

SAVIOR, CHRIST, LORD

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve/Christmas Day

December 24 & 25, 2021

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 2, verses 1 through 20. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 2, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

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 great 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.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who is Jesus? On this sacred night, we celebrate the birth of a child who was born over two thousand years ago. That's a long time later to still be celebrating a birthday. So why? What's so special about this baby? Who is he? Or, as the great hymn asks,

“What child is this, who, laid to rest,
on Mary’s lap is sleeping?”

The hymn, of course, goes on to answer that question in wondrous beauty, and we will do the same thing, though I can’t promise to match the beauty.

This text gives three titles to this baby: Savior, Christ, and Lord. These are the titles given by the angel who appeared to the shepherds that night, and so these are the three words we will focus on.

The first title is “Savior,” and we’ll spend most of our time on this one. It’s significant that the angel gives this title first. The title “Savior” is the one that makes clear that this baby comes in peace. And you might think, *Well, yeah, since when did any baby not come in peace?* They don’t always act peacefully, but they’re physically incapable of doing harm. Babies always come in peace. But if we started with the last title first, we might have doubts about even that. So the first title the angel gives is “Savior.”

The angel is obviously being very deliberate to calm the shepherds’ fears. Angels are terrifying creatures. In common usage, we use the word “angel” in sort of a slang sense when someone is beautiful or sweet. And this angel may have been both of those things, but he is also terrifying. That’s the way most angels seem to be in the Bible. We don’t have a visual description of the angel, only that, when the angel appeared, “The glory of the Lord shone around them” (2:9). That is, the glory of the Lord shone around the *shepherds*, not the angel, because at this point there is only one angel. So “them” refers to the shepherds. It’s not that the glory of the Lord was up in the sky somewhere. It’s down on the ground, all around the shepherds. It’s inescapable. The glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds, and they were filled with great fear. The truly terrifying thing about angels is that they project the glory of the Lord. Visually, I don’t know if it really looked like this, but imagine a search helicopter with a big blinding light on it. That’s how it must have *felt* for the shepherds. The glory of the Lord shone all around them.

So the angel immediately begins to comfort their fears. “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior” (2:10-11). So “Savior” is the first title.

The title “Savior” is filled with pure grace. Not only does he come in peace, but he comes to rescue and deliver. A person can come in peace and basically be neutral to those around him, like when we call our neighbors peaceful if they don’t cause a nuisance. So it’s not merely that this baby comes to do no harm, but he comes to rescue and deliver. He is a Savior.

The title “Savior” implies, of course, that we need saving. This truth became immediately obvious to the shepherds. If we saw and felt what they did, we would not merely *know* that we need a Savior; we would *feel* it. The glory of the Lord reveals just how unworthy and unclean we are. Just as the bright morning sun reveals how dusty a room is, the glory of the Lord reveals how guilty we are. The shepherds knew and felt this, so hearing the announcement of a Savior brought pure joy.

But to us, the title “Savior” might actually offend us, that is, if we understand it rightly. Now almost everyone wants a savior of some kind. Unless you have a really serious god complex, where you live and act as if you are god, you’re going to have some use for some kind of savior. Almost everyone wants some kind of savior. The big issue is what we think we need saving from. And this is where Christianity becomes most offensive. Most people have room for a savior, so long as that savior saves them from something other than themselves.

This gets at what we think our real problem is. We like to fashion our own saviors after whatever we think our real problem is. If we are poor, and we think poverty is our biggest problem, we will look for a savior of prosperity. If we are ill, and we think illness is our biggest problem, we will look for a savior of health. If we are lonely, and we think loneliness is our biggest problem, we will look for a savior of intimacy. And these might be legitimate problems, but we deceive ourselves if we think our big problem is our circumstances. That deception leads us to look for a savior to fix our felt needs. Or we might look further out, where we might see social injustice or social unrest or economic collapse. These concerns lead us to fashion political saviors.

So we often look for other kinds of saviors. But what's even worse, is when we take Jesus and fashion him as the savior we want, instead of the Savior he is and which we need. This happens quite often. Over the last two thousand years, Jesus has become quite a popular figure. His popularity has become so deeply entrenched in our society that, instead of replacing him with a different savior, many people have found it easier to simply mold Jesus and fashion him as the kind of savior they want. Call it "your own personal Jesus." He always affirms you or your particular identity group. He's not offensive at all. He affirms that you are right, and everyone else is wrong, or the world is wrong, and you are innocent victim of unjust circumstances. So there is a different Jesus for every political cause and every personal problem. This is massively confusing. Because of this, people have trouble figuring out who the real Jesus is.

But the real Jesus is not so malleable, and he is probably much less desirable, because the real Jesus is much more offensive. He is our Savior from sin. This means that my problem is not my circumstances, and it's not all the other people out there. My real problem is me. I am not the way I am supposed to be. And I do not live the way I am supposed to live. So I justly deserve God's punishment.

This is the kind of Savior we have in Jesus. He comes, not to tell everyone else that they're wrong. He comes because we are wrong. I am wrong. You are wrong. So he's not the kind of Savior who saves us from everyone else. We're always looking for a Savior to save us from everything outside of us, because we are too blind and proud to realize that the problem is within. Jesus saves us from ourselves. He sees us as we are, and he loves us as we are. This is not the kind of love that lies and pretends we are actually good. It's the kind of love that sees and acknowledges that we are evil. But he doesn't run away from that evil, nor does he ignore it. Instead, he deals with it. He takes it as his own. Our sin and rebellion against God is the real problem. So he saves us from the wrath of God by accepting that wrath upon himself.

From his birth, and even from before his birth, this child was destined to suffer and die for the sin of the world. This is even indicated in the humility of his birth.

"Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you."

The humble manger foreshadows that, just as he was born in humility, he will also die in humility. He was born to die. And he was born to die *for you*. "For you," is what the angel proclaimed to the shepherds. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior."

When you think about it, this is kind of a weird thing to announce at the birth of a baby. We often say that a child is born to its mother and father. But no one ever goes to a bunch of random strangers and announces, "Unto you is born a child." That would just be weird and confusing. But that's what the angel does at the birth of Jesus, because Jesus does not merely belong to

Mary and Joseph. This child belongs to the whole world. The announcement was proclaimed to shepherds, but this is not just for the shepherds. It is also for you. Yes, *you*, because the angel says this is “good news of great joy ... for all the people.” “Unto you is born ... a Savior.”

That’s the first title. Jesus is Savior. He is your Savior. And he is not the Savior from everything around you. He saves you from your sin. He came down to die for you, so that, just as he rose again, he can also raise you and take you with him into the new creation.

The second title is “Christ.” This ties the birth of Jesus with the promises in the Old Testament. The title “Christ” means the same thing as the Old Testament word, “Messiah.” Both words mean “Anointed One.” In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed into their offices. These offices foreshadowed the coming of God’s Anointed. He promised to send his Anointed One. As King, he would rule over his people. And as the Great High Priest, he would offer a sacrifice for their atonement. And it turned out that this priest was also the victim of the sacrifice. So the title “Christ” ties the birth of Jesus to the Old Testament promises of God. The Scriptures were being fulfilled. The people of Israel had lived in longing and expectation for Messiah to come. The title “Christ” means that the time of expectation has been fulfilled.

The third title is “Lord.” And this is the big one. This is the big, glorious, and terrifying title. It reveals that Jesus is not a mere man. He is a human, and he is fully human. But the title “Lord” identifies him as God himself. It makes him equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He is the eternal Word of God, through whom the heavens and earth were made, and which has now become flesh (John 1:1-3, 14). The title “Lord” identifies Jesus as Yahweh, the God who appeared in the Old Testament and saved the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Jude 5). That big, strong, powerful God, who is worthy of all fear, is now the baby in the manger.

If the angel had led with “Lord,” instead of the title “Savior,” it would have frightened the shepherds even more. They were frightened enough by the angel of the Lord. What fear they would have had if all the angel announced was that the Lord had come down to earth, and he’s over in that town of Bethlehem! So the angel leads with “Fear not ... good news ... great joy ... a Savior.” Then he reveals that this Savior is the Lord.

The title “Lord” appears four times in this passage. The first is when the angel is identified as “an angel of the Lord” (2:9). The second is when “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (2:9). The third is when the angel identifies the baby as “Christ the Lord” (2:11). And the fourth is when the shepherds say, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us” (2:15).

All four of these uses teach us about this child. When the angel of the Lord appears, this is Jesus’ angel. He serves at the will of Jesus. And when the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds, this is Jesus’ glory. The divine glory that is masked by the flesh of an infant in Bethlehem is revealed in the countryside. And then they go to see Jesus, because Jesus, the Lord, has made it known to them through his angel.

And this is such a profound change in the disposition of the shepherds. At first they “were filled with great fear” (2:9). The glory of the Lord around them was so intense, even though it was merely an angel, and not the Lord himself. But after the angel’s gracious proclamation, they are filled with faith, and instead of hiding or running from the glory of the Lord, they actually seek out his presence. Notice this change in their disposition, because it is such a radical shift. They go from being afraid of the Lord’s angel, to willingly, eagerly, and joyfully seeking out the

SAVIOR, CHRIST, LORD (Luke 2:1-20)

Lord's presence. The Lord has come, not to condemn them, and not to give them what they know they deserve, but to save them.

And this is your Lord. This is your Christ. This is your Savior. You do not need to look for false Saviors. You do not need to pretend that your problem is your circumstances, or the evil around you. You can confess that your greatest problem is within. You can confess that you are not the way you are supposed to be, and you do not live the way you are supposed to live. You can confess that, because that is the kind of Savior you have in Jesus Christ the Lord.

He came in humility. He came not condemn the world, but to save the world (John 3:17). “[He] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). He is your Savior. He bore your punishment. He was crucified for you and died for you. He rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. And for all who trust in him, when he returns, he will raise and transform you, and he will take you with him to where he is. This is what it means that Jesus is your Savior, Christ, and Lord. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.