

**Sermon Series: “Bethlehem’s Light Still Shines”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—12/16/2007**

**Title: “In the midst of oppression, Bethlehem’s light still shines.”**

**Text: Luke 2: 1-5**

**Intro.: Ills.: Getting God’s perspective**

**Theme:** Jesus comes this Christmas to us in our greatest moments of oppression, not necessarily to remove them from our lives but rather to deliver us through them by his all-powerful and merciful presence.

***The Christmas/Christian good news is not a “prosperity gospel” message***

- False misrepresentation of the purpose of Jesus’ coming is given and taken
  1. False expectations of Jesus have abounded from before he came until this present time
    - a. The people in Jesus’ day hoped for a Messiah to lead them from the Roman rule and occupation
    - b. Culture today wants a prosperity Jesus who fills all my needs and makes me happy
    - c. **Ills.: Too low of expectation**
  2. When we worship our self-made salvation, it can bring about a cynical death of our spiritual hope
    - a. There were many in Israel who were no longer looking for the Son of David to be born in Bethlehem
    - b. We may have become so embittered by the oppression we endure that we have stopped looking for the Light
    - c. But God never gives up— remembers his promise – comes up with the plan —and makes it happen
- Jesus came to live under our oppression with us (Emanuel) and to bring salvation from the inside out
  1. Luke states the painfully obvious from a historical standpoint
    - a. An occupying nation is one in a long list of conquerors who have oppressed and manipulated
    - b. An inconvenient census forced fully pregnant mother to take a journey which probably hastened his arrival
    - c. Jesus and the Father had the power to remove Rome and restore Israel but they intentionally did not
  2. But don’t miss the mystery and wonder in the midst of the painfully obvious
    - a. What inconvenient and painful oppression are you experiencing, which may have God’s hand all over it?
    - b. *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Gal 4: 4,5*
    - c. Jesus did not come as a law-breaker but to fulfill it for us, perfectly, to deliver us from its consequence
    - d. Jesus did not randomly come in some little town along the way but in Bethlehem where God had promised
    - e. He uses opportunity of our greatest moments of oppression to bring **LIGHT** to a greater deliverance in process
    - f. **Read 2 Corinthians 4: 7-11**

***Refusing to allow our oppressed condition to distract us our anticipation***

- Focus on the real deliverance which you need
  1. Joseph and Mary could have focused on crime of Roman rule but instead focused on God’s redemption at work
  2. Entangled in sin, swamp by fear, shattered by failure, enduring sin’s consequence, you cannot catch your breath
  3. Breathe easier because Jesus came and comes to redeem the deepest darkness of oppression overrunning your life
    - a. *Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. Hebrews 2:14-15*
    - b. God has a mystery and purpose at work even in what from the outside appears to be purposeless and w/o glory
    - c. **Ills.: Don’t be too quick to declare the moment as Ichabod (1 Samuel 4: 21-22)**
- Look, expectantly, for Jesus to fill it

1. Even though many would have expected better of God, he used Bethlehem, a manger/stable, a Roman ruler
2. *O my God, in You I trust, Do not let me be ashamed; Do not let my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed; Those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed. Psalm 25:2-3*
3. Don't be ashamed to expect great things from God's glorious plan wrapped up in plain paper
- Prepare for Jesus to work a breakthrough
  1. Mary and Joseph made the best preparations they could for his birth—you do the best with what God gives you
  2. The point is that it is not about what we do, but looking for what God is about to do in us through Jesus
  3. **Ills.: Searching for Jesus**
  4. *As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10-12*

### Getting God's Perspective

In the recent past a fictional novel—somewhat like a modern day parable—was written about Jesus coming to live in our modern times. The name of the book and character are *Joshua*. That is the name of Jesus in this story. At one point, Joshua explained to a man how we see what we are looking at differently from the way another might see it. Joshua earned his living by working with wood. He told the other man, “We look at life with different vision. We see what we want to see Three men may look at the same tree. One sees valuable lumber. Another sees firewood. The third sees a work of art. That is the message of Christmas. What the work saw about Jesus birth was the unfortunate birth of a baby to a poor couple far from their home because of the oppressive rule of a foreign government. God however, folds back the cover of history's underlying story and shows us a mosaic of a wonderfully planned out and implemented salvation plan coming together in the birth of the God/man Jesus Christ.

### Too Low of Expectation

Once down in South Carolina, just across the state line from Savannah, Georgia, an add appeared in the local paper. It read: “**Wanted, a good woman who will clean, sew, cook, fish, dig worms, and owns a good boat and motor. Please send picture of the boat and motor.**” Nothing has ever happened to the man who placed that ad and nothing ever will. When we lose our sense of expectancy, we get what we expect.

### Searching for Jesus

There is an old story about a slave woman who had a great Christian faith. She could not read, but the children she cared for had taught her to recognize the name of Jesus on the page. She knew it when she saw it. Every evening she would sit down with the Bible and run her finger up and down the pages searching for the name of Jesus. So are you searching diligently for Jesus in your Christmas this year.

### **Luke 2:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup>This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to his own town to register.

<sup>4</sup>So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup>He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. NIV

**2 Cor. 4:7-11**

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body

**1 Samuel 4:21-22**

She named the boy Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel"--because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."