

Chris Murphy  
December 24, 2023  
Scripture: Luke 2: 1-7  
Sermon Title: The Birth of A Savior

Prayer....

Introduction:

Story of Ancient Paths Midwifery- Midwife Lory Luyten Chino, CA (Like a Bed and Breakfast for birthing)

Far different from the journey of Mary and Joseph.

Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem because the Emperor Caesar Augustus wanted to register everyone in his empire. He wanted to take a census, so that he could tax the people. We need to remember that Jesus lived in an oppressed society. The world he lived in was underdeveloped, like a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> world environment. Most people lived in what we would call poverty. Probably 10% of the people were wealthy and 90% lived at a lower income level.

The journey was 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Can you imagine Mary making that trip while she is nearly 9 months pregnant? And when she arrives in Bethlehem, there is no room for them because everyone else is there to be registered.

Professor Elisabeth Johnson reminds us that Caesar Augustus, the Emperor of the Roman Empire was viewed by Romans as the Prince of Peace, but his leadership was a dictatorship that also included oppression. Dr. Johnson writes,

“Caesar Augustus — whose name means revered or exalted one — ended a long period of war in the Roman Empire and was hailed as a prince of peace, the savior of the world. With his reign began the Pax Romana, or “Roman Peace.” Under his rule, the economy was booming and Rome was rebuilt more glorious than before — with temples, arenas, public baths, and forums. A system of roads was built across the empire. Images of the Emperor and the Roman gods filled Rome and all

major cities of the empire, proclaiming “Caesar is Lord” and extolling his rule of peace and prosperity.

Beneath the emperor’s polished public image, however, was a much darker reality. Augustus brutally murdered any perceived enemies. He achieved peace in the empire by suppressing human rights and liberties. Receiving the benefits of the Roman peace meant submitting to totalitarian rule. And of course, peace achieved by coercion and oppression is no true peace at all.” Professor Johnson helps us understand that Jesus was not born in comfort but in a world in turmoil. Friends, when Mary gives birth to Jesus in Bethlehem, the true Prince of Peace is born. Jesus enters a society under oppression and will eventually bring a message of salvation, peace and love to the world.

Tonight, we will celebrate Christmas Eve. We will read many of the Scriptures surrounding the birth of Jesus again.

This morning as we center on the specific text that says Jesus was born in a manger, I want to remind us that Jesus enters into our world with all of its chaos and confusion.

Jesus comes to be the true Prince of Peace. Still today, we might be tempted to look to political power or wealth or control in order to bring peace, but Jesus offers a different path for peace. He comes to a young couple from an oppressed group of people. He could have been born as the child of a Roman emperor, but instead he is born to a brown skinned teenage mother and a humble carpenter that struggles to find shelter for his family in Bethlehem.

They arrive in Bethlehem with no home, like refugees. Later on they will become true refugees fleeing to Egypt.

This year at our church we have enjoyed seeing a real live Nativity set in front of our sanctuary. By the way, did you know that first Living Nativity was created by Saint Francis of Assisi, who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> and early

13th century? I want to tell you a couple stories of how this Living Nativity impacted our community this Christmas season.

- Story of houseless man in front of Living Nativity.
- Story of child touching Baby Jesus as part of the Living Nativity.

Our salvation is found in a baby born in a manger. Let us pause this Christmas to ponder the humble birth of Jesus. Let us pause and remember that the love we need is found in the prince of peace, not in the emperors of this world.

May we remember that in the midst of chaos and fear, we can find hope in our Savior, who knows our pain and confusion, who has compassion on the poor and oppressed because God entered into the poverty and sorrow of the world.

Where do you need Jesus to reveal himself in your own life? Let us reach out to the Baby Jesus this Christmas and recognize the gift of salvation, the gift of Shalom, which is wholeness and peace, the gift of love. Emmanuel means God with Us. God with us in the highs and lows

of life. God with us in times of stress and anxiety. God with us when we feel alone and afraid. God with us through the gift of a baby born in a manger.

Friends, let us also respond to the love we receive from the Baby Jesus by showing compassion to the most vulnerable in our midst. May we love the vulnerable in our families, in our neighborhoods, and in our world. Just as Jesus identified with the poor and oppressed, so we can be in solidarity with our neighbors in need.

Share vision of heaven.

Prayer...

Luke 2:1-7

## The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.[a]