

Text: Luke 2:1-5.

Christmas Eve.

December 24, 2020.

Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace to people. Amen.

Why start Christmas with this? Caesar, census, Quirinius. I pity every second grader who has had to memorize that name. Why preach on this, names we don't know, places we aren't familiar with? Why not the good stuff? She gave birth. I bring you good news of great joy. A Savior has been born to you. Glory to God in the highest! Well, how do we know she really gave birth? Can we be sure there is real good news? Are we certain we really have a real Savior?

You see, the most detailed account in all of the Bible about Christmas, the birth of Christ, doesn't start with, once upon a time, like it's a story. This is His-story. History. God's real account of the real birth of his real Son. This didn't take place long ago in a galaxy far, far away. This birth happened at a real time, while Quirinus was governor of Syria. In a real place, Bethlehem, the town of David. A real ruler, Caesar Augustus, gave a real decree about a real census. Luke is begging us: fact check it. Check it out. Check for yourself. This is a real story about a real Savior.

Don't you see what this means? Christmas isn't a feel good fairy tale. It's fact. Real sinners have a real Savior, for our very real sins. Real rebels have real release from the real rebellion we really feel in our hearts. That rebellion is rubbed off your soul, by this real Savior. Real guilt is really gone. Really nailed to a cross. Really forgiven. For real! Jesus really rose from a real tomb, to a real heaven, where you will enjoy real life, perfect life, a really perfect life with this very real Savior. Luke wants us to know, God himself wants us to know: you have a real Savior, for your real sins.

The real plan of our real God really prevails. God used Caesar Augustus, who couldn't have cared less and didn't even know about God's plan. Caesar Augustus wanted to tax and take. God used Caesar's plan to gift us his Son, to give us eternal life. Caesar's decree meant you had to register, write your name in a book so the government could get its fair share or more than their share, from you. God's decree, "I baptize you," means God wrote your name, in his book, so God will give you your share of heaven, more than your fair share.

Maybe you've been thinking for weeks, "My guy lost! All is lost!" Maybe not. Caesar wasn't anyone's guy. But God used him in God's story, in history to bring us the guy, our real Savior, Jesus. Maybe you've been overly elated, "The right guy won! We are saved!" For how long? Four years? From what? Our sins? Caesar called himself a savior and lord. Do we still praise him, or do we praise our real Savior, Jesus, who saved us, from all our sins, for all eternity? God's plan always prevails. Godless government? God will use them for God's purpose. Government claiming to be God? Don't worry, that government won't last nearly as long as God's government. God's plan prevails.

God's promises prevail. God promised, "My Son, the real Savior, will be born in Bethlehem." But Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth. Was it some accident that they didn't live in Bethlehem their whole lives and God just realized this and so had to make up something quick to get them to journey? No! God also said his Son would be raised in Nazareth. Born in Bethlehem. Raised in Nazareth. It was all God's plan, all God's promise. But God used a decree, a dogma, a rule they had to obey. Why else does a couple, with a woman nine months pregnant, make a journey, on foot, of nearly 100 miles! Can you imagine how many times they had to stop to go to the bathroom? Who makes this journey? And there's no definite evidence in the Bible of riding a donkey.

They made the trek to Bethlehem because God had a promise to keep. And God kept it. God used a godless ruler and a couple that would not otherwise make this journey to get people where God wanted them to be for God to keep his promise. God promised thousands of years before this, "I will send a Savior. He will be the offspring of a woman." God repeated that promise over and over. God detailed the women and men through whom he kept this promise alive, through the house and line of David. In fact, the very next chapter of this book of the Bible, lists the generations from Jesus, through Joseph, all the way to Adam, the very first human to whom God made this promise, the very first human ever! God made a promise. God kept the promise!

You know, some scholars from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or MIT, one of the most prestigious schools in the country, did a purely mathematical calculation on the odds that one person could just, by chance, fulfill or keep all the promises made about Jesus, like born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, killed with criminals, but buried in a rich man's tomb. They calculated the odds of one person, just randomly fulfilling eight of these promises. You know how they conveyed the odds? Yes in one to whatever, but the number had so many zeros it doesn't make sense. So they said, "It's the same as the odds of covering the entire state of Texas, with silver dollars, two feet deep." Think about that. Texas. Silver dollars. Two feet deep. There's an invisible mark on one of them. You can fly or walk or hoverboard around, but you only get one try. What are the odds you pick the one with the invisible mark? And they stopped at eight promises because they said, "Well, after eight, the numbers just got ridiculous." Jesus was no accident. Jesus is the real Savior. Jesus keeps all God's promises.

So when God says, "Surely I am with you always!" God will keep the promise. When God says, "In this world you will have trouble." God will keep the promise and you will have trouble. But when God immediately then promises, "Take heart! I have overcome the world." You can take heart. God has overcome the world, just like he promised. When God promises, "I am going to heaven to prepare a mansion for you." He's really going to a real heaven to prepare a real mansion, that's really for the real you.

As we read this real account it looks like Caesar is the one with the real control. He issues a decree. Mary and Joseph have to go. But don't be fooled by the appearance. See the real reality of the real Lord and Savior, Jesus. Caesar ruled from a palace. Christ placed in a manger. But who's the real king? Earthly choirs praised Caesar on his birthday. Heavenly choirs of angels praised Jesus at his birth. Who's the real king? Caesar was hailed by people as the bringer of Roman peace. Jesus was hailed by angels as the one who brought peace, between God and all people. Caesar's name Augustus means "exalted." Do we sing his praises today? But every Sunday, for thousands of years, Christians around the world have sung, "Glory to God in the highest!" Caesar had a temporal kingdom, over part of the world, that lasted a few decades. Christ has an eternal kingdom, over the entire universe, that lasts forever. Who's the real king? Caesar enjoyed the praise of the powerful. Christ was despised by the powerful and praised by the despised, the tax collectors, the sinners! Sinners today still praise Jesus. Real sinners, who need a real Savior, for our very real sins. And our real Savior brings real forgiveness. Our real Savior really rescues us from our sins and really rules in our hearts. Our real Savior really removes real guilt, from our real souls. And yes, our Real Savior, really uses really good and really godless government to achieve his plan and keep his promise to take us to heaven, to live with him there. That's a real Savior. That's Jesus. Amen.

Christ, born in a manger, is our real Savior, forever and ever. Amen.