



Series: Advent: Season of Hope

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Speaker: Pastor Josh Jones, Community Life Pastor

Text: Luke 2:1-7 - Hope Arrived

Good morning Mercy Church! How is everyone doing this morning? If you are new to Mercy, we are so glad you are with us. My name is Josh Jones, and I serve here as our Pastor of Discipleship. Which means I get to oversee things like our groups ministry, and different Equipping opportunities that we offer throughout the year.

We believe that community is essential to the Christian life. God did not intend for us to follow Him in isolation, but to follow Him in community

with other believers. So if you are here and you're new to Church, or new to the faith, or maybe you're not even sure what you think about following Jesus. Just know that we are glad you're here, and we want to help you take whatever your next step might be in following Jesus.

We are in week three of our Advent series, and as we've mentioned before Advent simply means Arrival. So over the past couple of weeks, we have been watching the build-up to the arrival of Christ. God's people for centuries had been waiting... waiting for God to fulfill his promise to send a savior, who would deliver them from their oppressors and provide salvation from their sin.

You know as well as I do that waiting is hard. We struggle to sit with the feelings of anticipation we have when we have to wait. When we want something, we want it now. I mean just look at the way we live. Amazon promises next day delivery, and sometimes it shows up on the same day! We do mobile orders at fast food restaurants to make fast food even faster. We have self-checkout lines

at the grocery store, and even theme parks have cashed in on this. You don't just buy a ticket into a theme park, you now have the incredible opportunity to spend even more money to buy a fastpass to cut in line. We don't like waiting, and Christmas is all about waiting! We don't get to "fast pass" our way through Christmas and we shouldn't. It's good for us to wait and as we wait, we should remember that our God who is in control, has been unfolding his plans, and will continue to do so until he brings them about.

This morning we are going to be in Luke chapter 2. Luke has been building to the birth of Jesus, really all of scripture has been building to this moment. We call it the incarnation. It's a word that just means that Jesus, the divine son of God, took on human form. The incarnation is the moment God's people had been waiting for, for centuries, enduring hard times, times where they felt as though God had forgotten them, times where they wondered...Will God show up? Will he make good on his promise?

When the things our hearts hope for seem slow to arrive, or never arrive at all, we can feel alone, we can feel forgotten.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you're feeling alone, maybe overlooked by God. You could feel this way for a variety of reasons, but whatever the reason, If this describes you, I pray that you will find comfort in the truths we are going to uncover this morning. The reality is that God is present with his children, and he makes that abundantly clear through the birth of his Son Jesus, who is given the name Immanuel which means "God with us."

This means that even in our loneliest moments, moments when we fear God can't see us, doesn't hear us, and is either unaware of where we are or just doesn't seem to care, we can know with certainty that God does see us. He does hear us, and He does Care. He is Immanuel... God with us.

This morning we are going to walk through our passage, Luke chapter 2, verses 1-7. I want to invite you to open your Bibles if you have them or you can follow along on the screen. As we go through the passage, I'm going to stop in a few places to

make some comments to help provide a little context for what's going on in this chapter. Then I want to spend some time talking about the hope that Christ's birth provides for us. Christmas is a time of worship and thanksgiving for the believer even in the most difficult of circumstances because Christmas reminds us that God is not a passive bystander but that He has come, and He has come to begin restoring the things that sin has broken, and one day, it will be complete. Hope, when it is placed in the person of Jesus Christ, is secure.

Now, **hope** can be defined as "A feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen".

Hope : A feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen

God gives us hope, a certain hope that redemption and salvation are provided for us in Jesus. And this hope should infuse every aspect of our lives.

Do you find yourself struggling this morning to hope? Do you find yourself waiting for a "certain

thing" to happen? Oftentimes when we feel hopeless it's because we have actually begun to place our hope in something other than Jesus. When we place our hope in improved relationships or circumstances, we are placing our hope in a thing rather than Jesus. The beautiful thing about the gospel of Jesus is that it teaches us to put our hope in Him, and not the circumstances of our lives. Because of this reality, we can have a hope that is secure and certain. We can have hope in the midst of our pain, in the midst of our own brokenness, and we can have hope in the everyday moments of our lives.

This is our big idea this morning. **Jesus' birth gives us hope in our pain, in our brokenness, and in the everyday moments of our lives.**

Let's look at our passage:

In Luke Chapter 2, verse 1, Luke starts his account by writing "In those days..." Basically, Luke is helping to establish the setting and time of Jesus' birth. It doesn't start like a fairytale might with "once upon a time" but rather "in those days..." He

does this to communicate that the events we are about to read are real events, they happened to real people with real impact for all eternity. So let's keep reading...

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered.

Ok, let's pause again for just a moment. Caesar Augustus was at this time the emperor of Rome. His original name was Octavian, and He was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. Once Julius passed away, Octavian took over as Emperor of Rome and took on the name Caesar adding the title Augustus which means “great” or “venerable”. His title, self-given by the way, insinuated that he was worthy of worship.

Now before Caesar's adopted dad Julius passed away, he was deified or declared a “god” by the Roman Senate, so he was called “the divine Julius”. What's interesting about this, is that Caesar Augustus, Julius's son was then referred to as the son of a god. Isn't it like our God, to send his only Son, the true Son of God into the world to prove

that there is only one God in heaven, and Caesar ain't Him.

Anyways, back to the story. Caesar, decides that he wants to have a census. He wants to know who is in his kingdom so he can know how much tax revenue he can expect to pull in. So in verse 2 it says

2 This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 Joseph 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, 5 to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant.

Now we're seeing some movement in our story. Caesar Augustus makes a decree to count everyone in the Roman empire and it causes Joseph and Mary to make a trip to Bethlehem, the city of David. If you've been with us in this series

you might remember Pastor Spence sharing that any time you see a reference to King David in the New Testament, you need to think “promise”. God made a promise to King David in the Old Testament that his kingdom would endure forever, and here in these opening lines we learn that Joseph is a descendent of David. The gospel of Matthew also traces Jesus’ lineage back to David. So this little reference to Bethlehem and the line of David is pretty significant. It is evidence supporting that Jesus is the rightful king who will rule and reign forever, and it is highlighting that in his birth Jesus fulfilled Micah’s prophecy spoken 700 years earlier that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the same place King David was born.

So we have to ask, Was Caesar responsible for bringing Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem or was God doing this? When we consider all these things, we realize that it’s not man or human government that has final authority but God. He’s the one behind the scenes working all things together for the good of His people. King Solomon writes, in Proverbs 21:1...

A king’s heart is like channeled water in the Lord’s hand:

He directs it wherever he chooses. -- Proverbs 21:1 (CSB)

Caesar's decree was like channeled water in God’s hands. God was directing these events. This should give us great comfort and hope as we think about the circumstances of our lives. As we think about the things that feel like they are out of our control, even the things we believe to be under our control... All of them can be, and must be, trusted in the hands of a good God who will bring about good things for his children.

It was God, not Caesar moving Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

And then in verse 6...

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.

This is a story that I’m sure many of you are familiar with, So why does this story matter to us? Why do we retell it year after year, teaching it

again and again? It's because the birth of Christ changes everything. Jesus is the long-awaited for King and deliverer sent under unlikely circumstances to rescue us from our sin, deliver us from its bondage, and give us hope. And this brings us back to our main idea...

Jesus' birth gives us hope in our pain, in our brokenness, and in the everyday moments of our lives

Jesus gives us hope in our pain

The very birth of Christ, is evidence that God sees us in our pain and rather than step away, he steps in. God is not sitting in heaven as a passive observer watching history unfold, being slow to provide help. God always moves towards us in our hurting to be present and a source of comfort.

We see this continuously throughout the scriptures. Over and over God meets his children in their pain and their hurting to provide comfort and to lead them through it. This is the story of the Nation of Israel being delivered from the hands of the Egyptians. If you were here with us for our

series in Exodus, we saw God's powerful hand enter into the suffering of his people to take them out of bondage and slavery and guide them into the promised land.

The writers of the Old Testament describe God's tenderness and steadfast love. He is a Good shepherd as we see in Psalm 23 who is able to restore the souls of his children and give them rest. He's gentle with the weak, "He will not break a bruised reed, and he will not put out a smoldering wick; he will faithfully bring justice. -- Isaiah 42:3 (CSB)

I know many of you come in here and you probably feel like a bruised reed, or like a candle whose flame is about to go out.

And what you need in those moments is to be reminded of God's tenderness. When I got married to my wife Ashley, we were both committed to following the calling we believed God had placed on our lives for ministry. Our plan was that I would go to seminary full time, work part-time as an intern at our church and she would work full-time. Once I finished seminary, I would then move into a

full-time ministry role and we would start a family. It sounded like a great plan to us, but that's not exactly how it happened. Four months into marriage we found out that we were pregnant. Our daughter Ivy, was on her way. I was terrified, Ashley was excited. It's not that I didn't want to be a Dad. Being a Dad has always been the one thing I knew I wanted to be. I just didn't know how it was going to work out. I thought God had misdirected our steps. I thought I was going to now have to quit school, get a full time job, and figure out how to provide health insurance for our growing family, so Ashley could stay home to care for Ivy. We felt desperate and needy, unsure of how God would provide, doubting what He was up to.

I remember sitting in a chapel service at Seminary, the summer before Ivy was born, and the guy giving the message was teaching out of Luke 12. In Luke 12 Jesus is teaching his followers that they do not need to let the anxieties of life rule their lives because God knows what they need. And in verse 32 Jesus said "Do not be afraid little flock because your Father delights to give you the kingdom" and when I heard him say "Don't be afraid little flock..." I melted in my chair. I felt seen by God, I felt heard, I

felt comforted. My circumstances didn't feel any easier that morning but I did have hope. Hope that I could trust a sovereign God who cares for me. And you know what, over that next year, we watched God work in our lives in ways we didn't even know to ask for. It wasn't easy, trust is rarely easy, because it requires letting go of whatever you are carrying, or worried about.

What pain or hardship are you feeling right now that you need to give to God and receive His hope?

To receive his hope with open hands you have to let go of whatever it is you may be holding on to.

Maybe your marriage has become more challenging than you anticipated
Or you're navigating difficult relationships within your family or friends.

Maybe there are challenges at work or school and you feel beat up, or you find yourself in a spot where the future seems unclear...

Maybe you continue to find yourself falling into the same sin over and over and you've begun to feel

alone, maybe even unworthy Of God's grace or you wonder if God even cares.

The birth of Christ is proof that God cares, and has entered into our world to be present with us.

It's important that we understand this. God is showing us through the birth of his Son, that he sees you, and he is present with you. He is showing us that He is one who steps towards us in our brokenness and in our pain. He chose to enter into our world conceived in the womb of an unwedded woman, born amongst the humble and lowly, not amongst the religious or political elite.

In Isaiah 53, Isaiah writes that Jesus would be despised and rejected and that he would bear our sickness and our pains. Jesus was a man who suffered greatly while on earth and certainly through his death, and through his suffering he is able to identify with us in our suffering and give us comfort.

So Mercy church, what do we do when we find ourselves consumed with the pains of this world? We have to give it to him, sometimes it's as literal

as speaking out loud, "God I give this to you", give the pain you carry to Jesus, and he will give you hope in the midst of it. He will be faithful to walk you through it, your job is to trust Him. I know this is so counterintuitive to how you're wired. Trusting oftentimes feels like a passive decision, and when we see a problem we want to fix it. Let me encourage you that trusting God is not a passive choice. It simply means that **you live and move in a way that is dependent upon him, trusting Him and not yourself with the outcome.**

So Jesus gives us hope in our pain, He also gives us hope in our Brokenness.

Jesus gives us hope in our brokenness.

Here's what I mean, Jesus' birth, was very purposeful. He lived a perfect life, fully intending to offer himself as a perfect sacrifice to God dying on our behalf. It is through putting our trust in his death and resurrection as payment for our sin that we can be forgiven and put back into a right relationship with God.

And when we do this, the scriptures teach us that we are given new life and that we are no longer enslaved to our sin. Sin is no longer our master! It will always be a constant struggle, it may at times seem to have our number, but sin according to God's word, is no longer our master, and no longer defines who we are.

Isn't that amazing news! Only God could do something like this, free us from our sin, Give us new life, and consider us righteous. The Apostle Paul talks about it as a great exchange in his second letter to the Corinthians.

21 He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. -- 2 Corinthians 5:21 (CSB)

Did you hear that? He takes on our sin and gives us his righteousness. St. Athanasius (a church father from the 4th century) said it this way "He became what we are that we might become what he is."

(ca.296-373) On Christ's Incarnation

This is a reality that is almost incomprehensible. That The God who made us would send his only son to come and die in our place and give us his righteousness so that we could be forgiven and made new.

Hope in our brokenness, comes only from Jesus, and we need to be reminded continually, that our hope when placed in Him, is secure. We can't place our hope in our performance, or our circumstances, but in Christ and Christ alone. Maybe you're here this morning and you need to be reminded that you are no longer defined by your sin. We sing this often here in one of our worship songs "Good/Great"

"There is freedom in the Lord
For I am not my sin
And will never be again."

That captures the certainty of the hope I'm talking about. Through Christ, we are saved from sin and death, and that salvation is secure. We are given new life, with a new identity... we are no longer defined by our sin and we will never be again Amen!?"

Mercy, as we think on Christmas this year, let's be reminded of the glorious reality that God does not shrink away from us because of our sin, but out of compassion he moves towards us.

From the first moment sin entered the world in Genesis 3, we see God move towards us in our sin. This was part of your advent reading, and it stood out to me in a new and unique way this year.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God asked “Where are you?” I used to read that and hear a condemning voice, a voice carrying all the undertones of the pronouncement of guilt and shame that I believed Adam and Eve should have been feeling at that moment. However, I read it differently this year. Instead of hearing a condemning voice, I heard a voice of compassion. This time I heard his “Where are you?” with the undertones of a compassionate Father moving towards his children who are in desperate need of him, more so than they ever realized.

He was moving towards Adam and Eve in the garden, not pushing them away, and then he

began to reveal to them a plan that he had put in motion to redeem them and their children, and their children's children, and so on and so on. All we have to do is release our sin, through something we call repentance. It's simply turning away from following and serving our sinful desires and turning toward Jesus. And as we do this, as we turn to Jesus, He meets with grace and forgiveness. He gives us hope in the midst of our sins. A hope that is certain.

Lastly **Jesus gives us hope in the everyday moments of our lives.**

This should be an encouragement to us to keep trusting God in the everyday moments of life. When you trust a God who is sovereign, a trip to the grocery store is no longer ordinary, another day at the office is no longer just another day at the office, school is no longer just something to be suffered through. Each moment of each day can have meaning and purpose in ways we may never know or fully understand. Our job is to keep taking our next step of obedience, trusting that he has a purpose in each moment.

Think back with me a bit to our passage this morning. Caesar Augustus called for a Census which required Joseph to go to Bethlehem. The text Tells us that Mary went with him. Did they know “why” this was happening? Maybe not to the full extent. did they know what they were supposed to do? Yes. They went to Bethlehem, trusting not in Caesar or his decree, but trusting in their sovereign God who controls all things. When we place our trust and hope in God who is all-powerful, who has all authority, and all wisdom then we can step into the things that are before us without always knowing the “why”. We can step forward with confidence when we know that God is good, loving, and wants what's best for his children. It's what allows us to trust him with the things that make no sense, the things that are hard.

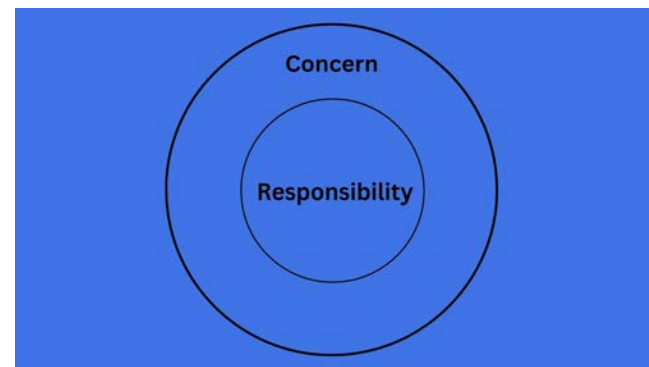
So the question becomes, *do you believe that your life and world are ruled by a loving God who is in control of all things?*

How different would your life be if you truly lived as though there was not a situation, location, or

relationship that you could ever be in that isn't ruled by Jesus?

How would it change the way you interact with those around you? How would it change the way you step into the responsibilities God has given you?

There is a helpful tool that theologian and pastor, Paul Tripp has come up with that I want to share with you. It's a really good way to think through the practical implications of the sovereignty of God for your everyday life.



Imagine that you have a sheet of paper in front of you, and on this sheet of paper, you draw a good sized circle and inside that circle you draw a

smaller circle. The smaller inner circle we'll call the circle of responsibility. In this circle you can list all the things that God has made you responsible for.

For example, I have a job. I'm responsible to show up on time, work hard, create spaces that help people grow in their walk with Christ. All those things would go into this smaller circle.

I'm a Husband, I have a responsibility to do the things necessary to love and care for my wife, to continually point her to Jesus. I'm a Father, I have a responsibility to love and care for my kids, to teach them about God and his Word. I have a responsibility to be a reflection of God to them.

I have a responsibility to pay taxes, be a good citizen, on and on...These things go in the inner circle.

Your responsibility to the things in your inner circle is to carefully and faithfully obey God in them.

The **outer circle** contains things that are of concern to me but I'm not actually responsible for. These are things that I can't control.

For example your job, you get to control how you show up and the attitude you bring and the effort you put in. You can't control how others receive you.

If you're a parent, you get to control how you show up as a parent, the way you invest in your kids and point them to Jesus, but you don't get to control their heart and manipulate them into faith, only the Spirit of God can draw a person to Himself.

There are other things, many things that probably capture your heart and mind but may not be your direct responsibility. For example, I want you to be amazing at your jobs, to be wonderful spouses and friends, I want interest rates to drop again so everyone can buy the house of their dreams. I want it to snow in Charlotte. These are things I care about, but are out of my control. These things fit in the outer circle. And if we are honest, a lot of the anxieties we carry are a result of us trying to control the outcomes of things that should sit in the outer circle. And they're there because they're important things, things we care about...But as we give ourselves to the rule and reign of God in our

lives we have to release these things into his hands.

Think about our story in Luke chapter 2. **What were some of the things that were out of Mary and Joseph's control?**

The Census, Caesar Augustus called for a Census that required Joseph to go to Bethlehem.

The timing of Jesus' birth.

The accommodations they would have... These were all out of their control.

How King Herod would respond to the birth of Christ.

But what was in their control? Making the decision to go.

Both circles are filled with things that require us to trust God in a dependant way, but the things in the outer circle remind us that God is at work and in control even when we can't understand or see what he's doing.

Mary and Joseph, probably didn't understand why she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus or why Caesare called for a Census that caused them to travel to Bethlehem just before Jesus was born, but what they could do was place their hope in a sovereign, all powerful, and loving God that is able to work all things together for their good and His purposes.

Guys, Jesus' birth reminds us that in Him we have a certain hope. Because our hope is fixed on a person, Jesus, and not our circumstances, we can have hope in the midst of our pain and brokenness. We can have hope in the everyday acts of obedience God calls us to in our daily lives. All you have to do is look to him and surrender. Surrender your pain, surrender your sin, surrender your Calendar to him and know that he is worthy of your complete devotion. In no way am I making light of the hard things you or I carry, but what I want for myself and for you is to step into those hard things with confidence that God is at work in the midst of them in ways that I may never know this side of heaven, but what I do know, is that we can trust Him with those things.

As we wrap up this morning, I want you to ask yourself, where have you been placing your hope?

Have you been placing it in a job, a paycheck, a house, human relationships, or improved circumstances? Or are you placing it in Jesus, the one who gives us life and holds all things together?

Secondly, I want you to ask, what if anything is keeping you from placing your hope and trust in Him today?

Mercy, let this Christmas be a reminder to you that God sees you right where you are and that's exactly why He sent Jesus, to rescue us from our sin and restore our broken world. This is what God is doing, and it's the work He invites you to join him on.

If you have never trusted Christ for salvation, I want to invite you to respond. We will have Pastors and ministry leaders down front who would love to talk and pray with you. God sent his son to give you new life and a hope that's secure in Him.

Just as Christ came once born as a baby to redeem us from sin, the Scriptures teach us that he's coming back a second time. And when he does, he'll rid the world of sin and brokenness for all eternity, he's coming to make all things new. Our Hope is secure in Him.

Let's pray.

God, as we remember your generous love for us, we are overwhelmed by your kindness and your grace. You sent your only Son Jesus to come down from heaven to rescue us from our sin and our brokenness. It is through Christ's life, death, and resurrection that we are able to draw near to you every day. So please, God, teach us to trust you, teach us to put our hope in you rather than our circumstances. It's in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.