

## ‘The arrival of the King.’ (2)

We’re continuing our mini sermon series on the events surrounding Jesus’ birth. Now Christmas is the time of the year where many people, especially children get all excited because of all the gifts they will receive. But when you get older those gifts don’t give you the same buzz as they did when you were younger. And there are even times when you receive a gift but you don’t know what to say because they are so bad.

I want to share with you some useful phrases this morning that you can use when you receive a gift that you wished you never received. When you receive gifts like socks, deodorant, a key ring, a huge mug for your tea, etc. Here are some replies you can give to people when you receive those kind of gifts.

1. Thanks a lot!
2. My word! What a gift.
3. If I hadn’t put on so much weight recently it would have fitted me perfectly.
4. Gosh, I hope I never lose this. We’re always losing things around here.
5. Its great but I’m worried about the envy it may create.
6. Just my luck to get this on the very Christmas I promised to give all my gifts to charity.
7. Frankly, I don’t deserve this.
8. Really, you shouldn’t have.

Someone once said that the phrase that best sums up the Christmas season is ‘**Peace on earth, Good will to all and batteries not included.**’

Please turn your Bibles to the **Gospel of Luke. Luke 2:1-3** “**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.**”

Now **Caesar Augustus** was a name taken by **Caesar Octavianus** who reigned as Caesar of Rome from **43 B.C. to A.D. 14**. And as we know the Roman Caesars who followed him adopted the name ‘**Caesar**’ as it embodied the concept of what the Roman head of state should be to promote unity and peace throughout the Roman Empire. **Octavianus** brought an era of peace to the Empire and he established an environment within the Empire that was helpful for the growth of Christianity throughout the Roman controlled regions of the world.

And so **Caesar Augustus** ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman world and we know this happened because archaeologists have recovered the actual documents of censuses that were taken by the Roman government every fourteen years from **A.D. 20 to A.D. 270**.

Luke also tell us that a man named **Quirinius** was governor of Syria during this time which again has been proven by some inscriptions discovered by archaeologists. Now censuses were taken every fourteen years and from **20 A.D. to 270 A.D.**, we possess actual documents from every census taken. A series of inscriptions in Asia Minor show that **Quirinius** was governor of Syria in **10-7 B.C.**, and again in **6 A.D.** Which is good news for all Christians because these documents actually prove the accuracy of the Scriptures.

And notice that everyone was to register in their own town which simply means that the Jews had to register at the city where their ancestral records were kept. **Luke 2:4+5** “**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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.**”

Now I mentioned that the Jews had to register at the city where their ancestral records were kept. And for Joseph and Mary, this meant the city of Bethlehem which is also referred to as the city of David. Both Joseph and Mary were of the lineage of David, and so both had to register in Bethlehem. Now don’t underestimate the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, this was journey of about **80 miles**.

We can only imagine how treacherous this journey must have been, especially for Mary who is heavily pregnant. The journey for most people would be a **4 day** journey, but for a pregnant woman, I can imagine it would have taken longer. But I want to raise an important point which is often overlooked concerning this journey.

Let me ask you, **why did Mary go with Joseph on this journey?**

It's certainly possible that her love for Joseph was the reason for her going on the journey. It's also possible that she wanted Joseph to be around when she was giving birth. You see neither Roman nor Jewish law required Mary to accompany Joseph for this registration, it wasn't a requirement of the decree.

**So why did Mary go with Joseph? Micah 5:2** "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."

In our last sermon we briefly looked at Mary's faith and it was her faith that led her to go with Joseph to Bethlehem. Mary was aware Micah's prophecy and so she was being guided by the Holy Spirit to fulfil this prophecy concerning the birthplace of the Messiah. There were carpenters, stonemasons, and different kinds of farmers residing in Bethlehem.

And what's more interesting is that the name **Bethlehem** actually means 'place of bread,' which is very appropriate when we think of Jesus as being the 'Bread of Life'. It was very appropriate that the **Bread of Life** should have been born in Bethlehem. It's very appropriate that the Son of David should be born in the village so intimately associated with the history of David, the shepherd king of Israel.

Now notice at this point and time Mary and Joseph are still engaged. Jewish law considered the engagement legally binding to the point that the woman was considered a wife. However, their relationship was not a marriage in that it had not been fully consummated. In other words, Mary was considered to be Joseph's wife, even though they had not been formally married according to Jewish law.

And when Luke tells us Mary was expecting a child, what he's actually telling us is that Mary is about to give birth any day soon. **Luke 2:6-7** "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."

Now if this tells us anything, it tells us that Mary was at least **8 months pregnant** when she made that **80 mile, 4 day** journey with Joseph to Bethlehem. And when we think of about this small town of Bethlehem, this little insignificant town of Bethlehem.

**How blessed is this little town going to become?** Read with me again, **Micah 5:2** "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."

Bethlehem, the first home of David, who was Israel's greatest king and the Ephrathites, the descendants of David. How blessed was this little town but now she's about to be blessed with the birth of the Messiah. Jesus, God in the flesh, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Messiah who brings hope, peace and salvation to all of mankind is about to be born.

And so Jesus is born, Mary's firstborn son, and if Mary had no other children, then Luke would have used the Greek word 'monogene' which means 'only son.' But he didn't, he used the Greek word, 'protokos' which literally means 'first born' and that tells us that Mary did indeed have other children like we looked at last time.

**A little boy said to his daddy, 'Who is Jesus?' His daddy replied, 'He is the reason for the season.' The little boy said, 'But I thought Santa Claus was the reason for the season?' Then his daddy said, 'He is, if you prefer PlayStation to eternal life'.**

You see loved ones we can argue all day long as to the date on which Jesus was born but that's not the issue. The question of the Bible is not, **what date was Jesus Christ born?** The real question the Bible asks is, **will you accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour?**

Mankind's greatest need wasn't food, drink and clothing. Mankind's greatest need wasn't socks, deodorant, a key ring, or a huge mug for your tea. Mankind's greatest need was and still is forgiveness and salvation from our sins.

**There was a wise old man who said to a wise little girl 'What is the meaning of Christmas?' And the wise young girl said, 'I don't know, is that the day that Jesus died?'**

Well, as mixed up as her answer was, there is some truth in her answer. The ‘Save the children’ charity have an advertisement on television that states, ‘No child born to die’. But that can’t be said of Jesus, He was born in order for Him to die.

In fact do you remember the first recorded words of Jesus? What did Jesus say just before He came? Hebrews 10:5-10 “Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said ‘Here I am---it is written about me in the scroll---I have come to do your will, O God.’” First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the Law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made Holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Jesus was born to do God’s will and God’s will was for Him to die for you and for me and take the punishment our sins deserved. Mankind’s greatest need, needed God’s greatest gift and that was Jesus. And while the world celebrates the birth of Jesus and give each other all kinds of wonderful gifts. The church needs to share with people the real reason for Jesus coming into the world.

A gardener was speaking to his friend and they were discussing whether or not you should teach people about religion or just leave to them to make their own minds up. So they started arguing and the gardener was saying, ‘Of course it is important to tell the world about Jesus, because you don’t know what road they will take in life.’ And his friend was saying, ‘well, I think you should just leave the world to make up their own minds’. So the gardener said, ‘Would you like to see my roses?’ And his friend said, ‘Yes.’ So they went to the back garden, his friend said, ‘What is this? There’s nothing here except dirt and weeds’. So the gardener said, ‘Well, I thought I would just leave the garden to make its own mind up’ what it grows’.

Loved ones the most important gift we can give to the world, is The gift that is going to last for eternity. The gift that is going to help them get through life, the gift that is going to tell them that there is hope in this life. The gift that talks about a Messiah, the gift that talks about a Saviour, the eternal gift. The world will give its own interpretation of Christmas, but we need to give the world the greatest gift it will ever receive, the gift of Jesus.

And so Mary took that little baby Jesus and she wrapped Him in cloths. Now those cloths were square in shape and long in length, almost like a bandage. And the child was first wrapped in the square of the cloth, and then the long strip was wound round and round about him.

Now notice, loved ones Jesus has just been born and there are already little signs of Christ’s final sufferings. John 19:38-40 “Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.”

When Jesus was born He was wrapped in linen cloth and at His death, they wrapped Him in linen cloth. He was laid in a wooden manger and He died on a wooden tree. And isn’t it interesting that Jesus was laid on the straw of a manger from which the animals fed but in thirty years’ time the world would be feeding on His teaching, even up to this very day.

But why was He born in a place where the animals were kept, why was He born in a manger? Surely, God’s Son deserved a high-profile birth in the most elegant of surroundings. We could say, ‘well, Jesus is the Good Shepherd and so He was born in a place for shepherds, in a manger.’ We could say, ‘well, Jesus was born in the manger because there was no room in the inn! It wasn’t something that was planned, it was just an accident.’

But loved ones, with God there are no accidents, God planned every little detail of this. When we think of a manger we have to remember it was cold. It’s that damp kind of cold that chills us to the bones and the only heat available was the body heat from Mary and Joseph and the animals in there.

But it’s not only cold in a manger, it’s also dark. A manger was usually located underground, beneath the barn. So even when the sun is shining, it’s dark in a manger. But it’s not only cold and dark in a manger, it’s also smelly and dirty. It’s full of mud, manure, dust and cobwebs and it smells of must and mould.

It's the place where the sheep and cows eat, it's the place where they slobber and drool. In the summer there are flies and spiders and insects, and swallows nesting in the rafters. There's no such thing as a clean or hygienic manger, a manger is cold, dark, smelly and dirty. The truth is that Jesus was born in a place that was cold, dark and dirty.

**But why was Jesus born in a place like that?** Well, Jesus is always born in the manger, let me explain. Every time Jesus comes into our lives, He is born in a manger. The human heart is like a manger, it's cold, dark, smelly and dirty. The human heart is cold because we don't know the love of God. The human heart is dark because we don't have the light of Christ or the hope of salvation. The human heart is smelly and dirty because we are sinners and our hearts stink and are stained and soiled by sin.

But the miracle of Christmas, the real miracle, is that Jesus is willing to be born into hearts like that. No matter how **cold** your heart is, Jesus is willing to be born there. No matter how **dark** your heart is, Jesus is willing to be born there. No matter **smelly** or **dirty** your heart is, or **how sinful** your life has been, Jesus is willing to come in, enter and clean your heart.

Jesus is always willing to meet us at the manger. He encounters us in that place where we feel utterly lost, hopeless and helpless. Jesus meets us in the darkness of our grief and sorrow and Jesus meets us in the blackness of our despair. He comes into our lives when we feel unloved, unlovable and alone, when inside we feel cold and half frozen to death.

Jesus meets us in all the mess and the filth of our sin and when we've done things that are unforgivable. Jesus comes to people like that the unloved, unlovable and alone, He comes to people like you and I. Jesus was born in a cold, dark, smelly, dirty place because He knew He was going to offer salvation to all those who were hopelessly enslaved in the cold, dark, stench and dirtiness of sin.

**At a school nativity play, two children were dressed as Mary and Joseph, and they were on their way to the inn at Bethlehem. Meanwhile on the other side of the stage, a young boy in a shepherd's outfit is on a mobile phone. After the show was finished one of the parents asked the young boy what he was doing on his mobile phone to which he replied, 'I was calling the inn to make a reservation.'**

Luke records that Mary placed Jesus in a manger **'because there was no guest room available for them.'** Now remember why Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem in the first place. There was Roman Empire wide census going on and everyone had to register.

And so the limited capacity of ancient inns, the influx of others for the enrolment, and the normal fluctuations in every business were probably among the conditions that made it impossible for them to have found better accommodations.

But, over and beyond all this, it was the will of God that the Saviour of all people should have been born in such humble circumstances. **I wonder if the landlord's would have made room for Jesus if they knew Whom was about to be born?** Imagine the King of Kings has arrived to visit His children in Person and they have no room for Him! You see we don't know if they would have taken Mary and Joseph into their home, if they knew Who was about to be born. But we know this much, people today still have no room for Him in their lives.

Let me ask you before we finish, **do you have room for Jesus in your life?** Yes, I understand your life is busy like the rest of us but **what's stopping you from allowing Jesus in?** I know for many it's a sin problem and that they believe that their sin is so great that Jesus can't forgive it. If your life is in a cold, dark, stinking, dirty place at the moment because of sin. Jesus says, **'I understand, kind of reminds me of the place where I was born and the condition of the world was in when I first came.'**

**Will you make room for Jesus to enter your life today?** Because He really wants to enter, no matter where you are from or what you've done in the past or are doing at the moment. Maybe you're already a Christian this morning, **is life beginning to squeeze Jesus out of your life?** Maybe your work life or family life, your hobbies or past times are affecting your commitment to keep Jesus at the centre of your life where He belongs.

You see society is squeezing God completely out of people's lives and it's affecting Christians all over the world. The government are trying to get people to work 7 days a week and it's affecting the Christian's worship attendance. It's affecting our Bible study attendance, it's affecting our special meetings and gatherings attendances and so on.

The world and Christians are now just too busy and God is being squeezed out, the Lord's Day has now become the Lord's two hours. The world is offering these desirable gifts, like shopping, drinking and car boot sales. 'Come over here and get a bargain' the world says, but the world can't offer anyone their greatest need.

And so Jesus invites us all and says in [Matthew 11:28-30](#) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Aren't you tired of running the rat race? Aren't you just worn out chasing after the things the world says you can't live without? Let me leave you with last stanza from the hymn, 'O little town of Bethlehem'.

'O holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us, we pray.  
Cast out our sin and enter in, Be born to us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels, The great glad tidings tell.  
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel'.

The Name Emmanuel means 'God with us', He was born just over 2000 years ago and He remains with us still. If you're not a Christian this morning [will you make room for Emmanuel today and allow Him to give you that much needed rest?](#) If you are a Christian this morning [will you make more room for Emmanuel in your life today so you can spend more time learning from Him?](#)