



Series: Advent: Season of Hope

Date: December 17, 2023

Speaker: Pastor Scott Urbanek, Pastor of Sending

Text: Luke 2:1-7 - Hope Arrived

Good morning, Mercy Union County! It's great to be with you and see so many familiar faces. If you don't know me, my name is Scott, and I'm the Sending Pastor at Mercy Church. This morning, we are going to be looking at a familiar passage in Luke 2. In this true story, we will be looking at the birth of Jesus and the circumstances of His birth. If you are new to Church and the story of Jesus' birth I'm really excited for you to peek into this beautiful story to see what this could mean for you. But, for those of you who grew up hearing about this story, it might seem rather familiar. In the Christian life, I believe we need to love the familiar. I mean really

love it. I think there's a temptation in the Christian life to undervalue what's familiar and exclusively move on to what's new. It's like "Oh, I've already learned this about God so I'm ready to graduate to the next important bit of information about God." Now listen, do we need to learn new things about the Lord? Yes! All the time, I hope. But I want to plead for you this morning to never forget or move past what's familiar to you in the Christian life. That's why, during this Advent season, we go through the same stories in the gospels. Why? It's because we need it! We need the familiar! We need it because our hearts are forgetful.

It's kind of ironic, isn't it? The thing that we're so familiar with, like the story of Jesus' birth, over time can become unfamiliar if we don't look at it enough. Let's look at it this way, let's say a friend came up to you and said, "Hey, Sally. I heard you go to church. Answer this for me... Why was Jesus born? Why did Jesus come?" Real quick, we will do something a little different this morning. Look to your neighbor and answer this question. Why did Jesus come? Go ahead...

Okay, okay... by a show of hands how many of you said something like, "Jesus came to save us from

our sins”? Yes, and that is completely true. In fact, that’s the exact reason he came. But, for many of us, we’re so familiar with this answer that this is the only answer we have. And I’m here to tell you this morning that if this is the only answer you have, it’s not going to be enough to carry you through this life. I remember my math teachers in high school and college would tell me that I needed to show my work. And I’d protest, “Yeah but I got the answer right.” But the point they were making was that by showing my work, I was able to prove not only that I knew the answer, but that I understood the concept. Showing my work explained how I got the answer, and proved that the answer was true. And I was going to need to understand that concept and come back to it over and over again if I was going to do any kind of math in the future, because math builds upon itself. And so does the Christian life.

Some of us in this room know the answer to why Jesus came, but you don’t know how to show your work on why you’re confident in that answer. And if you’re going to follow Jesus with all of your life, you’re going to need to have more of an “easy believism understanding” of why Jesus came. Here’s the deal... life is hard. I mean really hard. I’ve been in ministry for 13 years and I’ve seen some things. I’ve seen people in pain, in sin, and with unknown futures. And in our darkest hours, we

need to understand the full picture of why God sent his son to be born as a baby. There will be days that are so dizzyingly difficult that we will need to pull from the profound, yet simple reason as to why Jesus came for us.

So, here is what we’re going to do today. The story of Jesus’ birth in Luke 2:1-7 is going to help us to deeply understand the concept of why Jesus came so that we can trust Jesus with our entire lives. We’re going to walk through the text and I’m going to point out just a few things to us about the story of Jesus’ birth, and then we’re going to zoom out of the story to highlight some ways we will need to trust Jesus in our life... Here’s the main idea for today: **Jesus came so we could trust him with our pain, sin, and our future.**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. ²This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.

Okay, let’s stop here for a moment. If you know anything about world and church history, Caesar Augustus was the Emperor of Rome, and Quirinius was one of his governors tasked with executing this decree in his region. All we need to know about them is that these bad dudes. Caesar came to power through some pretty bloody wars. This

decree was a political power move by Caesar Augustus. As a new Emperor, he wanted to see how big his kingdom was for two reasons: he wanted to know how many people he could tax and how many he could force to go to war in his name. It was a wild time to be alive. This is the context that Jesus was born into. He was born into a dark, broken, and painful world. He wasn't being born into a nice and sweet time to be alive. He was born into a lot of darkness and chaos. He entered into our pain. And this came after 400 years of silence from God. 400 years since God had spoken to his people. Many people are watching the chaos unfold and wondering where God was. Little did they know, he was orchestrating the greatest salvation story possible. Jesus was born into a painful time.

³So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.⁴Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant.

Here's where this passage starts to be pretty amazing. Remember, Luke is acting as a historian here. We see that everyone went to their own town to be registered. Joseph had to leave Galilee, from

Nazareth, to Bethlehem for this registration because he was from the lineage of David. Don't miss what's happening.

Here's what we know through the dozens of prophecies like Micah 2, Amos 11, and I Samuel 17: The Messiah, the one who was supposed to save Israel was supposed to be born in Bethlehem, David's City. The problem is that Mary and Joseph are in Galilee. But, that's no problem for the Lord. No biggie. He'll just orchestrate a decree and registration of one of the largest empires in history to get one man and one woman to get to the exact city they need to be in order to fulfill his promises.

Church, This moment right here, this is the moment that God has been moving toward since the beginning of time. Micah 5:2 says the baby was to be born in Bethlehem and this "...one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." When he says from Old, what he's meaning is the old old prophecies in scripture. Like Genesis 3:15, the promise that God made to Adam and Eve, that from the woman would be born a messiah. He would save the world from their sins. And to the Devil, the promised that this child would destroy him. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. This is not any baby... No this is the promised one. This is the one

that all of history has been waiting for. This is the messiah that would save the world from their sins.

6 While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

So, Mary and Joseph made their way about 100 miles to Bethlehem. And Mary goes into labor, they can't find a place to stay and they had to stay in a manger because there weren't any hotels that had any openings. Think about how absurd this is! Jesus, is God. Colossians 1 says that Jesus is the creator of the universe. Remember Genesis 1, where it says God spoke things into existence. Yeah, that guy. What do you mean he can't find a room? Don't miss the picture here. Jesus is the king of the universe, no doubt about it. But, he wasn't coming as warrior king. He came as a humble, needy, helpless baby. He came as a humble servant. I remember hearing a former agnostic professor who was reading the Bible for the first time and she finished reading the Old Testament and then got into reading about the birth of Christ and she was like thought to herself "you know, this must be true because this is not how I would have done it if I were God. And this can't be a book of fiction, because no one would

write it this way."¹ No, no, Jesus' birth gives us a glimpse into what the future of his ministry would look like... humble service. And it gives us a picture of what our lives should look like too.

Okay, some of you have heard a lot of this before. But, I believe it's important for us to continue to build upon the concept of why Jesus was born, going back to our math illustration. We have got to build upon it because just like in Jesus' time, we live in a broken world. As a pastor, I've sat with many of you in the midst of your pain, sin, and your unknown future. Some of what we are going through requires deep trust in Jesus. Some of you are in pain right now and you don't know how to get through tomorrow. Some of you are so caught up in sin that you feel like you can't break free. And for some of you, you are anxious and worried about what lies ahead for the rest of your life. And if you are in that situation, look at me and lean in, I have good news for you. This. Is. Why. Jesus. Came. For you. In this moment. Right now. Yes, he came to die on the cross for your sin. But he also came for this.

1) Trust him with your pain.

Mercy Church, you can trust him with your pain. How? Look at the circumstances he was born into.

¹ Interview of Rosaria Butterfield.

He chose one of the darkest periods of history! (reference vs 1-2) Pain was everywhere around him. His parents were scared teenagers, he was born into political turmoil, and there was only confusion from God's people as to where he was. It was in that place that Jesus chose to enter in to their pain. Church, he entered into our mess. Some of you need to hear this, Jesus is not indifferent to your pain. Some of us are asking... "God, are you there? Are you listening to me? Don't you see what's happening down here?" This story of Jesus shows us that if God came down to earth, he did it for a reason. He came to identify with our pain.

I mean think about it this way... John Stott, speaking about this idea says this, "In a world full of suffering and pain, I can't imagine following a god that's immune to it." This important for us to think about. What if Jesus never came down? What if he stayed in the heavens and saved us by some other means? My guess, we'd struggle to follow a God who was unwilling to go where we've been. We can trust him with our pain because he was a man just like us.

Look at what Isaiah 53 says: He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him. ³ He was

despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him. ⁴ Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds."

Jesus was born into this world so that he could identify with our pain. This passage shows us that he has suffered every source of pain that you have. There is not a circumstance of pain that you could live through that he has not also experienced! This is important for you to know because I've seen many people walk away from Jesus in seasons of pain. How is this possible, they knew the answer, but didn't fully understand the concept. They know that Jesus came to live a perfect life and die a death on the cross but, they missed that Jesus was a man of sorrow and suffering. He understands. We have this advent season to remind us that he was born as a human being so that he could suffer the same pain that you are going through right now so that he can minister to you right now. Whether it's sickness, cancer, weakness... Jesus knows. Jesus doesn't minister to you from a place of understanding the concept of

pain. Like, he intellectually understands the concept. No, he knows it experientially. I love that he did that for us. He did it so we could trust him with our pain.

2) Trust him with your sin.

For many of us, it may not be the suffering of the world or in our lives that we need to hear today. Maybe, you look at what has become of your life and all you see is the results of the sinful mistakes you have made. Maybe, you haven't been able to trust him with your sin because you couldn't possibly believe that God would love someone like you. You might have heard that Jesus came to save you from your sin, but you need to build upon that concept further. If that's you, you need to see that God almost exclusively uses sinful people like you and me in his great plan to save the world. And he moved the history of the world to make it possible for you to be saved and rescued from your sin. Let's look back at our passage in Luke 2:3

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. ²This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria ³So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David,

which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant.

Ok, in order for you to trust Jesus with your sin, you might want to pay attention here. God pulled out all of the stops on this one. I want you to pay attention to verse 4. Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea to the city of David. Why? Because he was of the house and family line of David. According to God's promises, the messiah, the one that would come and save the world from its sins was to be born out of the family line of David, in the city of Bethlehem, David's city. So, what's the problem? Mary and Joseph are hundreds of miles away in Nazareth. But, that's no problem for the Lord. No biggie, he's a great multi-tasker. He'll just orchestrate a decree and registration of one of the largest empires in history to get one man and one woman to get to the exact city they need to be in order to fulfill his promises. Church, This moment right here, this is the moment that God has been moving toward since the beginning of time. But, why was he orchestrating this, so that he could save you from your sin. And not just your sin, but the sins of the whole world. If God spared no expense to save the world, you can certainly believe that he did it for you.

But, let's keep building on this concept. We saw earlier that we can trust him with our pain because he can identify with us in our pain. He wasn't just born for that reason, he was also born and lived as a human so that he could identify with our sin.

Let's look at Hebrews 4:15-16: ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

These verses are telling us that it doesn't matter what you're going through, Jesus understands. We don't have a God or a representative that's unable to understand our weakness. Jesus has felt every tug of sin that we have. He's just like us in that regard. He knows what it means to be tempted and tested. This means that when we are in the middle of being tempted to do something that we know we shouldn't, we can have confidence that Jesus can sympathize with us. We can say, "Jesus, you know where I am. I'm wanting to do thing I know that I shouldn't. Help me. I know you've been where I am. I know you understand how hard it is to say no to this temptation." He's just like us in

that way. But, he also not like us. When he was tempted he didn't cave in to sin. That means he knows the way out and he can help you. ¹ Corinthians 10:13 says it this way:

¹³ No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.

You can trust him because there is not a temptation or a test that Jesus hasn't felt, but he was without sin. But, why is it important that Jesus was sinless? Here's why. Our God is a good and just God. This means that he must punish sin. In order for him to be a good God, he has to punish sin. If he didn't, he wouldn't be good. Think of it this way...Let's say your grandmother was walking down the street and someone robbed her and took her life. Then, let's imagine this person on trial and the judge just said, "Eh, I think I'll let you go." Would that be a good judge? No! In the same way, a good God cannot allow sin to go unpunished. The fact that Jesus was sinless made him the only possible substitute for our sin. He had no sin of his own that had to be paid for. He's the only substitute that could have paid it on the cross. And, instead of punishing you and me, God poured out his anger onto Jesus instead of us. God loved

you and me so much that he did that for us. We are saved because Jesus, the sinless one, took our sin on the cross, so that we could trust him with our sin.

So, he wants us to trust him with our pain, our sin, and the last reason for Jesus' birth is that...

3) You can trust him with your future.

Let's look back at verses 6-7, ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. Joseph and Mary had a lot of uncertainty about their future. God's people faced a lot of uncertainty as well! Many of you are facing uncertainty as well. But, the circumstances of Jesus' birth show us how to trust him. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus wasn't born in a palace but in a manger, lying in a horse trough. He allowed himself to be born into a tumultuous time when the future of God's people was unclear. He did this so that he could meet you in the unknowns of your future. Even though Joseph and Mary didn't know everything about what their future would hold, they did know one thing... They were to serve the Lord. The same is true for us. The example that Jesus gave us in his birth is that he

came to serve not to be served. He came to give his life away. This passage foreshadows for us what the rest of Jesus' future ministry would look like. It wouldn't be about being the warrior leader, but a humble servant leader. He fed thousands, met people in their pain like the paralytic, met people in their sin like the woman caught in adultery, with the disciples he called them to leave their fishing nets and to trust him with their future. Regardless of where you are... in pain, sin, or uncertainty. Your future on earth is to serve the way Jesus did. Jesus wants you to give your life away to do what he did, make disciples. The birth of Christ shows us that God has kept thousands of years of promises for him to come to save us. If that's true, you can trust him with your future.

As I close, I want to talk to each of you for a minute... We need Christmas, do we not?! There are many in this room that no longer find the "easy believism" of why Jesus came to not be enough. Church, add to concept! Go deeper and let that that answer take root in your heart. Jesus will change your life! You can trust him! He came to meet you in your pain, your sin, and to show you your future. Here's what I want you to do... I'd like you to bow your head and close your eyes. Maybe you're the person that needs God to meet you in your pain. If that's you, stand up. If you need God to

meet you in your sin, stand up. Maybe you're
uncertain of your future stand up.

Pray in the moment... lead into worship.