

God Came Down

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[0 : 00] All right, so this morning, if you'd like, you can flip to Luke chapter 2, and Sarah will read verses 1 through 21.

Which is called Bethlehem.

And the angel said to them, And those with whom he is pleased.

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, and the name given by the angel became before he was conceived in the womb.

Thank you. All right. So most years in December, I end up re-watching a classic Christmas holiday movie.

[2 : 25] Not the one that the worship team was talking about today, which was Elf. But I end up, I do like that one. A Charlie Brown Christmas. It's a nostalgic favorite of mine.

And at one point, a frustrated Charlie Brown asks, Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is about? Charlie Brown's best friend, Linus Van Pelt, who was playing a shepherd in the play that they were rehearsing, walks to the center stage and shares the message of the gospel and recites part of this passage that we just heard.

So when I was asked to preach on this passage, I immediately thought of Charlie Brown. So Christmas, or more specifically, the Advent season leading up to Christmas, is about expectant waiting.

About recognizing that you have not yet received what you have been anticipating. How do you do with waiting? Can you wait patiently for something that you ordered online to show up on your doorstep?

Do you wait patiently for the last month of school to end before summer break? What is something that you've had a hard time waiting for? You guys think of something and just keep it in the back of your mind, and I'll tell you something that I had a hard time waiting for.

[3 : 44] And I was a teenager, which if you're a young person, that's a long time ago. And if you're not as young of a person, it doesn't seem like that long ago.

But I just couldn't wait to get my driver's license. There seemed to be so many steps in between, though, that you had to wait to be old enough. And then you had driver's ed class, which was interesting at my high school, because I'm pretty sure the driver's ed instructor would spit all the time.

While he was giving his class, he would turn and spit. I can't imagine being a janitor in that situation. So I had to take driver's ed classes, and I had to take a test and pass that and receive a learner's permit.

And then I had to have that for a while, and then same teacher behind the wheel. So we were now in the same car together. Is this guy going to spit? I don't know. It didn't happen.

In the car, at least. But it was just waiting. Waiting and waiting. Just endless waiting. There are 76 generations listed in Luke 3 to get from Adam to Jesus.

[4 : 55] That's 76 generations of waiting for the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent, put a reversal on the curse, and restore a direct relationship with God like Adam and Eve had enjoyed.

For roughly the last 400 years before Jesus was born, God did not speak to his people. In the Hebrew Bible, the way that God communicated to his people was through prophets.

You're probably familiar and have heard a phrase like, the word of the Lord came to Samuel. So Samuel was a prophet. God spoke to Samuel, and Samuel spread that message to God's people.

But that had stopped. That's to say 400 years of the silent treatment from God. For 400 years, things faded into darkness, but it wouldn't stay that way. On an ordinary night, just like every other night, the glory of the Lord would pierce the darkness to bring good news of great joy.

If everything in the whole of the Hebrew Bible is pointing to that moment, to this moment of the birth, the birth of the promised one 76 generations before, the snake crushing seed of the woman, then wouldn't we expect Luke to give us more than just two sentences?

[6 : 07] He gives us 43 words in the ESV translation. Verses 6 and 7, they read, What would you have expected would happen when the long-awaited king and savior finally appears?

Kings and world rulers are, after all, very powerful individuals. Would you maybe expect a king mounted on a horse with an army dressed for war, a press conference or a large public speech by a powerful and captivating leader, or someone who unseats corrupt leaders and overturns unjust authority?

Would you have expected a newborn baby, small, helpless, and cannot even provide for his own needs? I don't think, I'm not a doctor, and it's been a long time since I've had a little baby, but I don't think babies can even eat mashed potatoes when they're newborns.

That's pretty weak stuff. Babies. No pomp, pomp and circumstance, no crowds, no regalia, not even a marching band.

Just a helpless baby born into what worldly standards would call poverty. Laid in a manger, a place not well-suited for a newborn. It'd be hard to imagine a more lowly entrance.

[7 : 35] And yet, on the other hand, the Son of God was born just like every other human. Born of a woman, completely helpless and fully dependent on others to care for him, and finally wrapped in swaddling cloths, which I'm pretty sure, again, not a doctor, pretty sure that's how they do stuff these days.

Still, standard operating procedure. Pretty normal stuff, guys. I used to be pretty good at swaddling babies. Pretty good. I think I would have expected just a little more regalia.

Probably even just like a small marching band. Maybe like a small town high school marching band. I don't know, something. Maybe just one explanation point, even.

Exclamation? We'll go with that. But no. Just two quiet sentences. Have you ever heard the phrase, that's how we've always done it?

For the previous 75 generations, we've seen through the course of the Hebrew Bible how humans have looked forward to the promise of faith, but clearly have seemed to have made a mess by their own involvement and doing what is right by their own eyes.

[8 : 46] That's how we humans do it. We make messes when we doubt God. We get impatient while we wait. Eve said, I've gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

Certainly, she thought Cain was going to be the solution to their problem. It's a slam dunk. What could go wrong? Abraham and Sarah meddled with the promises of God and the result was Ishmael.

In the spring of the year, a king named David went for a walk on his rooftop, and I don't think I need to remind you of the ways that David does what he thinks is right in his eyes and not following what God says is best.

Like Jeremy taught us last week, sin is naturally passed from one generation to the next. 75 generations of faith and looking forward to God's promises, but that faith was also mixed up with meddling, accumulating power, struggling with others, working situations, and exerting leverage.

Sin and an inability to keep the law given by God through Moses draws a straight line through the story of the Hebrew Bible. Biblically speaking, that's how we've done it.

[10 : 00] The Hebrew Bible shows us that the way we've always done things isn't going to cut it. The plan of the good news of Christ has been 75 generations in the making and that in the Lord's providence, that was enough time for us to recognize that we're going to need a different way.

So I'll ask you guys again, you've been thinking about what you were impatiently waiting for. How do you guys do with waiting? Are you tempted to shortcut the fullness of time while you wait?

Do you allow sin to creep in on the edges? Do you meddle? Do you unwrap just a corner of the gift that's under the tree, thinking that you can just rewrap it and no one's going to notice?

That one's sort of a metaphor, but it might be true, a real temptation for some of us. Brothers and sisters, be encouraged at how Psalm 27 ends.

It says, Look upon the goodness of the Lord and wait. Wait for the Lord. The Lord will be your salvation. Keep your gaze fixed on him. You won't save yourself by your own cleverness.

[11 : 11] Luke only gives us 43 words about the birth of Jesus, but Paul shows us in his letter to the Galatians that these ideas of expectant waiting and the need for a different way both meet up at the same place at this exact same time in history.

Galatians says, in 4.4, it says, So when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

That's the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God. The expected end happens through unexpected means. God has sent his Son, his only Son, and he sent him straight to the bottom of the heap.

Luke does, however, drop us a breadcrumb here as well, that God's plan is going to be different from the way things have been done. Joseph and Mary are traveling to the city of David for the census because Joseph is of the line of David.

Last week we learned that Jesus is attached to the line of David through Joseph. So this is a little participation time for everybody. So just for fun, the city of David, on the count of three, I'm going to say one, two, three, and then you're going to say it because I can't say three and a word at the same time, and we just want to avoid the awkward thing.

[12 : 36] So I'm going to count to three, and then you guys are going to say the name of the city of David. Clear? You understand? You ready?

You ready? Okay. One, two, three, Jerusalem. Wait. You guys, you all said Bethlehem.

Did anybody say Jerusalem? Nobody. I did. Lone person out. Someone should probably come take over for me. So is there, is there like a mistake here in the Bible?

Because in the Old Testament, every single time it's a city of David, it's Jerusalem. Jerusalem. So now, it's switched. So obviously, there's not a mistake in Scripture, but this is like a pattern.

This is a thing that the Bible often uses. They develop a pattern, and then they disrupt the pattern in order to show us something that's really important.

- [13 : 43] So Luke has something important here. Jerusalem was the hub and the seat of power. It had become a collection or accumulation of human achievement, corrupt activities, and human exaltation.

If you wanted to be somebody, you'd better be in Jerusalem. Bethlehem, on the other hand, was flyover country. Think about Washington, D.C.

versus Fargo. I mean, Fargo's got good things going for it, guys. I'm not saying it's a bad place, but it is different. I mean, Roger Maris is from here.

That's something. So we could now be the city of Roger. When people ask you where you're from, you could tell them that, and they would look confused.

Very confused. So Luke has shown us that this good news isn't going to come the way we've always done it. The king isn't going to come from a major power center like we would expect.

- [14 : 41] This king is going to come in an unexpected way. In John's Gospel, he says, And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Son of God became incarnate.

God became human. And it's important to point out for the sake of clarity that Jesus did not reduce his deity. He never stopped being fully God.

If we think about it like a math equation, which is something that I'm generally not good at, it's not a subtraction problem. It's not God minus his glory to get to Jesus.

It's an addition thing. It's fully God, and then he adds being fully human, and that's Jesus. So the two are inextricably bound together.

We get the God-man. God could have chosen any way to redeem his people. He does have unlimited options after all. But he chose this way.

- [15 : 40] He chose the low road, so to speak. And Jesus willingly and obediently followed the plan the Father had set before him. God chose not to send his Son to display his power and strength, but to condescend so that he can identify with us in our weakness, so that he can sympathize with us.

The incarnation of Jesus is rooted in humility. I'll say that one more time because it's important. The incarnation of Jesus is rooted in humility.

So, in an unexpected way, God has come to us. The God-man is lying in a manger. Let's look at what happens next in verse 8.

So verse 8, it unfolds and it starts just like every low-budget alien abduction sci-fi movie. It's a quiet night. There's a few people outside in complete darkness.

And then suddenly, they're blinded by a flood of bright lights. So it's really no mystery why these shepherds would be filled with fear. But this isn't a bad sci-fi movie.

- [16 : 48] This is their current reality. It starts in verse 8. It says, And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were filled with great fear.

And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

So the angel's delivery of the good news, it's brief and it's direct and there's three parts in it. The first part is the standard angelic greeting. It's like, Whoa! I know, I'm scary, but hear me out.

I've got something for you to hear. The second part are clues for a treasure hunt. And the third part is what I'm going to call a hyperlink.

[18 : 01] Do you guys know what a hyperlink is? You're tracking with me if you're on a website and something is lit up, you can click on it and it takes you somewhere else. That usually has something to do with the page that you're on.

So I think there's a hyperlink right here. And I think that's why these slow living shepherds by God's perfect design have had plenty of time to internalize and organize the Hebrew Bible in their mind and also in their hearts while they watched over their flocks.

So when they heard, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord, I'm convinced that they had that hyperlink and they were just sucked over to Isaiah 9.

And also, if you're a Handel's Messiah super fan, which I know there's at least a couple that probably have like a, I don't know if Handel ever did tour shirts, they'd have them if they had a tour shirt.

I'm convinced that they heard Isaiah 9. And verse 6 says, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Father, or Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

[19 : 24] But I don't think just those two verses are the things that link it together. It seems like all of Luke 8-14, verses 8-14, match up to Isaiah 9, verses 2-4.

I think they match up really well. And I want to show you just a couple places today where they match up. So at the end of that, Isaiah 9-7 says, Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end.

On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it, to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

This is saying that this child, which all of verse 6 describes, is going to establish and create a kingdom that will be ever expanding until nothing is outside of its rule for all time.

and it will be marked by peace. And in Jesus, all of these titles in verse 6 are perfectly reconciled together. A child is born, Jesus is born a human, a son.

[20 : 33] God gave his only son to pay the penalty of sin. The government shall be upon his shoulder. He's going to establish his kingdom. Wonderful counselor.

His timing and plan is perfect. Mighty God, that one I think we all can get. That's pretty obvious. Everlasting Father, his kingdom will be marked by unending benevolent love.

And finally, Prince of Peace, a ruler who will bring about an unending peace. So that last line there helps us link though. It says, the zeal of the Lord of hosts.

That's the personal, divine name of God right there. So there's no mistake that this is talking about God. But another way to say this, to phrase this, is saying the God of the armies is going to make this happen.

And then here in Luke, we see a heavenly host. That's the army of the Lord appearing and praising God. So we have God saying that he's going to do it and then the army of God in the form of these angels saying that this is happening right now.

[21 : 43] So they say, glory to God in the highest. That's up there. The Lord is bringing his peace and his kingdom to plant and establish down here. Isaiah 9 verse 3, if we jump up to the top part, it says, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who have dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them has light shown. And I think if these shepherds were really Bible nerds, this connection would have felt like a ton of bricks being dropped on them.

Not only is the angels' message linking their current situation to the prophecy from Isaiah 9, but it's linking them. These specific shepherds are being linked with the reception of good news of the coming of the long expected Savior, Christ and Lord.

That means they didn't realize, they realize they didn't witness this by accident. It's not a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

It was all part of God's perfect plan and timing to reveal this message of good news and great joy to these lowly shepherds. Their immediate response of obedience shows us not only did they believe the promises of God were true with their mind, but they also believed them to be true in their hearts and they were expectantly looking forward to the moment that that would happen.

[23 : 11] In verse 15 it says, When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary treasured up these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told to them.

So lowly shepherds are the first evangelists. I wonder if the shepherds had any idea that ironically the treasure hunt clues that they received from the angel would lead them directly to another shepherd.

One of the titles Jesus would later attach to himself would be the good shepherd. We've already read one verse from John 10 and here's what he said right before that. This is John 10 verse 11 through 16.

[24 : 19] Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd who does not own the sheep sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Jesus didn't do things the way we've always done it because what we've always done had never worked. Jesus didn't come flexing his power and might and supremacy even though he didn't lack that.

He came to us like the prophet Zechariah describes. Behold, thy king cometh unto thee lowly. The key word that Zechariah used there was lowly.

This isn't how we've always done it. Luke seems to emphasize the lowliness of Jesus in his gospel and here's one way he does that. It's the theme of Jesus being bound.

[25 : 28] It shows his willingness to humble himself to follow and fulfill God's plan of redemption for his people. Jesus willingly humbled himself to be bound to a human body and enter the world as a small, helpless baby.

he was wrapped in swaddling cloths which is literally being bound by strips of cloth. We've already touched on scripture from Galatians. Jesus submitted himself to the law of God.

Luke 2 verse 21 says, At the end of eight days when he was circumcised. By being circumcised, Jesus bound himself to the law of the Jews. Remember in Galatians, Jesus was born under the law to redeem those who were under the law.

Jesus would also be bound by Roman soldiers in the garden when he was betrayed, paraded around, bound before the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate, bound by nails to the cross, and Psalm 18 tells us he was encompassed in the cords of death.

And finally, his body was bound up in strips of cloth again and laid in the tomb. Luke's account is the only gospel where this is recorded. Luke 24, 12.

[26 : 44] It says, But Peter rose and ran to the tomb. Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves. Jesus humbly submitted himself all the way to death.

But the empty linen cloths show that sin and death never had any real authority over Jesus. They show us that Jesus' obedience to the Father and his overwhelming love for his people are why he allowed this binding to happen.

Jesus says again in John 10, he says, For this reason the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. If you don't yet follow Jesus, remember that he came to seek and to save the lost.

The gospel message is for you. He doesn't gather his flock by force or compulsion, but by putting on flesh and becoming like us in every way except without sin.

[27 : 48] Repent of your sins and believe. Jesus said, I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. If you are a follower of Jesus, same as.

The gospel message is for you too. All of the binding that Jesus put himself through was for you. He didn't do it to prove that he could or to challenge himself.

He did it because he knows we are like sheep in need of a shepherd. Like the hymn says, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Whatever ways that you're prone to wander today, know that Jesus knows exactly what you're going through and know that like a good shepherd, he has went out before you through a similar path of temptation yet remained sinless and he is continuing to call you to himself.

He's not a God that's far off and distant. He's a God that's with you providing grace and mercy in time of need. Brothers and sisters, like it was no accident for the angels to visit the shepherds, when Jesus called you to himself, you responded.

[29 : 09] By repenting of your sins and believing, you became part of the flock. It's not a mistake. It's not an accident. The Son of God became man for you, paid the price on the cross for your sins so that you may stand before the throne of God.

the glory of the Lord shining brightly on you, fully in the light, your sins completely forgiven. And like the shepherds, the good news came to you and you received it with joy.

You responded like they did by getting up and moving towards Jesus. Like the shepherds, you can see that you didn't just receive the good news, you also have a part in God's redemptive plan.

Your part is to share the gospel message, the good news, and to make disciples. of Jesus. As followers of Christ, we carry around the message of the gospel like a lamp shining in a dark place.

Don't be tempted to believe the lies we tell ourselves that we need to be perfect or have ourselves all cleaned up before we can share the gospel message and teach each other about Jesus.

[30 : 16] Don't wait. Share it now. God is pleased to work in and through you by the Spirit and to exalt the lowly. If you can imagine someone walking towards you at night with a lamp, you're going to see the light first.

And it's like that way when we share the gospel. We're not convincing. I'm not convincing. But by the Holy Spirit's work in and through us, the gospel message will continue to bring people to Christ.

as soon as the angels left the shepherds, they responded in obedience to their Lord. They went as they were, probably dirty and tired, certainly not fit to stand before Christ, and yet they went.

They shared the gospel, and it caused all who heard to marvel and be astonished. Not because of who the shepherds were, but because of the message that they shared.

And then, they just went back. They went back to their humble job of tending sheep. But they went back changed. They went back praising and glorifying God. That's the power of the gospel message.

[31 : 26] It's the call of the good shepherd, bringing broken sons and daughters to himself to repent of their sins and believe in him and receive the mercy and grace that we desperately need.

The door is narrow, and there's only one way, but through Jesus, the good shepherd, you will find the great joy that the angel spoke about. The gospel is simple. The gospel is powerful.

The gospel is grace and mercy for sinners like you and me. And that's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown. Would you guys join me in prayer?

Dear Lord, we're just so thankful that you lowered yourself. you condescended and you came to us. Lord, you just came in a lowly form so that you could sympathize with us, so that you could be a good high priest to us.

Lord, I just pray that today, if people haven't heard about you, that this message would just reach them. Lord, as we continue and move towards communion, I just pray that we could take a minute and reflect and think about the things that we've heard today.

[32 : 48] And Lord, just think about you. I just pray that we could keep our gaze and our eyes fixed upon you, Lord, and wait upon the Lord. It's in your name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.