy.

Let our hearts overflow with thankfulness. And Heavenly Father, be pleased to be glorified as we join our voices to rejoice in you greatly.

[30 : 04] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.