

Born in an Unusual Place

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, really simple question for you this morning. Where were you born? Here's what I thought we'd do, if you have interest. See if we can find the person this morning who was born the furthest away from this building.

Okay, I'll start the bidding. I'll start with Glasgow. Okay, a wise man from the West, fittingly today. Who else? Where were we born? I know we've got someone from Wales.

Is that right? Wales, getting a bit more exotic here. Okay, anyone else? South Africa, brilliant. This is lovely actually to see what God has done in bringing us together.

Anyone else want to go? South Africa's winning it just now. Nigeria, excellent. Australia, okay, Glasgow is not looking so impressive now.

What? New Zealand, wow. Southern Hemisphere, rocking the joint. Excellent. Well, here's what I love. I love hearing questions, sorry, hearing stories about babies that were born in a New unusual places.

[1 : 01] Okay? Now let me clarify what I mean by that. Here's an unusual place. Here's my favourite. Did you hear about the one, about the lady down in Cambridgeshire who gave birth to her baby in her local post office?

Okay? Opportunistic shop owner took the baby, weighed it, discovered that it would cost £8.22 to send us a first class package. Gets better than that.

This is why I love it. The headline the next day in the local newspaper. Now that's what I call a special delivery. Sometimes these jokes just write themselves, don't they?

Excellent. Did you hear about the one, about the lady who gave birth in a stable in Bethlehem? Right? I'm sure that would have made a cracking joke story back in the first century.

You can imagine the story going around about this baby who was born in a stable. Is the birth of Jesus just another tale of a child being born in an unusual place?

[1 : 56] A great story for Mary and Joseph to tell in the years to come. A great conversation starter, but if we're honest, absolutely zero relevance for my life in 2022 beyond that.

Well, whoever you are here today, whatever you think about the God of the Bible, whatever understanding you have of this Christmas day, I want to take 10 minutes this morning just to show you why Jesus being born in Bethlehem is so utterly profound.

And it really is good news of great joy for all people. But if we're to get it, we need to travel back to the old little town of Bethlehem. Here's the reality of it.

No one gets time off work in the first century and thinks to themselves, I got to get myself to Bethlehem. Right? That's where the party's at. That's where the good times roll.

I'll be missing out in life if I don't get my selfie in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is a no one's bucket list of places to visit before they die. And if you remember back to that reading in Luke, as Luke tells it, remember Caesar Augustus had declared that he wanted this.

[3 : 06] He wanted this census to be carried out so that he could understand and fathom how many people were in his kingdom. What we need to understand is that he's not sitting up all night in the palace, desperately waiting on the news to come from Bethlehem.

How many people live in that place? Out with the popcorn, out with the Red Bull, set on pulling some kind of election night all nighter. He doesn't care about Bethlehem.

Rome isn't batting an eyelid here about this birth. Historians generally agree that in this day, Bethlehem is a town with most likely under 1,000 people.

Right? Some historians even put that figure as low as 300 people. And yet, as the world doesn't take notice at all about a birth in a lowly place, in a little place like Bethlehem, two things are wonderfully happening here.

Here's the first one. Firstly, an old promise is falling into place. You see, despite the many things that are going against it, Bethlehem has one thing that is massively going for it.

[4 : 22] So Bethlehem is the birthplace of King David. Israel's finest, their most celebrated king, this is his patch. And God made David this binding promise in 2 Samuel 7 as Israel's king.

More accurately, not to David per se, but to his son, someone who's going to come down his line. God is promising David in that moment that God will establish his kingdom and his rule will be forever.

And through the work of his reign, his work, he will bring his people peace. He will bring his people rest. And God says, I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me.

That's a huge promise God has made to somebody coming from David's line. But as the Old Testament timeline carries on and this baton is passed generation to generation down the line and his men come and go, sit in David's throne until one day that baton falls.

You're left wondering what has happened to God's promise that he made about the king par excellence. The king, he was going to bring in all those things for his people. And the whole time that sweet smelling prophecy from Micah hangs in the air like some kind of Christmas scented candle.

[5 : 47] Do you know the words? But you Bethlehem, Ephrathath, 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.

You see, Rome might not bat an eyelid at this birth. God's people might be disillusioned about this birth, but God's not forgotten his promise. And in Thunder's look at verse 4 that we read just earlier, placing Jesus through his earthly father Joseph, having traveled back to Bethlehem because of this census, he places Jesus squarely in the line of David.

Here in Bethlehem is an old promise that's fallen into place. And here in Bethlehem is a new king rising up to take his place. God's kings, the one who's stepping into those promises.

This is God's king here. Bethlehem was surprising and lowly enough. But the thing is, where he was born in Bethlehem was even lower. It's not like Mary and Joseph took the best suite at the Bethlehem Ritz, is it?

No, they had a stable. And not just a stable, the baby is placed in a manger. How inappropriate for God's king. And yet how fitting, because this was the shape of his life.

[7 : 16] The one who left heaven's glories. The one who shared eternity with his father. In this moment he is born. The shape of his life is downward.

It would carry on. And it needed to be that shape to win the things for his people. The things that were promised. Peace, rest. The son of God not born into privilege.

The son of God born into poverty. The son of God puts on our skin. The son of God steps into our mess. Jesus, the eternal son of God who knew heaven's riches, came into the world to show us what God the father is like.

If you're thinking that this morning, who is this God? What is he like? The Bible would say, look at Jesus. Look at him. And he came in order to seek, to serve, and to save the lost.

He lived the perfect life. Right? Driven by a love for his father. You look at Jesus and you think there is a man who knows life to the full. And the shape of his death.

[8 : 29] He would shed his blood and dies for us. A sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross. And if we trust in him, this baby who we celebrate being born today, who would grow up to be the man who would give his life on the cross.

The man who would die for the sins of the world. The man who would rise. Arise. Meaning that if we trust in him, our death will not have the final say. He will have the final say. We can know the truth of those six words that Micah spoke.

About what the ruler who would come from Bethlehem would do and be for us. Those six words. And he will be our peace.

Peace with God. The God who created us. The God who we've rebelled against. The God whose punishment against us hangs over us. We get peace with him because of Jesus.

And peace with one another. It's the wonderful truth about what God's done in bringing people from all over the world together to be part of his family. That where many things in the world would divide us.

[9 : 40] No, no, no. God brings us together in Jesus and says you are one. Peace with God. Peace with one another. Peace with one another. And how fitting then, isn't it, that in many respects a group of shepherds should be the first ones to know about, celebrate, and declare the news about the birth of God's Lamb.

The good news as it dawns in Bethlehem. This gospel is good news of great joy for all people. No wonder the angels in glorious unison declare, can't get enough of what God is doing in this ordinary yet so spectacular moment. It's all kicking off in Bethlehem.

So where were you born? Where were you born? Here is the birth in little Bethlehem, the city of David. Here is one born, the greatest king of all.

Oh, holy child of Bethlehem. Descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in. Be born in us today.

[10 : 50] We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell. Oh, come to us. Abide with us. Our Lord, Emmanuel. Let's pray.

Oh, our Father, thank you, Lord, that because of Jesus, our faith in him, our trust in him, that you hear our prayers.

The one who is at your right hand right now, the risen king. Father, thank you that you hear us because we pray in his name. Lord, we just come to you this morning thinking about what I prayed earlier.

All the different things on our hearts and our minds leading up to today, perhaps today, and going on from here. Father, we just offer them to you in the silence now.

And we thank you for Jesus, the one who it was said, it was prophesied of him, that he is the Prince of Peace. And so, Father, we thank you for being able to celebrate, living in a country where we have the freedom to celebrate this, the most special of days.

[11 : 58] And so, Father, we just ask as we close our time together this morning, that just the wonder of Christmas, help us enjoy all the things that go on, all the good things that you have given us.

But, Father, help us to savor your salvation plan as it comes to pass in the arrival of Jesus.

So, Father, thank you for him. In his name we pray. Amen.