

We Wish You a Merry Rescue

The Advent of Christ and the Rescue of Sinners (Part 1)

Introduction

Christmas and the Culture

- A. What is Christmas now for the average American? Christmas trees? Cookies? Lights? Santa Claus? Presents? Carols? Black Friday? Peppermint drinks? Family? Polar Express? (Every Christmas Eve my family would gather on my parents' bed to read the it together. I still have the book they gave me when I was like 5.)
1. Christmas now, it seems, has its own culture. I honestly love most all of these things. Christmas was always a blast for my family. We did it all.
- B. But you know what: none of what I just listed is Christmas. None of it. That's all the cultural trappings—some of it fun, some of it beneficial, some of it can be distracting and even dangerous. But none of it is Christmas.
1. Christmas, get ready for it, is about Christ. Now that should seem obvious. Without Christ you can't have Christmas. And yet, all around our city, our nation, even our world, people are doing just that!
 - a. Once you add all these other symbols and activities, once the marketers get on board and consumerism elbows in, suddenly Christmas becomes Xmas becomes holiday and Christ is gone: "Jesus who?"
- C. Once we realize this, we can look at Christmas in our culture and get all heated: "Look what they've done with it!" We get all worked up and boycott Starbucks because they don't have ferns on their cups: "I refuse to sip my vanilla-soy-2 shot-½ caf-latte from this sort of blasphemy!"
1. Yet somehow we miss that this can happen in our own hearts. Maybe it's even going on right now. We're doing all the stuff but Christ got replaced along the way. This is for real with me right now. Is it about Christ or church ministry? It starts out being about love for Christ, but it becomes about meetings, emails, reading books, writing sermons, learning songs...His Name is on it all but is He actually the center of it?!
 - a. Christmas is a great time to reflect on this! He might be at the center of our nativities, but is He at the center of our lives, our hearts?
- D. It seems to me, then, whether you are the secular non-Christian or you've been a Christian your whole life, we're all in desperate need of Christmas! I'm praying these next few messages serve this end.

The Text

- A. You have to love the sovereignty of God. When I began Luke at the end of August I knew we'd probably be dealing with the Lord's birth in some way around Christmas time, but this is perfect!

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26–38)

The Trinity Has to Work on Christmas

- A. Before we start to take this text bit by bit, there is a broader observation that I wish to make. I don't know if you noticed it or not (I didn't even notice it until another preacher pointed it out to me), but the Trinity—our triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all make an appearance in our text. Every Person of the Godhead is accounted for. All three are doing work.
1. You see the Father sending Gabriel to Mary with an announcement (v. 26).
 2. And the announcement is about Jesus who "will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High" (v. 32a) and, later, "the Son of God" (v. 35b).
 3. And how will Mary conceive this Son of God? "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (v. 35a).
- B. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all have to work on Christmas day. Your boss might give you the day off (I hope), but on this first Christmas our triune God was putting in overtime. "Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Psa 121:4).

Christmas and Creation

- A. This triune activity at the commencement of Christ's advent recalls the same triune activity of God at the commencement of creation. Christmas as it turns out, cannot be properly understood without considering it in light of the original creation. Consider this with me.

1. Creation in Genesis is pictured as this overflow of joy within the Godhead. Before anything ever was, God was full, brimming with being and joy. And when that joy started spilling over, we call it: “creation.”
 - a. To be sure, the Trinity is tough to get our minds around, but in Tim Keller’s book *King’s Cross*, he quotes C.S. Lewis and Cornelius Plantinga in a way that might prove helpful here: “In the words of...C. S. Lewis, ‘In Christianity God is not a static thing . . . but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.’ Theologian Cornelius Plantinga develops this further, noting that the Bible says the Father, the Son, and the Spirit glorify one another: ‘The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, and defer to one another. . . . Each divine person harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture and acceptance, each person envelops and encircles the others. . . . God’s interior life [therefore] overflows with regard for others’” (p. 6).

2. So, borrowing this powerful image from Lewis, the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—have been in this dance from all eternity. And the joy of this dance overflows in creation.
 - a. The Father leading, the Son proceeding from the Father as the “Word” ([Joh 1:1](#)), and the Spirit hovering over the deep bringing their directives to fruition.
 - i. And there’s this cadence to it all, as if the 7 days have been set to music, and the refrain that keeps sounding out: “[And God saw that it was good.](#)”

- B. And the most amazing thing is that humanity isn’t merely some overflow of Their joy, man was actually created to enter into Their joy. It’s as if the triune God is laying out the floor, setting up the lights, turning on the music, and inviting us to dance! That’s creation. That’s why we’re here!
 1. And, yet, while we were feeling the rhythm for a few moments, in a move of utter rebellion, humanity decides to step out mid-dance.
 - a. Think about your high school dances, is there anything worse? “No thanks, I don’t like this song, and, honestly, you’re not that great of a dancer, you’re always stepping on my toes, crimping my style.” We just walk off the floor and step out into a world darkness.

We Wish You a Merry Rescue

- A. Christmas, then, understood now against the creation and fall is best described by a single word: rescue.

1. The Father, Son, and Spirit, refuse to leave us in the dark. Just as they worked together in creation so they put back on their gloves for the work of our redemption. Christmas is the rescue mission of God. It is God's attempt to bring men back into the dance. (This might explain why surrounding this triune activity in the first 2 chapters of Luke, men and angels just start erupting in song!)
- B. It is for this reason that I'm titling our messages through this section of Luke: "We Wish You a Merry Rescue—The Advent of Christ and the Rescue of Sinners."
1. This morning, Lord willing, we will move from v. 26 to the fringes of v. 31. We will make note of (1) An Ancient Hope; and (2) A Bipolar Fulfillment.

(1) An Ancient Hope

4 Clues towards Immanuel

- A. Our text represents the climaxing fulfillment of an ancient hope. There's some scholarly debate on this, but it seems quite clear to me that, while every stream of the OT is now flowing into this single point of the Christ's arrival, there is behind Luke's presentation 1 predominant prophetic source.
1. It is the source that Matthew makes explicit in [Mat 1:23](#) and later on in [4:14-16](#). It's the prophecy of Isaiah particularly regarding this sign-child: Immanuel (discussed in [Isa 6-12](#)). In Isaiah, God promises a coming Child who will turn everything around, the Rescuer. And in our gospel, Luke is saying, that child is here!
- B. Let me show you the 4 clues in our text that point me to this conclusion and then we'll spend a moment considering the prophecies in Isaiah before returning to a deeper analysis of our text in Luke.
1. Clue #1: "Galilee"—"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee..." (v. 26). Galilee shows up only a handful of times in the OT, most significantly in [Isa 9:1](#). Galilee would be the first place to experience the glorious dawn of this coming child.
 2. Clue # 2: "Virgin"—Gabriel is sent "...to a virgin..." (v. 27a). And this virgin "will conceive...and bear a son" (v. 31). This is a direct correlation with [Isa 7:14](#), where it is the "virgin [who] shall conceive and bear a son."
 3. Clue # 3: "David"—this "virgin [was] betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David" (v. 27a). We'll deal more extensively with David in later messages as he shows up again in v. 32 and elsewhere in these [Luk 1-2](#). For now, just recognize that this is not a passing detail, it represents the rekindling of a smoldering hope. It connects us as well to these Immanuel prophecies, for they are directed to the "house of David" ([Isa 7:13](#)) concerning a child who will sit "on the throne of David" ([9:7](#)).

4. Clue # 4: “The Lord is with you.” Gabriel greets Mary with this words: “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” (v. 28b). While perhaps a standard greeting, in light of these other connections with the prophecies of Isa 6-12, I couldn’t help but think of Immanuel which means, of course, as Matthew tells us: “God with us” (1:23b).

The Oracles in Context

- A. Each of these clues serve to link us back to the ancient hope prophesied in Isaiah about a coming child. But before I read a few of the more prominent verses, it would be important to note the context of their delivery. These prophecies are being made by Isaiah to Ahaz, king of Judah, in the line of David. You might know who Isaiah was, but who was King Ahaz?
 1. You can read Ahaz’ story in 2 Chr 28, he’s just this desperate, despicable dude. What we’ll find is that his story is just a more descriptive replaying of the story of Adam—A refusal to trust and love and dance with His Creator.
- B. Here’s how he’s introduced: “¹ Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done,² but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals,³ and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.⁴ And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree” (vv. 1–4).
 1. He’s after the Canaanite gods here, Baal in particular. He’s sacrificing to them in every place imaginable. And he’s even sacrificing everything imaginable, including his own children.
 - a. Now I have never considered sacrificing my kids to Baal, but do I neglect them for my work? Am I so convinced that glory and joy and life are going to be found for me in my job that I’m ready to sacrifice my kids to this? “Daddy’s got to work late again, girls.”
- C. But the story moves on and it gets worse. Ahaz’ kingdom is under attack and rather than trust the Lord, he looks to Assyria for help, even giving to them gold and silver from the temple in an attempt to win their favor and protection. But we read that because of his unfaithfulness to the Lord the “...king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him” (v. 20).
 1. Our idols, our false gods, they just make things worse. They don’t love us, they want to exploit us. The more we lean in on them the more we fall!
- D. But Ahaz keeps leaning, and he keeps falling, lower and lower: “²² In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord...²³ For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus that had defeated him and said, “Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel” (2 Chr 28:22–23).

1. Here's the part where we just start to get crazy. When we are not resting in the one true God we lose our minds. What is going to help? I'm broken, I get that. How do I get whole? We start looking around. What's working for them? Money? Let's try it. A new exercise routine? Okay. That Mommy blog? I'll follow it. What is it for you? Is it alcohol that starts calling your name in the night? Or TV to numb the pain?
 - a. Whatever it might be, what God speaks to Ahaz still proves true today: "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all" (Is 7:9b). If you go running after all these other gods, though you are looking for stability you will find nothing but shifting sand.
 - i. It's as if we're just trying to find another partner. "Will you dance with me?...will you dance with me? You look beautiful." But as we did with God, so these idols do with us: they just walk out mid-dance, leaving us alone and ashamed.

Behold the Virgin Shall Conceive!

- A. But all the while, God is still calling, and, more than calling, God is coming. Christmas! Rescue! And this gift will come wrapped in swaddling clothes (Luk 2:12). God delivers this promise to Ahaz: "The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is 7:14).
 1. In righteous judgment, all of Israel will be reduced to a tiny remnant, like a stump that remains after a tree's been felled (Isa 6:13). But from that "stump of Jesse" (David's father) a shoot shall come forth (Isa 11:1), a child.
- B. And we see this child's mission put clearly in Isa 9:1b-3, 6-7: " ^{1b} ...In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali (northern regions of Israel), but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. ³ You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil...

(And all of this is predicated ultimately upon this child who shows up again in v. 6) ⁶ 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 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ 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 and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

 1. Here's the One who can rescue, here's the One who can lead us back out onto the dance floor—where the music never ends, where our partner never leaves!

(2) A Bipolar Fulfillment

The Light and Shadow

- A. As we return to Luke we see the advent of this promised child on the horizon. And we sing: “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King.” We say, yes, amen, where is He?! The King! The Rescuer! But then we see Jesus. That’s Him? Really? Where’s the throne? He’s in an animal trough. Shepherds are the first invites on the guest list? A poor peasant girl?
1. We watched San Andreas over the Thanksgiving holiday. The Rock, Dwayne Johnson, now there’s someone who can rescue me. “I will not lose you!” We’re looking for someone like him. So where is he?
 - a. While there is enough in this narrative to convince us God is wonderfully at work, we also get this sense that He’s at work in a way no one expected. As we read we’re left wondering: Are we looking at glory or shame, at strength or weakness, at joy or sorrow, at a King or a slave? The answer: yes!
 - i. Already at the bright light of Christ’s incarnation, the shadow of His crucifixion is coming in like fog over the bay. Even at Christmas, the cross is in view. And the cross would be simultaneously the brightest and darkest moment in history. So there’s this bipolar nature to this fulfillment. O He would rescue sinners, only not with His biceps, but with His wounds.

Revisiting the 4 Clues

- A. Because of this, our text, intriguingly, simultaneously points us in both directions—to the light and shadow of the Messiah’s work. Revisit with me those 4 clues and I’ll show you what I mean:
- (1) “Galilee”
- A. He would come like a sunrise to Galilee, the place where not only was He raised, but where He also began His public ministry as we’ll see later in Luke.
- B. But when this sunrise comes in Christ, there’s simultaneously this strange eclipse hinted at. For Luke records an extra detail: “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth...” Why “Nazareth?”
1. It’s a small, unimportant, agrarian village. One commentator notes: “The region may be mentioned because Nazareth was a very small village and Luke’s readers may not have known even its general location” (BECNT, 107).
 2. We get hints in the gospel of John that it was also perhaps even a despised location. When Philip comes to Nathanael and says: “⁴⁵ We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’⁴⁶

Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’” (Joh 1:45–46). There’s no prophecies about Nazareth.

- C. Nazareth. Nobody wanted to live there. There’s nothing desirable about it. There’s no prophecies concerning it. And yet Jesus is of Nazareth.
 - 1. Here’s where we see the bipolar nature of this fulfillment. Christ’s humiliation is already in view from the beginning. He didn’t come “to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many!” (Mar 10:45b).
- D. What does Nazareth mean? It means He’s not ashamed to be called my friend! It means He’s ready to get low. It means He’s not afraid of my mess, of my weakness, of my guilt and shame. Look at the people Jesus comes to hang out with. All the religious leaders are disgusted. What’s He doing with the tax collectors, prostitutes, leprosy, and lame? That’s me! I’m the sinner. I’m the broken. Nazareth means He’s not afraid to be identified with me. Indeed that’s why He’s come!

(2) “Virgin”

- A. Certainly we see the bright glory of this fact do we not?! Christ was born of a virgin. While His miraculous birth is connected to those miraculous births before Him (to the patriarchs, with Samuel, Samson, and now John), it is this point that makes Him entirely unique. Here we have not God rejuvenating a barren couple, but God Himself causing the conception! This child would be the Son of God!
- B. But while it is this fact of the virgin birth that sets the child apart as holy, it is also this fact that brings such scandal upon Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. She is betrothed but not yet married. And yet she’s pregnant! Joseph was even prepared to divorce her quietly, sure she’d committed adultery.
 - 1. So the brightness of the virgin birth also falls under shadow. And this again hints for us at the beginning what Christ would do at the end: He would bear our sin, He would bear our shame, at the cross!

(3) “David”

- A. David’s house represented the last dwindling hope for the people of Israel. All was reduced to a stump and then suddenly, in our text here in Luke, that stump starts to sprout! And when people start to catch onto this some are ready to make Jesus king immediately. But they don’t get it. Before this Son of David can ascend the everlasting throne of [Luk 1:32-33](#), He’d have to descend into the depths at the cross.
- B. Even this is hinted at when we consider the historical life of David. For while David was one of the most towering figures in the OT, we mustn’t forget that he began as a little shepherd boy that everyone quite literally looked over. And when he was anointed by Samuel as king it was first an anointing in secret, without all the fanfare or public endorsement. God had made him king but Saul was still sitting on the throne. He became a king in conflict. And the king of the flesh spent the last years of his life coming at the Lord’s anointed.

1. So too Christ is born into the context of kingdom conflict. He isn't but a couple years old before Herod is at his throat and His family is running for their lives. He's king, the Lord's Christ, but He would have to die.

(4) "The Lord Is With You"

- A. Immanuel, God with us. That is the great movement of all of this. God has not given up. He is still in pursuit. God will get us, sinners though we be, back into the dance! Gabriel comes and announces this to Mary, and it is a wonderful thing.
- B. But the means by which He will accomplish this is a horrific thing. If we are to be let back into the trinitarian dance He would have to be kicked out! That's the meaning of: "[My God, my God, Why have you forsaken Me?!](#)" To draw near to sinners the Father would have to pull back from His Son. The trinity is torn open to make room for a wretch like me!
 1. This is how Jesus on the cross could turn to a condemned criminal and promise Him: "[Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise](#)" (Luk 23:43)... "I'm being kicked out so that you can be welcomed in."
- C. God has restarted the record, and the everlasting dance has begun. Have you taken His hand? Have you trusted Him? Come back to your Creator and Redeemer this Christmas. And with that, from the bottom of my heart, I wish you all a very merry rescue!