

## LUKE 2:1-20

Merry Christmas! Jesus is born today against the backdrop of a mighty empire and powerful rulers!

At the time of Jesus' birth Caesar Augustus was the undisputed ruler of the world...The king of kings and son of gods...titles used for Caesar long before Christ.

And Augustus' literally made Rome Great again...he ended a period of turmoil...but now the economy was booming, and Rome was rebuilt more glorious than before... and he instituted the Pax Romana – The Peace of Rome!

The only catch was that it favored Rome and its citizens at the expense of the rest of the world and anyone else looked they deemed “outsiders”!

He brought peace and prosperity to the most powerful nation on earth.

But beneath it all there was a much darker reality. Rome eliminated anyone that they perceived as a threat. They achieved their peace by suppressing human rights and liberties. Receiving the benefits of Rome meant submitting to the Empire's will.

And of course peace achieved by coercion, manipulation, violence and oppression is not really peace at all? But it looks good and it sure is great if you are Roman.

And the purpose of the census here was to make sure they got all their taxes from everyone...so the Jewish residents were actually supporting their own oppression.

Now it's right here into this setting that we have a very pregnant, very young, unwed teenage girl and her fiancé...who's not the Dad BTW, travelling 90 miles through the wilderness from Nazareth to Bethlehem!

Far from home Mary gives birth in a small limestone cave and laid her baby in a stone feeding trough where the animals fed at night so that the baby could stay warm.

And instead of our king's birth taking place in one of the nearby palaces he was born in an insignificant place, to insignificant people on the margins of society.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem... right in the shadow of King Herod's Great Palace! God's reign on earth begins as an outsider to those in power.

So what's changed? So today we proclaim an old time, yet a new time!

An old world, yet a new world. The kingdom of man and the kingdom of God!

Our story begins "in those times". With an emperor and a superpower.

Now in these times we have a President and a superpower right here in America!

But upon this day...today... a child is born! **THIS DAY!** A time for all times!

An angel stands before us right here and now and says...do not be afraid for I am bringing you good news of great joy for ALL people...to you **THIS** day is born our King.

I wonder what Herod and Caesar thought of a rival king? He was born in weakness... with no power or armies behind Him. But He gave hope to those who weren't in power and that scared some folks.

Where would Jesus be born to us today? Here today in the most powerful nation in the world might we have witnessed God being born?

And if God appears through God's many messengers have you left a little room in your hearts for God to be born to you **THIS** day?

How can we in our world today make room for Jesus and the values of God's kingdom... right here in the Kingdom of America? See Emperors and Empires always seem to have all the power... but that's never true for long and if you pull back the camera you may see that something bigger than ourselves and our own little world is going on.

Even back then, centuries before Jesus was born, the prophet Samuel also journeyed to this same insignificant place – Bethlehem... and there he anointed an insignificant shepherd boy, David... to be king...and how did King Saul welcome David the new king – well he tried to kill him! Something's never change... especially when those in power... love their power!

Now into this same exact place (500 years + later) another child is born to inherit the throne of his ancestor, even while Herod and Cesare were in power...and how does Herod welcome the newborn king...well he tries to kill him...and Jesus is eventually killed by people in power 33 years later.

So do you ever wonder why God wouldn't just use power and might to get our attention here in the kingdom of man?!

In order to usher in the kingdom of God why would Jesus place ALL those in the world ahead of Himself...that seems quite backwards to us!

See the peace this baby brings does not come from power or violence, but from sacrifice, mercy, and love. In the kingdom of God, the powerful rule not by force, but with the eternal power of self-giving love!

And news of this king comes first to some random shepherds...the lowliest of the empire's subjects. God's messengers show up to these insignificant outcasts to announce the arrival of God's kingdom born This day!

See the news of Jesus' birth is for ALL of us, especially those of us the world has forgotten...those who seem insignificant to those in power. Those that don't really matter much to the Empire!

And last week in Luke's gospel, Mary sings that God will bring down the powerful and lift up the lowly...and that's always the case! How do I know?

Well where is Caesar and the Roman Empire today? See all Great Nations will rise then fall...the kingdom of man, no matter where or when, is only temporary.

Today...we still live in a world dominated not by love, but by love of power – folks who believe they are more important than everyone else.

We are still in love with wealth, status, power, and might...creating a world where the insignificant still get trampled under and forgotten... yet as every Kingdom of Man before it...it too will fall.

Even for each one of us... all our own personal empires too will fade away... all the stuff we hold onto so dearly will disappear...see ain't none of us getting outta here alive!

We can no longer think that we are kings over our own lives... for THIS DAY our eternal Savior is born into our world and into our hearts...have we left a little space there for love!?

And this King is born for ALL...to bring us peace on earth by re-connecting us to God and to one another... bringing with it an eternal self-giving love that casts out all our fears and anxieties.

Jesus comes to us today wherever you see the lowly are lifted up... wherever immigrants and outcasts are welcomed...wherever the hungry are fed...wherever the poor are clothed and sheltered...wherever captives are set free...wherever enemies are reconciled! And wherever God and God's messengers show up... lives are transformed and made anew!

As we celebrate Jesus' birth we look forward to the day when mercy, love and peace will come to ALL God's children...regardless of status, and circumstances here in the kingdom of man.

See heavenly citizenship has nothing to do with your status...your family, your work, what church you belong to, what nationality, religion, or community you belong to. See God's not tribal...we are!

And God works through our culture and through ordinary people just like you and me...like Mary and Joseph... and God shows up even into the most broken and unlikely of situations!

How many times do we face challenges among our own groups? How many times might we have felt insignificant or invisible or worth-less in the world's eyes!

Have you ever been excluded?! And conversely, how many times have we excluded others from our groups? So who then are God's children? And who among us is worthy of love?

The good news THIS day is that everyone, EVERYONE is worthy and loved by God! You are ALL a part of God's One Holy Family!

So now go and extend love to others... especially to people the world may have forgotten ...folks that don't matter much. Bring the kingdom of God to others today.

Do not be afraid! God enters the world This day through you and me. Through people who leave a little room in their hearts for Christ to be born once again!

...and even though there are times when things may seem to be falling apart...even in the midst of our pain and struggles...new life always bursts forth...light will always pierce the darkness!

God shows up right in the middle of our pain, suffering, despair, and darkness!

The good news THIS DAY is that when all seems broken...God... still ...shows... up...especially in unlikely ways and in unexpected places.

God shows up to us all...so often we feel like God doesn't show up for us...maybe because we don't go to church, or that we feel broken in some way...but that can't be further from the truth!

God will always show up... anywhere... and for anyone who is willing to just see and hear God's messengers! See God will always seek us out!

Those shepherds were tired and terrified...they weren't sitting around waiting for God to show up...yet God came... to remind us all... especially those of you who are tired and afraid... that God will never ever forget you!

Right in the middle of our messy lives...right in the middle of our anxiety, depression, addictions, and brokenness. God will find you... and you too can experience PEACE... right here and now! Just make sure to leave a little room for Jesus to be born in your hearts THIS DAY!

You just might be surprised at what God has in store for each one of you.

One night in 1818 in a little Church... appropriately called the Church of St, Nickolas... in a little town in Austria. The Rector was informed right before the service that the church organ was broken!

The organist now had to pull out a guitar and wing it, but he included the words of a poem written by the pastor that day. That was the first time those words were put to music and heard by others... the song was called Silent Night!

...and today Churches all around the world will play this simple but powerful song... all because something broke! Things usually have to

break in order to make room for something new and miraculous to be born...that's how it usually works.

So if something is broken in your life... invite God there... then look for God to show up!

Merry and Blessed Christmas to you all... for there is peace.... and there is joy... in ALL the world... for ALL OF US... THIS day!

Amen.