



CHRIST THE LORD

Part 8 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 2:8-21 | November 15, 2009

LUKE 2:8-21

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

²¹ And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

INTRODUCTION

All right, Mars Hill. We're going to pick it up in Luke 2:8-21 as we continue "Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God." Today we look at Christ the Lord. I'll pray. If you're new, my name's Mark, one of the pastors at the church.

And Father God, we come to a section of Scripture today that is perhaps among the most familiar of all Scriptures. God, my fear is that some are so familiar with it that they wrongly presume to be understanding of it, transformed by it, and in joy because of it. So, Father, I pray for the Holy Spirit to fill me and to fill us, that we might come back to the living Word of God and experience life and new life. And that Lord God we would have a deeper appreciation for, understanding of, and adoration in Jesus. In his name we pray, Amen.

Well, we hit this week the birth of Jesus. Something that history had been anticipating for hundreds of years. I think it is easy for us to underestimate the longing and the expectation and the anticipation. From the first sin in Genesis 3 and the promise of a savior, all of the Old Testament, a few thousand years of history, was waiting for the coming of a savior. A rescuer. A deliverer. A hero. Along the way certain prophecies were given, promises revealed by God, through his servants, that coming would be none other than Immanuel, God come to be with us. That he would be born of a virgin. That he would be born in the town of Bethlehem.

RECAP OF THE STORY

And Luke, the great historian, funded by the generous Theophilus, does all of his investigative work and writes for us the truthful, accurate, historical biography of Jesus. And he says that there was an occasion when the angel Gabriel showed up to this barren elderly couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. They'd been wanting and waiting for a child. They were beyond child-bearing years. Hope was almost altogether lost. And the angel said, "Your prayers have been answered, you'll give birth to a son. His name will be John. He'll be Jesus' cousin. He's going to be the forerunner, the prophet, the preparer of the way for the coming of Jesus." The angel Gabriel as well then made a visit about a hundred miles away, leaving the rural Judean hillside and going to a small town called Nazareth—dozens or hundreds of people—to a young woman, a teenager, betrothed or engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. And he revealed to her that she had favor or grace in the sight of God. That God had chosen her to give birth to Jesus Christ, God become a man. Her question obviously was, "How can this be since I am still a virgin?" She was informed that it would be a miracle of God. All of this happened.

As she was approaching the time of his birth, the governmental leaders, for financial and political and military purposes, wanted to call a census. Everyone was required to go to their hometown to register. Both Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, and Mary, his mother, were from the line of David.

And so they had to go, Joseph and Mary did, to the city of David, Bethlehem. It was filled with people. They arrived there. There was no place for them to stay. And so we know that they ended up in an animal stall, seeking shelter. There, Mary gave birth to Jesus, Galatians says, "in the fullness of time."

God worked this all out so the couple from Nazareth would be in Bethlehem at just the right time for Jesus to be born of the virgin in Bethlehem, fulfilling all of the Old Testament prophetic expectation and promise. And Jesus is wrapped in swaddling clothes. He's bundled up tight. He comes not in wealth but in poverty. He comes not to a big city but to a small town. He comes not to known parents but humble peasants. And he is laid in his first throne, which is not a bassinet or a crib, but it's the feeding trough of an animal. God comes into human history humbly. That's the story.

THE SHEPHERDS

We know as well from Luke's words that another unidentified angel shows up in the fields to announce this birth to the shepherds. They were unlikely to be chosen. If you ever played one of the shepherds in the church play around Christmas, you got the worst part. [Laughter]

The shepherds were weird. They lived by themselves, outside of town, sleeping in the open, with animals all the time. That's not the job you shoot for, that's the job you end up with. Shepherd.

Additionally, they couldn't make it to temple for sacrifices and feasts because they couldn't abandon their flock, so they weren't able to maintain religious devotion as the rest of God's people did. Furthermore, some would say that many of them were crooks and thieves. That they were a suspicious bunch. They couldn't even testify in court. These are the lowest of the low.

So when the angel shows up, that was surprising. No one ever showed up to hang out with the shepherds. And when he proclaimed to them that good news had come, these shepherds were the last people in the region who would have expected to hear good news, a message from God, via an angel. Yet they do.

And it's curious how God comes in a humble way to the humble Mary, and announces it to the humble shepherds. It's amazing. I mean, God takes the lowly, those people and things that are naught, and he works with them for his glory by his grace. Moses was a shepherd. David was a shepherd boy when he slew the giant Goliath. Amos the prophet says, "Why do you want me to preach, I'm just a shepherd?" Jesus comes as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. In John 10 and in 1 Peter 5, he is the Chief Shepherd, the Senior Pastor of the church.

And so God redeems even this really unpopular, insignificant profession and shows that he is humble and willing to look after us sheep, which are not the most brilliant of animals. Altogether defenseless. No one has ever been scared of a sheep. [Laughter] And the Bible says that we're like that: defenseless, silly, wandering, not real sharp. Some of you would say, "Oh, I am very smart and proficient." For a sheep, you are. [Laughter] But that's not a big deal. [Laughter]

And just like a shepherd tends to his sheep, the shepherd is devoted to his sheep, and the shepherd is willing to lay down his life for his sheep, so Jesus comes as the Good Shepherd.

And this announcement is made to the other shepherds that Jesus has in fact come. That God has become a man. And we don't know, but it is possible that they were even raising sheep to be sacrificed at the temple for sin. They may have been working amongst those sheep.

The angels report this, there is rejoicing and praising, the shepherds make the journey—a mile or two or more—into town. It is packed with people registering for the census. And they're looking for a particular son who was born. And I'm sure it took a number of hours to make the journey, and ask questions, and go seeking this son. And they find Jesus.

And every Christmas we celebrate this, right? Your homes are filled with nativity scenes: oh, there's Joseph and there's Mary and there's a feeding trough, and there's baby Jesus, and there's the shepherds, and there's all the animals.

And this can be one of those sections of Scripture that we're so familiar with that we're not familiar with it at all. We know what it says, but sometimes we don't know what it means. And there is a clue given to us by the angel in Luke 2:11, when he speaks to the shepherds, and he says that Jesus is, quote, "Christ the Lord." "Lord" there is preeminent, that he is the ruler, he is over all, and he's come to be with us. And what I want to emphasize to you is that is the rightful, exclusive position of Jesus Christ, Lord.

FIVE WORLDVIEWS

And what can happen is, because some of us are so familiar with the Christmas story, that we try and insert Jesus into something I'll call a worldview. It's a way of perceiving reality, God, your relationship with God, and the purpose of your life, and what happens after your life. All of those big existential questions. And I want, as we lean in toward the holiday season, I want to give us some time in advance to really treasure and ponder and consider these things. What does it mean that God became a man? What does it mean that Jesus came humbly? What does it mean, and what does it mean that he is Lord? And what does it mean in light of the alternatives? So I'll tell you where the sermon is going. We just looked at that which is historical, the account of the birth of Jesus. I want to look at it in comparison to that which is philosophical. And then we'll get to that which is pastoral.

There are various ways of seeing God. There are in fact basically five. We'll call them worldviews. Ways of viewing the world and your place in it in relation to God and what ensues after this life.

1. ATHEISM

The first is atheism (theos: God; A-: not). So atheism is that there is no God. There is no God. Now if that is the case, then this life is all we've got. There's no God who made us. There's no God who knows us. There's no God who's come for us. There's no God to comfort us. And when we die, there's no God to greet us. Just this life. That's all that there is.

Philosophically, if worked out to its logical conclusion, this is a horrific way to live your life. I'll give you two quotes. The first is from Bertrand Russell, the "great" atheistic philosopher. I put "great" in quotes, at least in my mind. He says this,

That Man is the product of causes which had no provision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast depth of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

Here's what he's saying: There is no God. You come from nowhere and no one. You're here for no purpose. If you are hurting or suffering, there is no one to help you or rescue you or comfort you. And when you die there is nothing awaiting you. What he's saying is, this is the scaffolding for life. And the foundation he says is, quote, "unyielding despair."

Richard Dawkins, a more modern-day atheist was asked the question, "Doesn't your world view lead you to be depressed?" Here's what he said, "I don't feel depressed about it. But if somebody does, that's their problem. Maybe the logic is deeply pessimistic." – Maybe? – "The universe is bleak, cold and empty. But so what?"

"Bleak, cold and empty. But so what?" Logically consistent, emotionally deadly: You come from no one. You come from nowhere. You're here for nothing. No one can save you. Might makes right. Only the fittest survive. If you are losing it's because you're a loser. If it's your pain, it is for progress and so be destroyed in the name of forward advancement. And when you die, there is nothing, there is no one; you go nowhere. The universe is cold, bleak and empty. But so what? Build your life on unyielding despair.

You ever wonder why atheists don't have great songs? That's why. [Laughter]

Now, where this leads inevitably is that when your life really hurts—you're struggling, you're hurting, you're physically injured, you're diagnosed with cancer, your marriage is in shambles, your loved one has betrayed you, your children are wayward, your boss fires you, you're nearing your end, emotionally you're undone; maybe you're just a tenderhearted-conscienced person and just life on the earth is very difficult for you—here's where you end up going with this ideology. Depression. You're just depressed. You're just depressed. That's why the number one category of prescription medications is antidepressants. I'm not saying that all medication is a sin, but a lot of medication is a functional savior. People who don't know God and as a result don't have hope. It also leads to self-medication, drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, shopping, violence, entertainment, a consumption culture, a conspicuous consumption culture. Thirdly, it results in suicide: "If there's no God to judge me, and no God to help me, and when I die there is no consequence, then, if it hurts really bad, why not just get it over? I'm going to die anyways, let's just move the date."

I prayed for a gal just an hour ago, bawling. She said, "That's what I believe. And I was going to kill myself. What do I do?" That's consistent. That's why teen suicide rates are up and girls cut themselves in junior high. That's why. That's why.

You know, my sons, they're eight and ten, they have a buddy who is diagnosed with cancer, elementary school boy. Good boy. Nice boy. Sweet boy. Recently took them to the hospital to visit their friend and bring him a gift and pray for him. You know what I didn't tell the Driscoll boys? "Look, the universe is cold, empty, and bleak, but so what? And the key is to build your life, gentlemen, on unyielding despair. And only the fittest survive, so if your buddy doesn't make it, he's back on the food chain of Darwinian evolution and that's what happens to the less fit." It's unbelievable that people would adopt this as hope for their life. It's not hope for their life. It's certainty of their death.

2. DEISM

So some prefer deism. Deism. And that is the belief that God made the world and left. We sinned, rebelled, and sin imbues, affects everyone and everything. Romans 8 says creation is longing for its redemption. And God said, "Oh my golly, what a mess people are. What a mess the world is. I'm not going to have anything to do with that, there's a lot of work there. And it's hard work." So God left. He doesn't pay any attention to you or your life or the world and he's certainly not coming. He's certainly not going to get involved. Many of the founding fathers were deists. This is what they believed. Unitarianism still teaches this. Christian Smith, the sociologist, says this is the prevailing spirituality of many in the West. Moralistic therapeutic deism. God's far away, you're on your own. He wants you to be good, so try therapy, see if that helps.

That's it. That's all you've got. Again, you come from God, but he's not paying attention to you. He's not there with you. He's not coming to rescue you. And when you die, he may or may not be there in the end. Good luck, you're on your own, you're abandoned. You're like a kid whose dad walked out, never looked back, never called, texted, emailed, sent a letter, checked in, or cared. You're on your own.

The movie *The Devil's Advocate*, Satan is played by Al Pacino, which was brilliant casting. [Laughter] And he calls God, quote, "an absentee landlord." That's it. He made the world and left. And he ain't coming back, you're on your own. Good luck. Result? Life gets hard. Depression. Self-medication. Suicide.

3. PANTHEISM/PANENTHEISM

Some move on to number three, which is, it's actually monism, which means "one," all is one. And it manifests itself as pantheism and panentheism. I'll explain these. They sound similar, but they are different. Pantheism is that everything is God. This used to be fairly popular. It's sort of lost prestige, because if everything is God, and you get cancer, then cancer's God. If you smoke and you throw a cigarette butt on the ground, which is why you got cancer, the cigarette butt is God. People started wondering, "Seriously? Like, cancer and cigarette butts and mosquitoes, they're God?" If everything's God, then yeah, that's God.

So then they proceeded to move toward panentheism, which is that God is in everything. That God is not a person, he's a force. God doesn't have a name, he's just an energy that imbues everything. And so, whereas atheism says that there is no creator, there's just creation, all we have is the material universe; the deist says there is creator and creation, but he has nothing to do with creation; panentheism or pantheism (both monism) would say, all we have is creation, there is no creator, but there is this divine force that fills all creation so that everything is sort of knitted together as one.

Now here's what that means: Good and evil are one. What this means as well, you don't come from God, you're not here for God, you're not here with God, you're not going to God. All there is is the material universe, and you are spiritually connected to the divine and you're on your own, so good luck, figure it out, do better, try harder. Spirituality. This is just general, vague, western spirituality. Consciousness, yoga, meditation, go into myself, get in touch with the divine force.

And here's the problem with this, if you didn't come from God and you don't belong to God, and God's not here to judge you and God's not waiting for you in the end, as you're suffering and you're hurting, and you see injustice and evil on the earth, in your own life, and that you do to others, the question is, where's the justice? You cry out in your heart because you're an image bearer of God, "where's the justice?" The answer is, there isn't any. There's no judge outside of this system. All we have is what is, and good and evil are different sides of the same coin. It's all one. It's all one. So if you're hurt, damaged, raped, abused, abandoned, betrayed, you can't say, that was wrong. All you can say is, that happened. And you can't appeal to anyone because there's no one beyond creation. And you have no hope of final judgment in the end, meaning if they got away with it, tough. There's nothing you can do and there's no God to help.

This is Deepak Chopra, this is Oprah Winfrey, this is Eckhart Tolle, this is what was said on this very stage when I debated Deepak for Nightline. Can't talk about good and evil, it's all one. No. There's good and evil. God and Satan. Creator, creation. Again that ideology, when life gets really hard: depression. You're abandoned, you're on your own, there is no God to help. Self-medication. Suicide. Suicide.

4. THEISM

Some try number four, theism. Theism is the belief that there is a God. This can be from monotheism, one God, like Judaism or Islam, to polytheism, many gods, Mormonism, Hinduism. They would say, "Yeah, there's a difference between creator and creation. The creator made creation. And yeah, God is a judge, he's holy, righteous, and good, and he judges us. And yeah, when we die we're going to stand before God and give an account. And we have sinned, so we're all guilty." But here's the difference, there's no savior. There's no savior. You have to save yourself, that's religion. Theism results in religion. Which is pray five times a day; go to Mecca. Obey the moral law, the Jews will tell you. Live a perfect whole life, work really hard to be one of the 144,000, the Jehovah's Witnesses would tell you. Transition from being a person to being god, attain your divinity, that's what Mormons would teach you. Or the Eastern religions would say just reincarnate and suffer and suffer and suffer to pay God back. Pay him back. You've got to save yourself. You got to do something. God's not pleased with you. He's not coming in to help you. He's not loving and merciful and compassionate and kind. He's the judge. He's the distant, far away, furrowed brow, crooked fingered, rule keeper over it all. And you're going to give an account to him. So do better, try harder, or go to hell. That's it.

This goes one of two directions: pride or despair. That's where religion always goes. Theism results in religion. It ends up in pride or despair. Religious people who feel like they're doing a good job, "Hey, I did good things. I'm a good person. God loves me because I've earned it." They're the worst, most smug, self-righteous, difficult, judgmental, hypocritical people in the world. Religious people are the worst. They murdered Jesus.

My son, he's ten, he was recently at an event and there was a church there. And the kids all put up signs in the church. And my son was mortified. He came home, he was like, "I can't believe this sign. I didn't know if I should tear it down or not Dad, it wasn't my sign or my church." I said, "What did it say?" "It said, 'God loves the good people.'" No, God loves the bad people, because he's good. God doesn't love us because we're good, God loves us because he's good. That's the difference between what we believe and religion.

It ends in pride: "I'm a good moral religious person. I know what hat to wear." Every religion's got their hat. It's crazy. You go to the Middle East, oh man, you go to the Holy Land, it's just like, "Oh, we're going into a Jewish place, put a hat on. Oh, we're going into a Christian place, take a hat off." "Why does that guy got a big hat?" "Oh, he's a big deal." "Why does that guy got a little hat?" "Well, he's a little deal." "Why does that guy got a red hat?" "Well, I don't know, cause he's red." I don't know why. [Laughter] "Oh, you got to wear long pants." "Why?" "It's a holy place." "You can't wear shorts?" "No, you can't wear shorts." "Why?" "Because God will see your knees." "He made the knees, he's already seen them." [Laughter]

I don't get, I don't get all the, I don't get all the rules. [Laughter]

I actually went to the place where Jesus fed the 5,000, plus the women and the children. We'll show you this later. They had a big sign out front, with a piece of bread, and a line through it. You're not allowed to bring food into the place where Jesus fed the 5,000. [Laughter]

And you're not supposed to wear a hat, but you are supposed to wear pants. [Laughter]

We call that ridiculous religion. But that's what happens. You just start making rules. And enforcing them, and thinking you're proud because you keep the goofy rules. Like you're going to stand before God: "No hat on, knees covered. Am I good?" "No." [Laughter] "It's going to take a little more than that to see eternal life." "I'm with a guy with a hat." "Well, that doesn't help either. He's already kindling. Next." It doesn't work that way.

But that's where theism goes. It goes to goofy, ridiculous religion. People become proud or depressed. Despairing: "Oh man, I tried to do all the stuff and I didn't do it well, and I forgot to do this and I know I'm supposed to pray this time of day but I forgot. And oh, man." And they get depressed. And here's what happens with theism that leads to religion: When you're hurting, it's because God's punishing you. That's it. See, God in this economy, he's like an abusive dad: "Oh, you did that. [Cracking sound of fist punching into hand] I'm going to hurt you." See, the picture of God is like a fist-clenched father. And he's just looking at your life. He's not really involved. He doesn't really love you. He doesn't really help you. He's not putting an arm around you. You mess up. [Cracking sound] Boom. You get punched. So, you get cancer, you get hurt, you lose your job, you're suffering. You come apart emotionally, physically, financially, spiritually. You don't run to God, you run from God. You don't cry out to God, you cower from God. Because God is punishing you, he's hurting you, he's making you pay. You have to atone for your sin, so just take your beating. Just take your beating.

Some people will be suffering and they don't even know why. They say, "I don't know what sin I committed. I don't know why God is so angry." "Ah, it was in your past life. You've reincarnated. He's beating you for a past life. You don't know what it is, but just take your beating. I'm sure you deserved it."

It's horrible. See, the truth is, for the Christian, the Bible says God's our Father, we've been adopted into his family; we're sons and daughters. Is there consequence for sin? Yeah. Proverbs and Hebrews say we have a dad who loves us and he'll correct us. But the Father doesn't punish his children because Jesus already paid our price. So God's not a dad who comes with a clenched fist and punishes kids. God's a dad who comes with his arms open to rescue his wayward children and to correct them, to save them from death. But see, the picture of theism is: You're on your own. God's not coming. He could punch you in the mouth at any time. And you're going to stand before him in the end, so do your best. But you don't really know how it's going to go. You could still go to hell after a whole life of trying really hard.

5. CHRISTIANITY

Which leads us to Christianity. Why I tell you this is I don't want you to interject Jesus into a false ideology. See, some people are so familiar with this birth story of Jesus and the nativity set on the mantel over the fireplace of their home, that they have this prevailing worldview that they just stick Jesus in. And he's Christ the Lord, like the angel said. And Christianity is this- and this is where Christianity is different. Christianity is not a world religion. It's the truth. It's about Jesus. And the story is that God is Creator. He's eternally existing. He is a spirit being, that he is the Creator who made the physical world. The heavens and the earth, all that is. And God made us male and female in his image and likeness, with dignity, value, and worth. And God spoke to us in relationship and he gave us moral commands to obey so that we might enjoy life. And instead, we chose death. We chose to follow Satan rather than God, to choose death over life, lies over truth. And traded intimacy with God, for hiding from God. And because of our sin, creation was affected. And everything is stained and marred by sin.

And God came, in Genesis 3:15, and he promised to our parents that he would come into human history as a man born of a woman. And again, the Old Testament prophets declared that he'd be born before 70 A.D. (when the temple was destroyed), that he would go to the temple. That he would be born to the virgin woman. That he would be born in the town of Bethlehem. That his name would be Immanuel, God with us. And he would come as the Savior. The angel Gabriel told Mary to name him Jesus, which means, "He is our savior." And that the Creator would enter his creation. That God would come among us. And that he would come as our savior. That he would come to live in poverty and humility and simplicity. That he would come made like us to identify with us. That he would suffer. That he would be betrayed. That he would be abused. That he would be berated and belittled. That he would ultimately be shamed and mocked and scorned, and that we would do that to him. That we would kill God. And that God would willingly die in our place, for our sins. And that he would rise to give salvation. And that he would reconcile sinners to their God because he is the God-man who can reconcile man to God. And so we come from God, that we belong to God, that we're here for God and his glory. And that God is here with us. And that one day we'll stand before God and experience a perfect eternity with God where sin and all of its affects are no more.

The way this works itself out in life is absolutely practical. I really get frustrated when people say things like, "I'm not into philosophy or theology, I just want practical." Well, what you think determines how you live. And what you think determines how you suffer. And what you think determines how you die.

And what I love is this: God has come to make himself seen and known. Don't you love that? You get intimations of this in the Old Testament. There's Jacob, trickster, con man. Ladder comes down from heaven. Ah, God comes down to be with us. Moses is leading the children of Israel, pillar of cloud, leading them. God comes down to lead them. The Ark of the Covenant is built; God comes down to be with his people. The Temple is built and in the Holy of Holies, God comes down to be with his people. The story of the Bible is, over and over, God saying, "I come down to you, you don't go up to me. It's about me being humbled, not you being religious." And then Jesus comes, born of a woman. Comes humbly into human history. He comes as our savior.

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE SAVIOR, CHRIST THE LORD

You know that atheism, deism, monism, theism, the one thing they all have in common is, God is not the savior. In theism you're your own savior. In the others there is no savior. In Christianity, God is the savior. He's the hero. He's the rescuer. He's the redeemer. He's the hope. I don't know about you, that sounds like good news to me. If there is no hope, that's not good news. If I'm the hope, that's not good news either. If he's the hope, well,

that's good news right there.

That's exactly what the angel says. I'll show you this verse. Here's what the angel says. And if you don't trust an angel, who are you going to trust? Right? I mean-

Luke 2:10-11, "I bring you good news," – there's the preaching of the gospel – "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."

Let's unpack that. The angel says, "you," this is personal. You and me, we get good news. This is the gospel. Good news. Right? Atheism, deism, pantheism, panentheism, theism, not good news. Jesus, good news. Good news for you, for me, for us, and for who? "All the people." This is where we get missions, church planting, world evangelization, why we do the Acts 29 Church Planting Network. We're planting over two churches a week in that network, just in the U.S. We're planting all over the world. Why? It's for all the people. All the people need to hear a savior has come. And he's for them. He loves them.

"I bring you good news of great joy for all the people." Where is this good news? Well, it's in Jesus, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David." And these three titles don't come together anywhere else in the New Testament: Savior, Christ, and Lord. Savior, he's the hero. He's the deliverer. He's the rescuer. It's God and Satan, it's God and sinners, it's creator, creation, and we are part of creation. We've aligned with Satan. We are sinners and rebels. And we have a savior, come for us. He's going to take away our sin; he does that through the cross. He gives us new life; that happens because of his resurrection. He's the savior. And he's Christ. He's the anointed one. He's the chosen one. He's the special one. And he's Lord. He's over all religions. He's over all nations. He's over all genders. He's over all peoples.

And he says, this is good news, and it's happened in the city of David. Now David was a king. King David. Like Jesus, he started humbly as a shepherd boy. Jesus started humbly as a carpenter. And he grew to be a great king, like Jesus grew to be a great king. And what happened is that David was anointed king before he was appointed king. That David was the king, but there was still a great battle. There was a fight for the throne. And so prior to his appointment on the throne, he was king, but he was not yet ruling and reigning from the throne. And so during that season he was collecting faithful followers, members of his kingdom. Preparing for his inauguration as visible king.

Jesus is just like that. Jesus is anointed king. And right now there's a great battle between Satan and demons and the kingdoms of this world and the prince of the power of the air, and Jesus. And Jesus is the king. And he is gathering faithful subjects, he's saving men and women from sin and death and Satan. We call that the church. There's a few billion of us on the earth right now. And one day he will assume the throne. He will return to establish his forever kingdom, where Satan, sin, death, are no more. And so Jesus is coming like David came. And we are citizens of his kingdom here in the midst of this horrendous battle on the earth. And what we think of this man Jesus determines how we live and suffer and die. It is good news. It does cause great joy. We want to get this out to you and to all people. That Jesus is like David, anointed king, coming again one day to be appointed king. He's the Savior. He's the Christ. He's the Lord.

THE GOOD NEWS IN "REAL" LIFE

And some would ask, "What does this have to do with life and that which is practical?" Let me culminate all of this for you in a story. God, in his providence, gave me an amazing experience recently. There's a young couple at Mars Hill. They go to the West Seattle Campus. And they weren't Christians, they were living and sleeping together. And they were in their twenties. And she came to church and heard about Jesus and sin. She went back to her boyfriend and said, "I've been going to church, and I think we should stop living and sleeping together." And he said, "I think you should stop going to church." [Laughter] That was his answer. See this battle at work. She said, "No, I think you should go to church too." So they go to church. She ends up falling in love with Jesus. Meets him as Savior, "he takes away my sin." Christ, "he's the one," Lord, "he's in charge of my life, I now belong to him. He's my king." He meets Jesus as well. "Jesus is my Savior," he determines. "Died for my sins." Christ, "it's all about him, he's the special one." Lord, "my life belongs to him, I need to obey him. I need to enjoy him." They stop sleeping together, go through the pre-marital class, get married. They're doing everything that the Scriptures would say God would have them to do. They're repenting of sin. They're walking in holiness. They're studying the Scriptures. They're getting wise counsel. They became husband and wife because they really do love one another very much, even though their love was selfish, it was still real. Now they've got a new, better love to share, from the Holy Spirit.

And so they're married. They're serving in ministry at Mars Hill. She helps out in the nursery. They're in community group, connected to some great people. They're really excited about starting a family. She really wants to be a mom. They bought a place. They're just getting established. They're both working, trying to get ready to start their family. Doing everything that we would say at Mars Hill that, that's beautiful. That's a good thing. She's a scientist, a bright gal. And so she says goodbye to her husband, gets on her bike to ride to work on morning. This was actually eleven weeks ago. We're not sure exactly what happened. As far as we can tell, she was hit by a car. That car fled the scene. Didn't check on her. Didn't call the cops. Didn't call the police. Didn't call the medics. No one. Just left her there to die. She broke her spine, shattered the entirety of her arm, broke her face, her spleen exploded, her helmet was shattered, she suffered a traumatic brain injury, and went into a coma, lying on the shoulder of the road. We don't know how long it was. Someone driving by saw her, checked on her, called the medics. She was in a coma for a long time. They didn't know if she'd ever wake up. Only about 10 percent of people that have this kind of traumatic brain injury actually come back to consciousness and functionality.

Gentlemen, imagine that's your wife, fiancée, girlfriend, sister, friend, some woman you really care about. Ladies, imagine this is you. I mean you, you've repented of sin, you love God, you're doing what you're supposed to do. You're just going to work. She didn't even see it coming. She has no idea what happened to her.

I and many, many others- her community group's been good; Pastor Adam, the West Seattle Campus Pastor's been good; people have been good, loving, supporting, serving. So I'd heard the updates on how she was doing, and she came to consciousness at one point, and then went back under. And then came to again and she asked to see Pastor Mark. Well yeah, I'm a pastor and I need to go see her. So I recently got to go visit her in the hospital.

And on the way there I'm wondering, what are they thinking? I mean, are they questioning if God exists? Atheism. Are they questioning if God even knows them, loves them, cares for them, is involved in their life? Deism. That God is good and evil. That God sat up in heaven and decided that was a good day to have one of his daughters hit by a car. Like pantheism or panentheism would teach. Or theism, where they're thinking that God was punishing them, that God was angry with them. Was she wondering if God hated her and was like a violent father? As I'm driving to Harborview I'm praying along the way.

And I walk into the room. I sit in a chair, and she's on her bed. She sits up. I get to look her in the eyes, and I'm wondering, is she bitter, is she angry, is she hollow? She was smiling. Absolutely sweet. I mean, that's her last name. That's very prophetic. Sweet. Sweet. I looked her in the eye and asked, "Sweetheart, what are you thinking? How are you doing?" Immediately she starts talking about Jesus. Smiling. And she's not denying her life. She's not like some Buddhist that says reality is an illusion. She starts telling me the story. She said, "Well, they reconstructed my face so it's hard to talk. And mentally I'm still slow. And I can take a few steps, I'm in physical therapy. I can't move my arm yet because it's all metal." She shows me the x-ray. It's all metal with a big bolt sticking out at the elbow. She says, "It really hurts. I can't do much." They cut out her spleen. She's got a huge scar right here. Her hair's very short on the top. She said, "They had to shave my head to examine the head wound. I don't like my bangs," she says. [Laughter]

I asked her, I said, "So what are you thinking about God?"

She asked this question, "Did he do this to me?" I said, "No." She said, "But isn't he in charge?" I said, "Yeah, he's sovereign, he's the Lord, he's in charge. But God didn't sit in heaven and say, 'Today I want one of my daughters to get run over by a car that flees the scene.'" I said, "Jesus is anointed, but not yet appointed. He is the king, but there's a great battle raging and what was done to you was evil. I mean, it's a sin and a crime. It's attempted murder. It's horrible what has happened to you." She said, "I thought that, but I just wanted to check." I said, "Sweetheart, God is good." Looked me in the eye. She's just smiling. I said, "God is loving, God is good."

I said, "What else are you thinking all of this?" She says, "I'm thinking that Jesus was very nice to suffer for me. I'm thinking that he probably felt worse than I do." She said, "I'm thinking that he really loves me if he's willing to endure physical pain, because I hurt all the time. I know what that feels like now." She said, "The good news is, I've been able to talk to everybody about Jesus." Her physical therapist, her nurse, her doctor. Nobody gets a break from this gal. [Laughter] "How are you doing?" "Jesus is helping me." "Are you depressed?" "I was, and I talked to Jesus about it. He's alive and we talk about these things."

I asked her, "What else are you learning?" She said, "My husband loves me." He's standing next to her. Good guy. He's rubbing her back, he's very affectionate in the right encouraging, concerned way. I said, "What do you mean by that?" She said, "He was so selfish before he met Jesus." [Laughter] That's just a standard-issue male. They need a lot of work.

She said, "But he never would have treated me this way, under these circumstances before he met Jesus." She said, "He sleeps here every other night. And my mom is now walking with Jesus too." Her mom was in the room. They take turns. One sleeps there every night. She said, "He loves me so much. He is so worried about me. And he's concerned about me. And we pray together, and he reads Scripture to me and he sleeps in the bed next to me." She said, "He slept in the bed next to me for, I don't know what it was, weeks, when I was in a coma. Just in case I woke up he could be there." She said, "He hasn't slept in our bed in eleven weeks." I said, "Why's that?" She said, "We have a short little sofa, he doesn't fit in it. One night he sleeps here, the next night my mom sleeps here at the hospital, and then he sleeps at our house." She said, "He refuses to sleep in our bed until I come home. So he sleeps in the love seat. All crunched up. He doesn't fit." She started crying. She looked at me and she said, "I really want to have his babies still." She said, "But I don't know if that'll ever happen."

She's going home soon. It's amazing that she's actually conscious and making some progress. Apart from a complete miracle, her life is going to be very hard. Physical therapy, maybe not fully functioning motor skills, maybe not back to where she was.

I looked at her husband and I said, "I'm very proud of you. You've loved her like Christ loved the church and I am very proud of you." And he said, "Honestly, it's Jesus." He said, "There's no way that I would be acting like I'm acting if it wasn't for Jesus. He's changed me." So he's praising Jesus too. I asked him, I said, "How did you know your wife was going to be okay?" He said, "When she first came out of the coma, she started talking about Jesus and Funfetti cake." [Laughter] He said, "Then I knew we would be okay. Because she really loves Jesus and Funfetti cake." [Laughter]

So she's getting out soon, and when she comes home, we've got a nice custom Funfetti cake that's going to be waiting for her from us. I thought that would be cute. She needs a little levity.

You know, I love Angela, she taught me a lot. I thanked her for teaching me a lot. We both know that there's no guarantee that everything will be okay in this life. But what we do know is, for Angela and the rest of us, we come from God. We belong to God. We're here for God. We're known by God. We're loved by God. God is present with us, if we come to Jesus, he takes up residence in us. He changes us. He can empathize with us because he suffered and had been tempted. And when we die, he'll be there. And we'll see him face-to-face. And he'll wipe all the tears from our eyes. And he'll welcome us into his kingdom. And that's the hope of the good news, that a savior has been born named Christ the Lord.

You know, if I was an atheist, and I showed up, I would have told her, "The universe is cold, empty, and bleak, but so what? Only the fittest survive,

apparently you're not one of them." Were I a deist I would have said, "Look, God's abandoned you, you're on your own. He doesn't know your name, he's not watching your life, and he's not going to help. You're on your own." Were I a monist into panentheism or pantheism, I would have said, "Well, there's not good and evil, everything is one. And there is no judge, and there is no justice, and there is no eternal consequence. So the guy who ran you over, he wins, you lose."

I did ask her, when we were conversing, "What do you think about the person who hit you and fled the scene and they can't find?" She said, "I hope they meet Jesus, because I don't want them to stand before God without that sin forgiven." Wow. That's a love. That's a love that we do not in and of ourselves possess.

If I were a theist I would tell her, "I'm sure in a past life you did something horrible, and this is God's way of punishing you. So just suffer and pay God back. And do a good job, otherwise you'll come back again in the next life, and who knows, maybe next time it'll be worse."

But I'm a Christian. And I tell her that Jesus is a savior. He's the Christ the Lord. That he doesn't do evil. He's altogether good. And that he has suffered as she is suffering, and he will comfort because he understands. And he will teach her about himself. And one day, she'll enjoy a fully restored physical body, and an eternity with Jesus and the husband who loves him as well. Now we hear that, and it is good news, isn't it? Of great joy. And the response, then, is joy.

JOYFUL RESPONSE

Here's what I'll share with you in closing. In hearing about the birth of Jesus, here's what the angels do, Luke 2:13-14: "Suddenly," – out of nowhere – "there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host," – an angelic choir – "praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'" In hearing, seeing the birth of Jesus, the angels show up—those who dwell eternally in the presence of God, singing of his goodness and grace. And they celebrate. Do you know that these angels aren't demons? They've never sinned. Jesus hasn't come to go to the cross and pay the penalty for their sin. They're not even getting saved. They're just so excited that someone is, they're going to worship God just because he's so great. That's the angels.

Mary, Luke 2:19: "Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." Some of you are more contemplative worshipers. She has sung previously in the book, but here, she's just overwhelmed, like it dawns on her that the savior, the rescuer, the hero, the deliverer, the dragon slayer, the kingdom giver, "He's here in my presence. It's my son Jesus. Immanuel, God's here. He's here to be with us and to save us." And she's pondering all this in her heart. It's like some of you hearing this. It's just mind bending. It's heart wrenching. It's history altering. It's something that you need to sit down and think about for a few decades.

And the shepherds, Luke 2:20, "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God." They're not as contemplative at this moment, they're active. The savior's here, sin is forgiven, the kingdom is done, the king has arrived. They sing, they celebrate, there's gladness, and joy, because there's good news for you and all the people. The Savior Christ the Lord has come. The Savior Christ the Lord has come. And the response is pondering in your heart like Mary did, and singing with your mouth like the angels and the shepherds. Amen.

Father God, I pray now that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we would ponder these things in our heart like Mary did. Consider them deeply. Feel them. Experience them. Enjoy them. Consider them. Ponder them. Meditate on them. Delight in them. Savor them. Believe them. And God, I pray that we would sing like the angels and the shepherds, that we would worship with gladness and joy. Because we have good news of great joy for us and all the people, that a savior has come and he is Christ the Lord. God, I pray for my friends who are really hurting, really struggling. Lord God, I pray that they would see that the good news is in Jesus. Amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.