

# THE BABY KING IN THE MANGER

Luke 2:1-7

Key Verse: 7

**“...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”**

Last week, we heard the beautiful prophecy in Isaiah that a child would be born who would be called **“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.”** This child would reign on David’s throne with justice and righteousness forever. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Before we get into today’s short passage, let’s briefly review Luke chapter 1. Luke has already introduced to us the elderly godly couple of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, a miracle baby. John’s mission was to **“make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”** Zechariah could not believe this good news from the angel Gabriel. So he was given a time of silence until the birth of John. In Elizabeth’s sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the same angel Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth, to announce to her that she was chosen to be the mother of the Son of the Most High God. The angel said, **“The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”** The Holy Spirit would make possible this conception in the virgin Mary, so this child would be called the Son of God. Mary accepted this holy mission from God, even though it completely changed her life direction from her own human dream. Mary then visited her relative Elizabeth, who called Mary “the mother of my Lord.” Mary broke out in a song of praise, **“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”** Three months later John the Baptist was born. Zechariah could speak again and he also broke out into a song of praise: **“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...”** In this way John the Baptist was born with many accompanying praises and prophecies of the Messiah.

Now in chapter 2, Luke turns his attention to the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of Mary. Let’s go through the passage briefly and then consider several points.

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Look at verses 1-3. **“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.”**

Luke sets the life of Jesus Christ firmly in human history. Who was Caesar Augustus? Caesar Augustus (63 BC- 14 AD), also known as Octavian, was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. He became the first emperor of the Roman Empire. His life was surrounded by wars and politics. Surprisingly, he died not in war, but at the age of 75. He had a step son Tiberius, whom he officially adopted, who became the second emperor of the Roman Empire. One title bestowed on Caesar Augustus was “Divine Son” or “Son of the gods.”

St. Luke mentions a census decree. There could be many reasons for a census. Simply speaking, it was to maintain control of the empire by providing finances for military control and civil service projects, including a police and fire-fighting force. So everyone went to their own town of descent which had the best archives and genealogies to prove their lineage.

Verses 4-5 continue: **“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.”**

Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, which was no small distance to travel by foot (see a map), especially for a woman in her full term of pregnancy. This expresses some of the cruel oppression of the Roman Empire. Couldn't they make an exception for a pregnant woman to stay with a relative or mid-wife to help with the childbirth?

Two more things are noteworthy: Joseph's descent and their marital status. Joseph was a descendant of David. As we already know, the Messiah had to be descended from David's line to fulfill the prophecies in Scripture. The other somewhat embarrassing point is that Joseph and Mary were not yet married. They were only pledged to be married. That was a shameful situation in that society: Mary was pregnant before the wedding ceremony. Of course, we know that this

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was not Joseph's child, but from the Holy Spirit. Even so, the general population did not know that. So, rumors must have spread, causing a scandal.

Luke goes on in verses 6-7: **“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 cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”**

It was not a good time humanly speaking for Mary's baby to be born. First of all, they had no relatives in Bethlehem to stay with, and all the inns, motels and guest rooms were full. Joseph had little clout as a poor carpenter to rent a room in someone's home. They had to settle for any place of shelter. So they found a barn.

Have you ever been in a barn? Christmas cards with manger scenes look so sweet and cozy, but that is not the characteristic of a barn. Barns are cold, smelly, and dirty. The baby Jesus was placed in a manger, which is an animal's feeding trough. Feeding troughs are not clean. They have animal saliva. But there was no crib for Jesus, and you can't sleep with a baby in your arms. You need a place to set the baby down. So Jesus was placed in a manger.

What a great contrast between the power, wealth and authority of Caesar Augustus, the emperor of Rome, with this poor, helpless, powerless couple and their newborn baby, Jesus. Frankly, it looks ridiculous and pitiful from a human perspective. How could this child be anyone of significance? If people were told this child would be King of kings, they would all laugh. This child would be lucky to get out of poverty.

If people were told this child was God's Son, they would laugh even harder. Doesn't God have a bit more power and control to see that his Child get a decent room at his birth? Wouldn't any earthly king provide a room in a palace to be born in, with the best doctors and nurses around? Then why did not God orchestrate some better circumstances for his Son to be born in? What can we learn from this? I find 3 wonderful truths from God here.

**First, our God is humble.** If God had sent his Son into the world as the son of a mighty king or general, people would all tremble. God did not invade our world like a warrior ready to strike down all his enemies. That would only strike fear and

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terror in people. We might accept such a person's rule, but only out of fear, not out of love.

Love is humble. St. Paul described love like this: **“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”** (1Cor 13:4-8a)

We human beings are so proud. We don't like to admit we are wrong or say, “I'm sorry” first. We don't like to look at or be around those who offend us. Last week, some of us heard the testimony of a NU student at our end of quarter symposium. He said he never met his cousins because of an argument between his father and his uncle. That hurt this student deeply. He wanted to meet his cousins. But he could not for a long time because of a family fight. Families fight for basically the same reason that nations war: pride.

But our God is humble. He came in such a humble way so that anyone can come to him. If he came with power and wealth, then poor and powerless people could not approach him. But Jesus came as the Friend of the poor and powerless. No one felt intimidated by Jesus. Ironically, it was this very quality which caused people to despise and reject him. In our hearts we aspire for wealth and power, which is the way of the world. It's not popular to say, “When I grow up, I want to be poor and powerless, humble and holy, approachable and amiable.” Rather, people aspire for money and fame. But our God came to us in such a humble way to be our Friend and Savior.

**Second, our God is love.** Love is to give, not take. John 3:16 describes God's supreme love: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** Jesus taught that the greatest love is to **“to lay down one's life for one's friends”** (Jn 15:13). Jesus didn't just teach this. Jesus did it, by dying on the cross for us. In this way, Jesus proved his love for God and for people. Jesus also taught, **“Love your enemies”** (Mt 5:44). Again, Jesus was no hypocrite. He practiced what he preached. From the cross he prayed, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”** (Lk 23:34). Jesus was mirroring God's love for us. Romans

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5:8 demonstrates this: **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son of God revealed that God is indeed love.

**Third, Jesus became poor to make us rich.** Paul wrote, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”** (2Cor 8:9). As the Prince of heaven, Jesus had all the wealth of the universe at his disposal. But he left the glory of eternal heaven, to be born in our fallen world, and laid in a manger at his birth.

What is the American Dream? I’m quite sure it is not to become like Jesus Christ. Rather, people commonly aspire to be wealthy, popular and famous. Young people used to say, “Be like Mike,” meaning Michael Jordan, the great basketball player. Young people are taught to compete. Last week I got the desire to see my youngest children compete in spelling and geography bees. I thought, “I could help them to win, at least at their school, and maybe in Chicago.” But then I realized that would take many hours of study and for what? For human recognition and praise. How much better it is to aspire to grow in the mind and heart of Jesus Christ, and the knowledge of God, rather than worldly knowledge or fame. Growing in the character of Jesus Christ brings praise and recognition from God, and it is eternal.

We know the saying, “Money can’t buy happiness.” Still, so many people pursue money as if money is the key to happiness. Jesus taught, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions”** (Lk 12:15). Jesus also said, **“You cannot serve both God and money”** (Mt 6:24).

What kind of influence do you have upon others? What kind of influence do you aspire to have? Think of the greatest people in human history. From a human point of view, it might include many people who had much power and money. But not many rich and powerful people would make it on God’s list of greatest people.

Remember John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel said, **“He will be great in the sight of the Lord”** (Lk 1:15). What made John the Baptist great? He had no wealth. He simply spoke the truth. He lived for God. He prepared the way for Jesus

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Christ. Finally, he died as a martyr. He gave his life fully in service to the Lord our God and Jesus Christ our Savior.

What are you giving your life for? Really. Not in theory. But practically. How are you spending your time and money? What are your greatest joys and sorrows? Are they rooted in God, his kingdom and his purpose? Do they include Jesus Christ?

Here I'm reminded of my life key verses: Mark 8:34-35. **“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.’”**

These words remind me over and over what I must live for. They challenge and encourage me to live for Jesus Christ and his gospel. But I find it so easy to live for myself, for small comforts and petty pleasures. Yet Jesus calls me again and again to deny myself, take up my cross and follow him. So this is what I pray and intend to do, by the grace of God.

Today we thought about the baby in the manger. Humanly, he looks poor and pitiful. Especially, in view of Caesar's power and wealth, he looks unimpressive. But in the manger is the life and hope of the world. In the manger is the Messiah, the King of kings, our Friend and Savior. Let's accept this humble King who is love, and who became poor to save us, to show us the way to true life, and to make us children of God who are truly blessed and great in his sight.