

Why Jesus? *We Need a SAVIOR* Luke 2:1-21

Introduction: Why Jesus?

Good morning! Welcome to EBC... Today is our second week of the season the church has historically referred to as Advent. “Advent” is a Latin term which means “coming” or “arrival of someone”. For this year, we are focusing on the question, “Why Jesus?” Each week as we pose this question, we will look for answers from Luke’s gospel. As those of you are regular attenders of EBC know, we are going through the book of Acts together as a congregation, so this short break for Advent we want to keep our Lukan theme going by exploring how Luke introduces us to the Lord Jesus and answers the question as to “why Jesus”?

Last week, Pastor Stan showed us how Jesus came to be a *king*. The first designation we learn about Jesus when His mother, Mary, receives the angel’s message is that His future destiny is to be the king of Israel, but the king of the world. If you weren’t here for the message, I encourage you to go back and listen to the message. Today, we are going to examine the angel’s announcement to the shepherds in the field. As we will see, this announcement is about salvation; that this baby Jesus is destined to not only be a king, but a Savior.

What does it mean to be “saved”?

Now, if you were to ask most Christians what it means to be “saved” my guess is that they would say something along the lines of knowing they were going to heaven when they died. But is that really how the New Testament describes salvation? One of the most controversial things I did at my former church was ask this question to the congregation of where this is actually written in the Bible...it wasn’t the most pastorally sensitive way to explore this topic, but I wanted to get them thinking about “salvation” in a more biblical way that fits with the New Testament. But is salvation an abused term in our Christian vernacular? A word used so often that we have loosened it from its biblical roots to something we no longer understand or take for granted?

Reframing Salvation: Way Out/Way In

Salvation: being given a way out of bad circumstances and way in to better ones.

Salvation in the modern world - The idea of salvation is not just something Christians discuss or think about. The need for “salvation” is woven all throughout our society; it’s in every major religion; and it’s the common cry of the human heart. I want to suggest a few ways that our society thinks about being “saved”:

“Salvation” in the modern world:

- *True Love*

Out of loneliness and into companionship

- *Self-discovery*

Out of feeling insignificant and into feeling empowered/important

- *Political Liberation*

Out of oppression and into freedom - However, this morning friends, I want to show you how Jesus offers a salvation – a way out, way in – that is far, far better than what the world currently offers. This morning I want us to hear afresh the announcement of Jesus and the salvation He brings to the world, and the invitation He gives. Please open your Bible to Luke 2...

Luke 2:1-21: The Savior who Ends our Exile from God

Fake Saviors: Caesar Augustus - Luke 2:1-7 - Now, don’t dismiss this too quickly as just a bunch of random historical info. Luke is preparing us for the birth of Jesus, the true savior; but the context and political situation surrounding the birth of Jesus is significant! Not unlike today, there was the belief that political leaders could provide salvation. Rome used propaganda well to keep the population trusting in those in power.

Let me give you some background on this person, Caesar Augustus... Caesar Augustus's birthname is Octavian. He was the nephew of Julius Caesar, the great military leader and first emperor of Rome. However, Jesus Christ was assassinated by Brutus. Octavian joined forces with Marc Antony and defeated Brutus. Later, Octavian defeats Marc Antony and Cleopatra, and becomes the sole ruler of the Empire. He took the name Augustus, which means "majestic one". He started the emperor cult, viewed himself as a divine figure, and boasted that "Rome built in brick and left it in marble".

I want you to see how Augustus was described as one who brings good news and peace to the empire. First, according to inscription dating around 9 B.C. hails Caesar Augustus as a god whose "birthday signaled the beginning of good news [gospel] for the world." Another inscription attributed to a famous Roman official states the following:

"Augustus is the father of his **divine homeland Rome**, inherited from his father **Zeus**, and a **savior** of the common folk. His foresight not only fulfilled the entreaties of all people, but surpassed them, **making peace** for land and sea, while cities bloom with order, harmony, and good seasons; the productivity of all things is good and at its prime, there are fond hopes of the future and good will during the present which fills all men, so that they ought to bear pleasing sacrifices and hymns."

Let's turn our attention to the rest of the passage and see how Luke describes the birth of Jesus and the angel's announcement to the shepherds as a contrast to what Caesar Augustus supposedly offered. Luke 2:8-21 - So, what was it about this announcement, and the angelic experience these shepherds had that gave them such joy? Keep in mind that in the Old Testament encounters with angels were usually terrifying experiences; but here, it leads to absolute joy. What makes the difference?

First, let's look at the announcement itself beginning with verse 10. Who is the good news of God's salvation for? Luke 2:10 - The angel says, "I bring you good news [gospel] of great joy for *all the people*". This good news is for everyone – both Jews and Gentiles, and even shepherds. Who were these shepherds? Well, we don't know other than they were considered insignificant in first century Jewish society. In fact, they were also considered to be untrustworthy people. Shaking the hand and taking a shepherd at his word typically meant you were more than likely being lied to or at risk of being double-crossed. Some sources suggest that a shepherd's testimony or word in Jewish court didn't count or is highly suspicious. And yet, this is the first audience that God chooses to witness the birth of Jesus.

God's salvation in Jesus is available for anyone! Luke 2:11 - Secondly, the angel gives us a location and a title. Again, as modern-day bible readers it's very easy to just roll right through these verses and miss their significance. But we need to remember there is always a reason for Luke's details. *Location: City of David, Savior* - The birth of Jesus will take place in the city of David. Now, most often in the Old Testament, the "city of David" refers to Jerusalem, where Mt. Zion the site of the holy temple is. Yet, Jesus is born in the Bethlehem. Why does this matter?

Last week we learned from Pastor Stan that God promised David a son who would be given an eternal throne; and from Zion (the temple), God's glory and presence would reach out to the rest of the world. So, any "savior" that shows up must have a Davidic heritage ("son of David") and have the renewal of the Temple as their target. And yet, we also know that Bethlehem is where David grew up. So, Jesus is born in the city of David (Bethlehem), outside of the power-structures of where the current temple, HP, and Herod (puppet king) reside. So, we see that this Savior will come as not only a challenger to Augustus's claims, but a challenge to the existing temple, existing Jewish king, and HP (which is exactly what Jesus does).

Title: Christ (the) Lord [or Messiah-Lord] This is the big one! In English we put the definite article there to help it make sense, but it literally reads: Messiah Lord. It is one of the few places in the New Testament where Jesus is given this description, but the fact that it appears here at the beginning of Luke with the angelic announcement over Jesus's birth is hugely significant. For this Son of David, Savior, is not only a Messiah (that is, an anointed human king), but He is also the Lord Himself. When we see Lord appear in the New Testament, it's the Greek "kyrios", the same Greek word used in the Greek translation for the Old Testament called the

Septuagint for “Yahweh”, the special Jewish name for God. In other words, this Messiah is not only a Son of David, but also the embodiment, the image, the personification of the Lord (Yahweh) Himself. It’s one of the earliest pieces of evidence we have of Jesus as not only a human figure, but also a divine one: Jesus as both fully human, and yet at the same time, fully divine - God the Son Himself in human form. So, God Himself is going to fulfill the promises given to Israel, for a King, son of David, born in the city of David.

God’s salvation comes through the Son the God (Jesus) becoming a human being

Luke 2:12 - What exactly is this “sign”? I confess for years I have been confused about what the significance would have been for Luke’s audience (and the shepherds?) of being told about Jesus in a manger? Well, I think there might some biblical answers. First, the language of “sign” and a “child being born” comes from the prophets, particularly Isaiah. Let me show you: Isa. 7:14, Isa. 9:6

But what about the manger? Well, have you ever wondered why in every manger scene you have oxen and donkeys? Luke doesn’t tell us about the animals. We have no way of knowing. It’s possible those were common animals. But I think our Christian iconographers were more biblical than that. Listen to the opening of Isaiah... Isa. 1:3

Now, in the Greek Bible (which is the one which the New Testament authors used), the same Greek word is used to describe the “cribs” of donkeys in Isa. 1:3, and the crib of Jesus (manger). Christians have made a connection between these two texts, suggesting this:

The God whom Israel did not recognize or know (due to their own rebellious hearts) is now being made known through this child, born in Bethlehem, in a manger – the place where the donkey and oxen recognize their masters; so now, God’s people can recognize His presence among them – His salvation – through this humble savior named Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Messiah Lord (God Himself). God dwells amongst His people again through Jesus, the humble savior, lying in a manger in a nowhere stable in Bethlehem.

God’s salvation in Jesus means the world’s alienation from God (both Israel’s and the nation’s) is now over
Salvation is not just about going to heaven when I die! It’s more: salvation means that we turn to Jesus (repentance) and receive that which He is offering (eternal fellowship with Him). Salvation is a WAY out and a WAY in. “Salvation is portrayed [by Luke] as a new or renewed relationship with God, established through repentance and faith on the one hand, and the reception of divine forgiveness on the other. *It is losing one’s life to Jesus in order to enter the kingdom of God and experience eternal life.* It is the enjoyment in the present of the salvation that the Messiah [Jesus] came to achieve for His people.” David Peterson, New Testament scholar

Main Point: Why Jesus?

Jesus gives us the way out of misery of sin (spiritual slavery; divine condemnation/judgement; eternal separation) and the way into God’s salvation (forgiveness; peace; joy; eternal fellowship)

So, our question this morning is quite simple:

- 1) Are you “saved”? (have you lost your life to Jesus?)

What might Jesus be calling you out from and entering into? Christmas is a season for turning to Jesus, and losing your life in Him!

- 2) Are you enjoying your *present* salvation?

Are you walking more closely with the Savior? Is there anything hindering that walk with Him? Christmas is a season for turning to Jesus and losing your life in Him!

Main Point: *Why Jesus? Jesus brings us out of spiritual exile and back into fellowship with God*

Luke 2:1-21: The Savior who Ends our Exile from God

Luke 2:1-10

God's salvation in Jesus is available for anyone!

Luke 2:11

God's salvation comes through the Son the God (Jesus) becoming a human being

Luke 2:12

God's salvation in Jesus means the world's alienation from God is now over

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) What do you think it means to be "saved"?
- 2) What is the biblical significance of Jesus being called "Messiah Lord"?
- 3) What is the significance of the "sign of the manger"? (hint: see Isa. 1:3; 7:14; 9:6-7)
- 4) How are you presently enjoying salvation and fellowship with Jesus? Is there anything presently hindering your joy in Him?