

# Our Humble Ruler - *Luke 2:1-7*

## **Introduction:**

- I want to begin with just saying Merry Christmas to all of you, both those who are here, and those watching online.
- Over the past four weeks we have been working through this season of advent, looking at different promises in the Old Testament, all the while anticipating the celebration of the birth of Christ, and now we've come to this time where we are celebrating everything that the past few weeks has been anticipating, the moment that our saviour was born.
- We started this celebration together on Christmas eve the other night, and now we're continuing to celebrate together today.
- On a day like today, as we reflect again on all that was accomplished for us through Christ's birth so many years ago, I can't think of any place more fitting to be than right here, celebrating this great gift together, reflecting on all that Christ has done for us, and continuing to anticipate with one another the day when Christ will return.
- As we've looked at different promises about Christ throughout the Old Testament, we've seen so many different descriptions of what he would be like, and I just want to remind us of a bit of what we've looked at together:
  - In Genesis 3 we see the promise that God would send someone who would crush the head of the serpent, though the serpent would also strike his heel
  - In Isaiah 42, he is promised as the servant of the Lord who is gentle, yet will bring justice to the earth.
  - In Isaiah 53 he is the suffering servant who is crushed for our iniquities
  - And in the book of Micah he is a great king who is would come to set the world right.
- And even on Christmas eve, as we looked at Luke chapter 2, Darryl walked us through the amazing description of Jesus that is found in that passage, that he is Saviour, Christ and Lord.
- We have seen so many amazing things about Christ already. So many things worth celebrating.
- And now, today, we're actually going to be looking back into Luke chapter 2, but I want us to focus on a bit of a different section of this passage. I want us to look at the moment that Christ is actually born, in V. 1-7, as we see the one who comes to fulfil every promise we've looked at thus far finally arrives on earth. When you think of all the promises that we've seen so far, this is such a moment of incredible triumph and celebration.

## **The story of Christ's birth is beautifully understated:**

- Yet there's something shocking about this story as we look at it, and really the most shocking thing about what we read in these first 7 verses is how understated it all is.
- I want you to think of the past few weeks as we've looked at these promises in the Old Testament that point us to Christ. Not even a fraction of all the promises there are, yet they're amazing. They are at the core of all of the hopes of the Jewish people, you'd expect this moment, where Jesus is actually born into the world to be such an amazing moment, accompanied with fanfare and celebration.
- Yet look at how little detail we have here. Look at how V. 7 describes the birth of our saviour:

*“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.” - Luke 2:7 (ESV)*

- One commentator writes:
  - *“With the simplicity that is often the mark of his literary genius, Luke tells the story of Jesus' humble birth in a single sentence”*
- It's such an amazing moment, yet so understated.
- And this is not necessarily unique just to Luke. The books of Mark and John just skip right over the birth of Jesus and start their stories when Jesus begins his public ministry.
- Matthew is the only other one that gives this event of Christ's birth much attention, yet he doesn't give it much more detail. Actually he gives it less, if you can believe that. This is what Matthew 1:25 says:

*“he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” - Matt. 1:25 (ESV)*

- So even there, he kind of skips over the birth of Jesus to talk about what happened after he was born.
- So why is this? This should be such a powerful moment of triumph, yet all we have is one sentence. And yet I don't think that this was accidental. I actually think that Luke is very intentional with how he tells this story, and there's two things that we can learn from how understated this story is:

**Christ's coming was in direct contrast to the powerful rulers of the day**

- And the first thing that we learn is that Christ's coming was in direct contrast to the powerful rulers of that day.
- There's such a contrast in this passage between two significant and powerful individuals. The first one, introduced at the beginning of the passage is Caesar Augustus, and the second, not mentioned until the seventh verse, is Jesus himself.
- If you look at this story, it's the story of the birth of Christ, yet he seems almost to be a side character in his own story. As if his birth is only a small footnote in a bigger story.
- Look at the beginning in V. 1-3:

*"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town." - Luke 2:1-3 (ESV)*

- This is the story that actually gets a lot more focus in this passage, the story of Caesar declaring this census of "all the world".
- Now when it says "all the world", it's really just referring to the Roman empire rather than the entire globe, yet the exaggeration there is very intentional.
- Caesar is introduced as this massively powerful figure, essentially Luke introduces him here as the "ruler of all the world".
- And just to give you a little bit of historical background on Caesar Augustus himself:
- He believed that he was the son of a god, and therefore was a god himself. He presented himself as this divine ruler, who was worshipped throughout the entire Roman empire, the strongest world power in existence at the time.
- So you have this great and powerful emperor, ruler of the world, who thinks he's a god, exercising his power to call a census of the "entire world". That's how the passage starts, yet look down to V. 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." - Luke 2:7 (ESV)*

- The contrast between these two could not be greater. On one hand you have a powerful "divine" world ruler, and on the other a small, seemingly insignificant child, born in a stable and laid in a manger, because there was no room for him anywhere else.
- And what's funny about this is that Jesus is not given that same level of status or power as Caesar in the way that he's described, yet he is a greater ruler, and king than Caesar ever could have hoped to be.
- Caesar believed he was the son of a god, and deserved to be worshipped. Jesus actually is the son of God, and the one who is truly deserving of our worship.

- While Caesar is showing his power through his census of the world, Christ's birth is being declared to the shepherds by the heavenly hosts.
- Jesus didn't come to be a ruler like Caesar. He certainly didn't appear that way. He came to be a ruler that is so much greater.

### **Christ's coming foreshadowed the kind of life he would live**

- And this contrast is so striking. I mean come on! This is Jesus! The true king of the world. Every Old Testament prophecy that we've looked at has told us that. Jesus is the king that had been promised throughout all of history, who would give up his life for us. Who would bring justice to the world. He is the seed of the woman who had come to crush the head of the serpent. The Son of God who is God himself. Yet he is born in such a humble, unassuming way.
- But through this humble birth of Christ in the stable, we see such a clear picture of the kind of life that Jesus would live, and the ministry that he would have.
- Do you remember the words of Isaiah 53?

*"he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,*

*and no beauty that we should desire him."* - *Isai. 53:2b (ESV)*

- That's the way that Jesus was born, and it's also the way that he lived.
- He is our great Christ, saviour and Lord, yet he lived his entire life as a simple son of a carpenter. A teacher, who went about healing people and proclaiming the kingdom of God, until he ultimately humbled himself to death on a cross in our place.
- There is no greater humility. And again such a contrast between the glory that Christ rightly deserves, and the level to which he humbled himself on our behalf. He deserved to have all of the riches, the power and the worship that Caesar commanded, and so much more, yet he chose instead to come as an infant, born in a stable. So humble that there wasn't even space for him to be born in a proper room.
- Even in the way that Christ's birth is first announced to the shepherds, truly the lowest of the low in society, we see a picture of the ministry that he would have. Jesus always took the time to care for the lost, the outcasts, and the sinners that no one else wanted anything to do with.
- Because Jesus wasn't interested in what he deserved, or coming displaying the kind of power or status that he rightly should have. He came for a reason, to be a humble servant, who would lay down his life for our sins.

- Doesn't that just make you want to worship Jesus? That he could have had everything, deserved everything, yet chose to be nothing for us.
- Humility defined Jesus' birth and it defined his ministry on earth. He wasn't concerned about status or power or wealth. He came to humble himself and show the love of God to those around him.
- Think of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples in John 13. Such an act of humility, and as he did it, he instructed his disciples to follow in his example. To show the same kind of self-sacrificing, humble love that he had shown to them.
- And the same is true for us. We're called to follow Jesus' example of humility, not to be concerned about what we think we want or deserve, but to be willing to humble ourselves to show the love of Christ to those around us, because it's the same kind of love he showed to us.
- Doesn't that make you want to worship him?

### **The Story of Christ's Birth Shows God's Sovereignty:**

- Now as we end today, and end off this advent series and the Christmas season, I want to just take a moment, as we're looking at this understated story of the birth of our king, and look at something that we see about God throughout this passage, and really it's something that we see throughout all of Scripture.
- Some of you may remember, last year, right around the time that Elaine and I started at the church, we were going through a series as a church through the book of Esther.
- Our "tagline" for that series was: *"Hidden God - Messy World"*. The idea there was that, even though God is never actually mentioned throughout the entire book of Esther, he was still present, at work in the background of the book, protecting his people and sovereignly bringing about his purposes throughout the story of Esther.
- I think we see something kind of similar here. I want you to look at all the detail that Luke gives us, and the different people and situations that are mentioned as he tells us about the birth of Christ.
- You start with Caesar calling for this census in V. 1-3
- Then you have Marry and Joseph in V. 4-5:

*"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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child." - Luke 2:4-5 (ESV)*

- And all of this leads up to Christ.

- Think of everything that has happened, how events and timing has worked out perfectly for things to be exactly the way they need to be for the birth of Christ.
- And that's just in this story alone.
- Think back to Genesis 3, where we saw the very first promise of Christ given, immediately after Adam and Eve fell. Think of everything that had happened, nearly 4,000 years of history, perfectly leading up to this moment, when Jesus, this humble ruler was born in the stable.
- God was at work throughout all of history, in everything that has ever happened, to bring about his purposes through Christ.
- Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of every promise we've looked at.
  - Through his death, he is the one who crushes the head of the serpent
  - He is the gentle servant who will bring peace to all of the earth.
  - He is the suffering servant, crushed for our iniquities
  - He is the humble king born in Bethlehem.
  - He is Christ, Saviour, and Lord.
- Have you ever sat back to appreciate how this larger story of the Bible all fits together?
- I know around this time last year we had a challenge to read the entire Bible in 30-40 days. It's quite the undertaking, but I think one of the advantages to doing that is that you get to see more of this whole picture. How God worked over so many years, in the lives of so many people, to perfectly bring about his plan of salvation.
- One of the attributes of God that is so clearly on display here is his sovereignty, and the way that he is always at work to bring about his purposes. We also see so much of his faithfulness, in remaining true to the promises that he made.
- I'm sure there were days when the Jews wondered if God had left them. I'm sure there were days where they wondered how he could possibly be at work.
- I'm sure even as Caesar called this census, which would have meant a huge hassle, and ultimately more taxes for the people, they were wondering how long God would let things go on the way that they were. Yet even in that census, God was at work to bring about this plan of sending his son into the world.
- Do you have days like that? Where you just don't know where God is, or how he could possibly be at work in your life?
- Remember these two things. God is sovereign over all of creation, and he is faithful to his promises. That doesn't mean things will always look the way that you want them to, or that he'll work in the way you think he will. Sometimes you may not even see that God is working until you have a chance to look back. But look at a passage like this and remember that God is sovereign, and God is faithful.

- And it is through that sovereignty and faithfulness of God that he sent his son, a humble ruler born in a stable, to lay down his life for us.
- If that's not something worth celebrating, I don't know what is.