
The Love in God's Plan

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 24 December 2025

Isaiah 9:2-7 • Luke 2:1-20



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

The angels are at work again.

Gabriel and his cohorts have been very busy. He has been to visit Mary, a young woman in the town of Nazareth, to give her an important message. She is going to have a baby, and that baby would be very special. The message wasn't just important for her, but for all of us. Having a baby is a big thing for any woman, but this baby! This baby would be the Son of God. This baby would be Jesus Christ.

Then, he has been to see Joseph, a man of Nazareth, who has promised to marry Mary. Joseph was having second thoughts about marrying her, because he found out that she was pregnant. He didn't know who the father was, but he knew it wasn't him. Gabriel tells him that Mary is pregnant through the action of the

Holy Spirit. He need have no fear of marrying her, for she has not been with any other man.

Then Gabriel and a lot of other angels go to tell the news to some shepherds in the fields. It must have been quite something to see: “a multitude of the heavenly host.” Lots of angels, singing loudly and praising God! The shepherds are dazzled, and they rush off to see the new baby in the stable.

And so we see that the angels are driving all of these events — which means, of course, that God is driving them, since the angels are God’s servants. God, who does not often act directly in the affairs of people, is making sure that his plan of his will come off as he wants it to. Each actor in this wonderful and true story is guided individually to do his or her part and move the events along.

And God’s involvement goes beyond the angels’ actions. Let’s look at our Gospel reading:

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. (Luke 2:1-4)

The Emperor plays his part in these events as well. God inspires him to call for a census. This gets Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, which is where God wants his Son to be born as a human being. Having Jesus born in Bethlehem is important, for it establishes Jesus as part of a long line of ancestors back to King David. And Bethlehem is the city of David, the one David established during his reign. Bethlehem is to be the city of Jesus’ birth, to fulfil the prophecy from Micah, who lived many centuries before:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)

The ruler of Israel will come from Bethlehem, because God makes it so. Matthew, in composing his Gospel, made a point of often referring back to the Old Testament prophets, mainly Isaiah, to show that Jesus is the one Messiah whose coming was foretold by them.

Another part of God’s plan was to have Jesus born in a stable. Why? Because Jesus is to be a man of the common people. We often hear that phrase: He’s a man of the people. But in this case, it is true, for Jesus came to *his* people, in order to lead them to salvation. Had he been born in a palace, he would have

been remote from his people. Jesus was not born to lead a soft life, to associate only with the rich and powerful, but to be a Saviour for all the people. He grew up poor — not destitute, but working-class — in order to know firsthand the kind of life his people led. That allowed him to relate to his people on their terms, and with reference to their experiences. So God arranged that there would not even be a humble inn for Joseph and Mary to stay in, but only a stable. Jesus is born among the cattle, sheep and donkeys, who are all God's creatures; and to be adored by shepherds, common labourers in that society.

I believe there is another advantage for God's plan in having Jesus born in a stable and visited by shepherds: the news of his birth would travel fast among the common people. We all know how news travels fast, from mouth to mouth, in small villages; and traders would carry the news from village to village. God wanted this birth to be known. Imagine if Jesus had been born in this internet age!

All of this that we've been talking about points to one thing: God's plan will be done. This working-out of his plan was in God's mind from the very beginning. God knew that we would fall from grace, almost from the moment of our creation. The Garden of Eden had not been long-inhabited before our ancestors were banished from it. Many long centuries passed, from our human point of view, before the second part of God's plan was to take place. God wanted us to come back to him, to re-enter the Garden, and so Jesus came to us on what we now call Christmas Day. All this is done out of God's great love for us, love so great that he sent his only Son to be our chance of salvation. God wants all his people to join him in the new heaven that he is creating. He reveals himself in Jesus Christ, so that we know God better. And all we have to do is say "Yes!" and give thanks.

Above all, the revelation of God through the coming of Jesus Christ shows us the miracle of God's love. We were not created and then set aside. We were created for God's pleasure, and God takes active pleasure in his people. God knows that we can go wrong. We can follow other gods, we can mistreat each other, we can wreck God's beautiful creation. So in his love, God sent Jesus to show us the way to live in accord with his creation, not in conflict with it. Jesus shows us how to live with each other and how to mirror God's love in himself. We can mirror that love because we were created to be a little bit like God. In the supreme act of love, God gave his Son to give himself for us on the cross — all in order to give us a chance at eternal life in God's presence. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). That very well-known verse from John's Gospel encapsulates all that I am saying. God's love for us is so great that he wants our company forever.

And so we come to Christmas — not just a holiday but a day to recognise God’s great sacrifice of love and his revelation to us of that love. A very blessed and merry Christmas to you all.