

The Unexpected Messiah

Sermon Text: Luke 2:1-20

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

¹And it came to pass in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to register all the inhabited world. ²This registration first happened while Quirinius was governing. ³And all went to be registered, each one to his own city. ⁴And Joseph went up from Galilee from the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, the one betrothed to him, who was with child. ⁶And it came to pass that, while they were there, the days of her pregnancy were complete. ⁷And she bore her son, her firstborn, and she swaddled Him and laid Him in the manger, for there was no place in the inn.

⁸And shepherds were in the same region, living outside and keeping watch that night over their sheep. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were afraid with a great fear.

¹⁰And the angel said to them, “do not be afraid, for behold I bring the Gospel to you, which will be a great joy to all people. ¹¹For born to you this very day in the city of David is a Saviour, Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign to you, you will find a babe, swaddled and lying in a manger.”

¹³And suddenly there came with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest, and peace on Earth towards men of goodwill.”

¹⁵And it came to pass, as the angels departed from them into the heavens, the shepherds said to one another, “let us go indeed unto Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”

¹⁶And hurrying, they came and found Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in the manger. ¹⁷And seeing it, they publically made known the thing spoken to them about this Child. ¹⁸And all those who heard it marvelled concerning the things spoken by the shepherds about Him. ¹⁹But Mary stored all these things and pondered them in her heart.

²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as it was spoken to them.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

“Do not be afraid, for behold I bring the Gospel to you, which will be a great joy to all people.” These are the first words spoken by the angel to shepherds in the field, the first people on earth to hear the good news of the Gospel, that the Saviour has been born to you. Christ the Lord, the Prince of Peace, the Saviour of the world has been born for you. He is your Saviour. And this news is given to humanity in the most unexpected way. “The birth of the Messiah was not first proclaimed in Caesar’s halls nor in Herod’s palace, but to humble shepherds in the fields.”¹

We would expect that the news about this long-awaited Messiah would have been proclaimed to the kings and nobles and priests, and yet God announces it to the poor, lowly shepherds. And He does so in a way completely unimaginable. In fact, the way that God does this is so unthinkable, that even today we continue to have the wrong picture in mind.

When you think of the angel appearing to the shepherds what do you see? Do you see a beautiful looking man with two giant feathered wings, floating in the air? Do you see a soft, gentle, warm and comforting figure? This is our normal perception of angels. And yet that is not how the Scriptures describe them. Of course on certain occasions angels have taken on a human appearance, such as the angels who came to Abraham, also the “young man” sitting inside the tomb where Jesus had been laid.

But if you turn to the Book of Ezekiel you get a very unexpected description of angels. In Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10, we are given the descriptions of two types of angels the Cherubim and the Ophanim (or wheels). The Cherubim are big monstrous looking creatures, with six wings, the feet of calves, they sparkled like burnished bronze, one had the head of a man, while the others had the head of an eagle, an ox and a lion. Their bodies appeared as if they were on fire. Their entire bodies, wings, back and hands were covered in eyes. And the Ophanim are described as wheels interlocking with wheels, with rims that are covered in eyes.

God works in ways that are the complete opposite to our human way of thinking. We imagine angels as these beautiful creatures and the demons as monstrous beasts. And yet in reality Satan, the prince of the demons, is the one who is described as being beautiful (Ezek. 28:12) and an angel of light (Isa. 14:12). While the terrifying, monstrous looking creatures, which we would assume to be demons, are in fact angels. And not just any angel but these are Cherubim, those who guarded the throne of God.

Just imagine being one of those shepherds. You’re standing there in the middle of the night. It’s late, dark, cold. You’re already a little on edge, because you’re

¹*Saint Luke*, D. Miller, *Layman’s Bible Commentaries*, page 36

worried that a bear, lion or wolf may come and attack your flock. And then, “boom”. The night sky lights up as if it was day, and a booming thunderous voice begins to speak to you. You look up and you see this monstrous creature floating in the air. No wonder the shepherds were afraid.

Now, I’m not saying that the shepherds were greeted by the Cherubim, or that the angels who appeared to the shepherd definitely looked like that. But however these angels looked; they weren’t some soft and gentle creatures. They were terrifying. The shepherds are said to have been afraid with a great fear. This wasn’t a standard shock of surprise. These shepherds were petrified by what they saw. Seeing an angel of the Lord was a frightful experience. Through the Old Testament people were terrified when they saw these creatures. They needed to be told not to fear. When the angel appeared to Zachariah in the temple (Luke 1:12-13), he fell down in fear and was told by the angel to not be afraid. Even Mary was told by the angel not to be afraid (Luke 1:30). And at the resurrection, the battle-hardened centurions fainted in fear at sight of the angel and became like dead men. We have no idea exactly what the angels looked like when they appeared to the shepherds. But whatever their appearance was, it was terrifying.

And this is how the Lord chose to first bring the Gospel message. In an absolutely unexpected way, the Lord sends a monstrously looking bestial angel to appear to these nameless, insignificant shepherds in the middle of no one. And this shows us the kind of God that we have. A God whose ways are so much higher than our ways, whose thinking is so different to ours. A God who acts in ways that are completely unexpected.

And this is how the Messiah comes to us, in an unexpected way. The Jews expected the Messiah to be some great earthly king who would ride in on a war horse and conquer the Romans. They expected the Kingdom of God to be some earthly Jewish kingdom that ruled over the entire Earth. This is what people expected the Christ to be. When the Magi followed the star, they came to Judea looking for the one born King of the Jews. So they arrived at Herod’s Palace expecting to find a baby prince. They expected to find a baby in Casimir swaddling, lying in a golden crib, with servants running around to cater to his every whim. This is what people expected the Messiah to be.

And yet instead, the Messiah was born to a poor engaged couple from Nazareth, who, because of the census, were in a small country town, spending the night in a stable surrounding by animals. And this “stable” was not like a barn or something. This “stable” as we call it, was more a holding pen inside a cave. The inn that we imagine was nothing like our modern motels. It was a single room structure, similar to a hall, in which groups of travellers had to find a spot on the

ground to sleep. And while they slept inside this hall-like inn, all their animals were herded together in something more like a holding pen. And because this inn was so packed full of guests, Joseph and the pregnant Mary had to go and sleep with the animals. And here is where the Baby Jesus was born. And so His mother wrapped Him up in rags and placed Him in the manger; which was a big stone feeding trough.

It is in this most unexpected way that the Saviour of the world was born. The Creator of the universe is born as a poor child and placed in the feeding trough for animals to avoid being stepped on.

And why does He do this? The answer, for you. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 St. Paul says that He who was rich gave up His riches and became poor for your sakes. Our Lord Jesus Christ became poor that you might become rich. Jesus gave up His heavenly riches and dwelt among us as a poor, weak, fragile human being so that you might share in eternal life.

As St. Augustine of Hippo said, “Man’s Maker was made man that the Bread might be hungry, the Fountain thirst, the Light sleep, the Way be tired from the journey, the Truth might be accused by false witnesses, the Judge of the living and the dead be judged by a mortal judge, Justice be sentenced by the unjust, the Teacher be beaten with whips, the Vine be crowned with thorns, the Foundation be suspended on wood, the Strength be made weak, the Healer be wounded, and that Life might die. Wake up, O human being! For it was for you that God was made man. Rise up and realize it was all for you. Eternal death would have awaited you had He not been born in time. Never would you be freed from your sinful flesh had He not taken to Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Everlasting would be your misery had He not performed this act of mercy. You would not have come to life again had He not come to die your death. You would have perished had He not come.”

For your sake, Christ was born, so that He could die in your place. He took on flesh so that that flesh could be beaten, whipped, and crucified for the sake of your sins. He was born a human so that He could bear the suffering that humanity deserved. For you, the Saviour was born. As Martin Luther said “unto you, says the angel, unto you that were captive under this harmful, evil, poisonous spirit, who is the prince and god of the world, the Saviour is born. The words ‘unto you’ should surely make us happy. For to whom does he speak? To wood or stone? No, but to men, and not to one or two alone, but to all people.”²

²Martin Luther quoted in *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, Paul Kretzman, page 272

Christ was born to save you. And even this is just so unexpected. Our natural human idea would be for God to save us by conquering all our enemies. We imagine Christ riding in a on a glorious steed and slaying the devil. We expect Christ's victory over sin, death and the devil to be like the Battle mentioned in Revelation when the archangel Michael slays Satan the Dragon. And yet we find the Messiah, bruised, beaten, bleeding and nailed to the cross. And nobody expected this. The Disciples were utterly lost and confused when Christ died. Previously in Matthew 16, after Jesus foretold His death which was to come, Peter rebuked Him and said that he would never let this happen to Jesus.

The birth of Jesus in the manger was not what people expected, and His death on the cross was unthinkable.

This child born, King of the Jews, did not sit on a throne, but was nailed to a cross. This baby wrapped in swaddling cloth and laid in the manger, was the man who was wrapped in burial cloth and laid in the tomb.

And, just as nobody expected, He rose again three days later. He who was slain for the sins of the world, was raised again for your justification. So that just as He rose from the dead, so to you will be raised from the dead to live eternally with Him in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

In the most expected way, Christ trampled down death by His death. He conquered the devil, not by sword but by the cross. In humility and weakness, Christ triumphed over the forces of evil. Through suffering, He won the victory for you.

This is your Saviour, who suffered and died for you. This is the God who took on flesh, who was born poor, weak and helpless, for your sake. This is the God whose flesh was nailed to the cross, who died poor, weak and helpless, for you.

In our lives today we are often upset when bad times happen. We want God to just fix everything. We expect Him to just remove all our suffering. We complain and moan and whinge anytime something goes wrong in our life. And we get mad at God because He allowed it to happen. This is because we expect Him to just fix it. He's all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving, shouldn't He just fix it.

Well, if you haven't figure it out by now, God doesn't work how we'd expect Him to. We have a Saviour that works in unexpected ways.

We expect God to fix everything, we expect Him to remove our suffering. And yet He doesn't. In fact, God never promises that He would, instead He tells Christians that they will suffer in this life because the world and the devil hates us and wants to see us suffer. God doesn't promise to remove our suffering.

Instead, He promises to be with us in our suffering. Jesus is the God who saves us by entering into our lives and suffering with us. He is Immanuel, God with us.

God didn't remove our sufferings. Instead, God took on flesh and dwelt among us, to experience the suffering that we all go through in this life. And He has promised to be with us until the End of the Age. Christ doesn't remove our suffering; instead He walks with us through our suffering. He dwells in us and with us. He comes and comforts us in our suffering. He does this through His Means on Grace. Through Word and Sacrament Christ comes to us to strengthen us for the life of suffering that we face. And through fellow Christians, He reaches out to us to give us a physical hand. Even when we don't realize it, Christ is with us in our suffering, comforting and strengthening us to move through it.

Christ doesn't give us an earthly life free of pain and suffering. Instead, He took on a life of pain and suffering. Christ became man, so that He could die a painful death, so that you didn't have to experience the eternal consequences for your sins. Christ does not remove our earthly suffering, but He has already removed all our spiritual suffering. He was not born to take away your earthly pain. He was born die in your place, so that you would not suffer eternal punishment. As St. Augustine said above, "Eternal death would have awaited you had He not been born in time. Never would you be freed from your sinful flesh had He not taken to Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Everlasting would be your misery had He not performed this act of mercy. You would not have come to life again had He not come to die your death. You would have perished had He not come."

I am reminded of the story about a man, who was walking in a field when he was hit in the forehead by a rock. "Arggh", he groaned rubbing his forehead, "why did you let this happen God? Why didn't you stop the rock from hitting me?" Then he opened his eyes. Standing over him was Christ, bruised, bleeding and broken, hunched over, with a large pile of rocks and boulders behind him. These rocks had been meant for the man, but Christ had taken the hits instead. When we expect the all-powerful, all-knowing God to remove all pain and suffering from the world, we forget about all the pain and suffering that He took away from us and placed upon His own shoulders, when He died upon the Cross.

Our God, is one that acts in ways that we could never expect. He was born in animal holding pen, and placed in a feeding trough. He was born to a poor family. The news of His birth wasn't told to kings or noblemen or the Jewish religious leaders, instead the Gospel of His birth was told to nameless, low class

shepherds. The news came not by some beautiful heavenly figure, but most likely but a monstrous looking angel that brought fear to those who saw it. And this child didn't grow up to be rich, or popular, or to have an army. He didn't grow up to be a great warrior king that conquered the world. Instead, He grew up to be nailed to the cross with His closest friends and followers deserting Him, and denying that they knew Him. He didn't conquer the Romans and lead a nation of Jews to rule the world. Instead He was arrested by the Jews and executed by the Romans.

And yet He did all this for you. As the angel said, "behold I bring the Gospel to you, which will be a great joy to all people. For to you has been born a Saviour, Christ the Lord."

To you, this child was born. In a way that was most unexpected, the Christ came into the world for you. And to this day He comes to us in the most unexpected ways. Through the Word read and preached, through water splashed on your head, through a wafer and a sip of wine, the Saviour is given to you.

Behold, I bring the Gospel to you, which is a great joy to all people. For to you this very day a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, is given to you. Amen.

And may the Saviour who was born to die for the sins of the world, comfort you in your suffering as we await the life to come. Amen

READINGS:

Isaiah 52:7-10

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

⁸ The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹ Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the LORD has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God

Hebrews 1:1-12

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son, today I have begotten you”?

Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”?

⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God's angels worship him.”

⁷ Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.”

⁸ But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

¹⁰ And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; ¹¹ they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, ¹² like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

John 1:1-14

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

PRAYERS:

Dear Heavenly Father, on this day we remember the birth of Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We thank You for sending Him into this world to take on flesh that He may lay it down for our salvation. We ask that you will help us to remember His birth this Christmas season and that we do not turn our attention away from His birth and to the materialism of this world. Open our eyes Lord that we may see that the true Christmas gift is not material gifts but the gift of Your Only-Begotten Son.

Lord, we thank You for sending the Messiah in a way that was completely unexpected. Lord, Your ways are higher than our ways and Your thoughts higher than our thoughts. You saved us in the unexpected way by sending Your Only-Begotten Son to die on the Cross for our sin, and You continue to come to us today in the unexpected ways of Word and Sacrament. Open our minds Lord to perceive Your thoughts and open our hearts to receive Your ways. Help us to recognise those unexpected ways in which You come to us today.

Lord, You sent Your only Son to be born King of the Jews and to bring to us Your Everlasting Kingdom. We pray for the nations of this earth, that You will watch over them and bring peace within their borders. We pray that the nations of this world will return to Your Word and that truth and love may reign across this planet.

We pray for the leaders of this nation. We pray for the local mayor, Paul Antonio, the state Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, the national Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, and the head of the Commonwealth Queen Elizabeth II. Bless our nation and all the people who dwell therein. Help all those in government and positions of powers to maintain justice, peace, honesty, integrity and courage. We pray that all members of government may be lead by Your Scriptures and guided by Your truth.

Lord, You sent Your Son to be born of a Virgin. We pray for all those born this previous year, especially those recently born, bless these children and their families, and keep them safely in Your care. We pray for all those who are pregnant at this time, that You will keep them and the child safe and that You may bring these children to full term in safety and health. We pray for all those who desire the gift of children, if it be Your will, may You grant them this gift.

We thank You Lord for the gift of child bearing and we pray that our nation will come to see this gift for the treasure that it is. We pray that You will frustrate the plans of all those who seek to promote abortion in this country. Be also with those who have been affected by the evils of abortion, and make them aware of the forgiveness of sins won for them by the life and death of Your Son.

Lord, You sent Your angel to bring the Gospel to the shepherds in the field. Help us to spread the Gospel to the world around us, so that all people may come to know the joy of salvation. As we remember the birth of Your Son, assist us to

take the message of the true meaning of Christmas out to those who need to hear it.

Lord, as we gather together this Christmas Season to celebrate the birth of Your Son, bless our gatherings, and grant safe travels to all those who travel around at this time.

Lord, be with those who are sick or lonely during this Christmas Season. May Your healing hands be upon those suffering illness and may Your comforting arms be around those suffering loneliness. Let them know Lord, that You are always with them.

Heavenly Father, we prayer for all this and whatever else we may need through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, Forever and Ever. Amen.

HYMNS:

O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL # 34

1

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of angels.

O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the
Lord!

2

God of God,
Light of light,
Lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb;
Very God,
Begotten, not created:

3

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
Glory to God
In the highest:

4

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning,
Jesus, to Thee be glory given,
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing;

FROM HEAVEN ABOVE TO EARTH I COME # 23

Part 1

1

“From heaven above to earth I come
To bear good news to every home;
Glad tidings of great joy I bring
Whereof I now will say and sing:

2

“To you this night is born a child
Of Mary, chosen virgin mild
This little child, of lowly birth,
Shall be the joy of all the earth.

3

“This is the Christ, our God and
Lord,
Who in all need shall aid afford;
He will Himself your Saviour be,
From all your sins to set you free.

4

He brings those blessings, long ago
Prepared by God for all below,
That in His kingdom bright and fair
You may with us His glory share.

5

“These are the tokens ye shall mark:
The swaddling clothes and manger
dark;
There shall ye find the young Child
laid
By whom the heavens and earth were
made.”

6

Now let us all with gladsome cheer
Follow the shepherds, and draw near
To see this wondrous gift of God,
Who hath His own dear Son
bestowed.

7

Give heed, my heart, lift up thine
eyes;
Who is it in yon manger lies?
Who is this child, so young and fair?
The blessed Christ-child lieth there.

Part 2

8

Welcome to earth, Thou noble guest,
Through whom the sinful world is
blest!
Thou com'st to share my misery;
What thanks shall I return to Thee?

9

Ah, Lord, who hast created all!
How weak art Thou, how poor and
small,
That Thou dost choose Thine infant
bed
Where ass and ox but lately fed!

10

Were earth a thousand times as fair,
Beset with gold and jewels rare,
Yet were it far too poor to be
A cradle, Son of God, for Thee.

11

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy child,
Make Thee a bed soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

12

My heart for very joy doth leap,
My lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue
That sweetest, ancient cradle-song.

13

Glory to God in highest heaven,
Who unto us His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth
A glad new year to all the earth.

COME YOUR HEARTS AND VOICES RAISING # 29

1

Come, your hearts and voices raising;
Christ the Lord with gladness
praising;
Loudly sing His love amazing,
Worthy folk of Christendom.

2

Christ, from heaven to us descending,
And in love our race befriending,
In our need His help extending,
Saved us from the wily foe.

3

Jacob's star in all its splendour
Beams with comfort sweet and
tender,
Forcing Satan to surrender,
Breaking all the powers of hell.

4

From the bondage that oppressed us,
From sin's fetters that possessed us,
From the grief that sore distressed us,
We, the captives, now are free.

5

O the joy beyond expressing,
When by faith we grasp this blessing,
And to you we come confessing
Your great love has set us free.

6

Gracious Child, we pray you, hear us,
From Your lowly manger cheer us;
Gently lead us and be near us
Till we join Your choir above.