

LUKE 2:1–14. EHV

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governing Syria. And everyone went to register, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the town of Nazareth, into Judea, to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was from the house and family line of David. He went to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was pledged to him in marriage and was expecting a child. And so it was that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. There were in the same country shepherds staying out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified! But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He 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.” Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.”

Why exactly are you here? What are we celebrating tonight and tomorrow?

I currently belong to a singing group that sang for the Christmas tree lighting ceremony in Gregory back toward the end of November. A lady from Gregory gave a little speech before the Christmas tree was lit up, and she concluded her speech by saying, “And of course let’s not forget the real reason for the season.” Then she began the countdown to the lighting of the Christmas tree.

What *is* the real reason for the season? What are we actually celebrating?

As I peruse the nice Christmas cards we have on display at home—many of them given to us by some of you sitting in front of me—in what was already printed in the cards I read of peace and joy. One of them even says right on the cover, “Jesus is the reason for the season.” Another says we are celebrating “the wonder of God’s love in the birth of Christ.” That doesn’t quite answer the question either, does it?

Why is Jesus the reason for the season? *How* did God show us his love in the birth of Christ? What are we actually celebrating?

On the first Christmas night, here is what the angel told the shepherds should give them and us great joy: “Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord.”

“Today.” Perhaps not actually December 24 or 25, but an actual day in human history. A day during a census initiated by Caesar Augustus, the leader of the Roman Empire, while Quirinius was governor of Syria. When you hear that this baby was born to a virgin and laid in an animal feedbox, when you see all the glowing, fairy-tale-like paintings and drawings, you could easily get the idea that we’re celebrating some legend or myth. But all of the circumstances that Luke gives for this child’s birth, for the beginning of his ministry when he was about thirty, for his death and resurrection, for the ministry of his apostles—they all check out. This isn’t like,

for instance, the Book of Mormon's account of Jesus Christ appearing to some of the inhabitants of the Americas after his resurrection, for which there is not a shred of historical evidence. This is no fairy tale. This is a true story.

"In the town of David." The town of David is Bethlehem Ephrathah, which distinguishes it from another Bethlehem that was in Galilee about six miles from Nazareth. Bethlehem Ephrathah in Judea was exactly the city where the prophet Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born more than 700 years earlier. And the reason he was born in the town of David is because Mary and Joseph were both descended from King David, and Caesar's census required them to return to the town of their ancestry to be registered. The prophet Nathan had told King David that the Messiah would come from his line about 1,000 years earlier. So we are also celebrating that God's word and promises are reliable. He always keeps his word, in short time or long. That's important to remember when we hear his promises to us—to provide for our daily needs, to give us strength to endure hardships, to return to judge the living and the dead and to take his believers to heaven, and many others.

"A Savior was born for you." This is the heart of the reason for our celebration, but I think it's also why Christmas people and Christmas cards don't like getting into the specifics of the reason for the season. Who wants to open up a Christmas card from a friend and read, "May your heart be filled this season with all the joy that comes from knowing there is a Savior for a miserable sinner like you." But that's exactly what we need to hear! That's exactly why Christmas should be celebrated! A Savior was born for us!

After all, who are we human beings? God originally created us in his image, so to figure out what we are, we shouldn't compare ourselves to anything else in nature. We instead need to compare ourselves to God. God is holy; we are sinful. God is eternal; we are mortal. God is life; we live every moment in the company of death. God is kind; we are cruel. God is selfless; we are selfish. God is gracious; we are nice to those who are nice to us. God is loving; we are hateful. God never lies; we do. God is always at work; we are always looking to get out of work. God is blessed; we are cursed. God resides in heaven; we are doomed to hell by nature. But guess what? A Savior was born for you!

Think of how many times you lost your temper, how many times you disobeyed your parents or broke the law, how many times you lusted after someone who was not your spouse, how many times you coveted or stole someone else's property, how many times you used foul language or took God's name in vain, how many times you didn't make God and his Word and gathering together with his saints your number one priority *just this past year*, not to mention your entire lifetime! But guess what? A Savior was born for you!

And "he is Christ the Lord." He is the One God planned to send to save us from eternity. He is in fact the Lord himself, God's own Son. Do you know or care about all the poor people in Mumbai, India? As a Christian, you might care about the poor in a general way, but you don't specifically know or care about the poor people in Mumbai, or even if you do, there isn't anything you're going to do to help them—unless you maybe do something after this sermon just to prove me wrong. Why? Because there are 8,000 miles' distance between you and them, not to mention the cost of money, energy, and time to help them!

Why should the God of the universe give a fig about us or do anything to save us poor sinners, considering the eternity of distance between us and him? If every one of us should

perish, he would continue to be just fine! It's actually what we deserve. Not to mention that saving us will cost him his life—the life of the One who *is* life.

Yet there he is: “This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” *The* native of heaven lying in the poorest place on earth.

Ah, Lord, though you created all,
how weak you are, so poor and small,
that you should choose to lay your head
where lowly cattle lately fed!

Instead of soft and silken stuff
you have but hay and straw so rough
on which as king, so rich and great,
to be enthroned in royal state.

And so it pleases you to see
this simple truth revealed to me:
that all the world's wealth, honor, might
are weak and worthless in your sight.

So welcome to earth, O noble Guest,
through whom the sinful world is blest!
You came to share my misery,
that you might share your joy with me—

yes, joy and peace and the wonder of God's love and everything else in the Christmas cards. Jesus is the reason for the season, because he is God's own Son who assumed humanity in order to save humanity from sin, death, and the devil, so that all who believe in him may not perish, but have eternal life. The best possible gift that could be given has been given to all of us by the best possible Giver.

That's definitely reason enough and more to celebrate, not just tonight and tomorrow, but throughout our lives and into all eternity. Amen.