

Born in Bethlehem

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[0 : 00] Great, well how good was that folks? Zoom Nativity, there you go. Wonderful, just let me just thank again everyone who's been involved in putting that together. So much hard work in not just the days before but the months before as well putting that all together.

So incredibly well done to everybody. Great to see those of you this morning who have not met. It's wonderful to welcome you to the church. My name is Graeme, I'm the pastor here. Simple question for us this morning. Where were you born? Where were you born?

I don't know about you but I love the stories that you hear about babies who were born in strange places. Do you know the kind of stories I mean? If you go online you'll find some of these stories. I went online this week and found great stories, right? Like the little baby who was born on board a Turkish airways flight headed for Burkina Faso. Great story that one. Or the woman down in Birmingham who gave birth while she was giving evidence in court.

Right? Cracking story that one. Or here's my favourite. The woman down in Cambridgeshire who gave birth in her local post office. Right? An opportunistic shop owner weighed the newborn and figured it would cost £8.22 to send it as a first class package.

[1 : 17] And then the next day the newspaper ran with the headlines. See if you can guess this. This was my favourite part of the story. Now that's what I call a special delivery.

Sometimes these jokes kind of write themselves don't they? But since we're on the topic of births. Have you ever considered where Jesus was born?

Not so much talking about the major. I'm talking about Bethlehem. Have you ever stopped to think about the significance of Bethlehem? Okay? Maybe you're here today and you're watching this and you think to yourself, Well surely Jesus is another one of those kind of stories.

Alright? A baby born in a strange place. I bet he's grown up with a cracking story. Right? Imagine that the conversation starter that's that one. When you have that awkward round the room. Let's say one fact about ourselves.

Boom! You're straight in there with that one. Or maybe you're here today and you are a Christian. And you've maybe connected the dots between that prophecy that we hear at Christmas time from Micah about the baby who was to be born in Bethlehem.

[2 : 26] And you think, well of course it needed to be there. Here's what I want, whoever you are here today, I want you to come and see that the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem is profoundly significant.

And it gets us right to the heart of who he is and what he has come to do. So come with me, if you've got a Bible there, to Luke chapter 2. And travel with me to O little town of Bethlehem as we find it in the first century.

Now if you read around on this, historians generally agree that you're looking at a town with most likely under a thousand people. And some historians even put that somewhere closer to 300 people.

So this is a small place. And truth be told, there's not a lot that goes on in Bethlehem as far as we know it. But imagine that you get a last minute package deal, jet two holidays and the sales, and you find yourselves on the plane, you're headed to Bethlehem, right?

And you walk in Bethlehem streets, and you see the tourist information center, and you make a beeline for it, and you ask the person behind the desk, what should I know about Bethlehem?

[3 : 45] I imagine the person behind the desk would have alerted you to the fact that Bethlehem is kind of famous for two things. Okay? Firstly, it's the place where King David, Israel's most celebrated king, this is the place where he's from.

As if you've ever driven down south, you'll know that you'll come to this place, kind of close to the border on the motorway, called Echofekin, right? Which I think is just the best Scottish place name ever.

You're driving down just off the motorway, and there's a big sign there that says, this is the birthplace of Thomas Carlyle, right? One of Scotland's kind of most famous sons, and I imagine the locals there, they take great pride in the fact that he was born there, and they probably get a lot of trade from it too.

So you can imagine you go into Bethlehem, you might see something like this as you enter. Okay? Birthplace of King David. You see, Luke mentioned that, you've got the verses there, in verse 4 and verse 11.

Bethlehem is the city of David. Okay? It's probably his nickname, the city of David. And the Old Testament story, I love it, it's where Samuel goes to Bethlehem.

[4 : 56] It's where he goes to, that God tells him to go, to appoint the new king of Israel. Okay? And in that scene, what is David doing in the sea? He's tending his sheep.

Because I think that's the other thing that Bethlehem is known for. It's known for shepherds. Okay? And it was a common job all over in this day, really. But apparently the shepherds in Bethlehem had one special job assigned to them.

They had to raise and protect the best, spotless, perfect lambs and take them on the four and a half mile trip to Jerusalem so that they could be used in the sacrificial worship at the temple.

Right? One of those kind of, it's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it kind of gigs. So bring these two things together and think of it this way. Okay? If the Bethlehem Tourist Information Shop had a gift shop section, and you were able to purchase a kind of Bethlehem scented candle, the smells of which reminded you of your time there.

Okay? You'd light this scented candle and after a while, you'd detect the distinct smells of king and of sheep. Try and work creatively and seasonally in these illustrations.

[6 : 06] There you go. King and sheep. King and sheep. And do you see how the Bethlehem backdrop is so fitting as the place where Jesus is born?

Okay? For here at this day in Bethlehem is born, is born a king the likes of which we have never seen before. Okay? You know, I love that scene as David is chosen as king.

Samuel goes to Jesse and he says, where are your sons? God has told me it's your son. Where are your sons? And Jesse wheels them out one by one. Right? And Samuel says, it's not him.

No, it's not him. And it's not him. And it's not him. And it's not him. Go anymore. And Jesse says, well, there is the youngest. There is my boy David. And Samuel clogs eyes on them and says, that's him.

That's him. What's the Lord seen in David? What does he look for in his king? But here's a great sense of the heart of the God of the Bible who, what does he look for?

[7 : 10] Man looks on the outside, but God looks on the heart. Right? God wants a king whose heart will beat for him, who will lead the people in joyful worship and of wholehearted obedience, which is a delight to God.

And sure, David makes some massive mistakes in his life. But God calls him, he's a man after my own heart. It says, God says of David, that's my kind of king.

That's him. That's my kind of king. And as David grows as king, the Lord makes him this binding promise. You get it in 2 Samuel 7, which is one of the most important promises in the Bible.

Makes a promise to one of, the line of David's, one of his sons, that God will establish him on the throne. And his rule will be forever. His victory will be final.

His peace that he will grant will be forever. And in him, people will find rest. And God says, I will be a father to him.

[8 : 10] And he will be a son to me. And so as the kingly bat is passed down the line, it falls. And you're left asking the question as the reader, as you're reading your Bible, thinking, what has happened to God's promise?

Where is this king? And then in Thunder's look at verse 4, chapter 2, placing Jesus through his earthly father, Joseph, having traveled back to Bethlehem because of the census, squarely in the lineage of David.

As if to say, here is the long expected king. The one that God promised, the one that the world needs. Here he is.

Come now long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free. Here is God's king. Friends, and in our world where this year has so often been about the character of political leaders across the world, across all kinds of positions, and what they're really made of, one is to know that you will not find a king like this who holds who stops to bind the wounds of the lonely, who associates those who are society's outcasts, whose wisdom is unsurpassable and leaves listeners then and today amazed and one who says to all the weary and the broken, and that's all of us right now, he says, come unto me and I will give you rest.

You know, I had a wonderful story from a lady called Isabella, who's part of King's Church, which is just at the bottom of Leamington Terrace here. She's given her story about how she came to know Jesus and what it is that he means to her.

[10:06] And she simply said, you can find it on their Facebook page. She said, coming to know Jesus, she said, it's like putting on for the first time some collective glasses. Everything has become clearer.

Here's the testimony of all those who love this King, that there is life to be found in this King, that there is refuge to be found in this King, that there is purpose to be found in this King, that there is joy to be found in knowing this King, this King who is our Saviour, this King who is our brother. Here is God's King. He is born in Bethlehem a King, the likes of which we have never seen before. And here is born in Bethlehem a Lamb, the likes of which we've never known before.

You know, perhaps this year has been a year where as a society we've maybe recaptured something of the true meaning of that word sacrifice. Right?

What is it we used to do every Thursday evening during lockdown? I always remember it because it was a Thursday at 8, because that was the day when I used to come in here and to record the sermon for the Sunday, and I had to quickly get it done before we start clapping.

[11:14] Right? What do we do? We clap for our carers. Thank you for the sacrifice you're making. They're still making it. Thank you for what you're doing. All the healthcare workers putting yourselves in the front line. Thank you.

I know I was flicking through the channels the other night. I found myself watching a bit of the Royal Variety Show. Okay? It's amazing what you're watching a Tuesday night. Royal Variety Show. The undoubted star of the evening was Captain Tom.

I know, remember Captain Tom? What is it he did? He did, what, 100 laps in his garden on his Zimmer frame to raise money for the NHS. Right? Just a wonderful thing.

And there's the Royal Variety Show. He's singing a duet. Somebody to lean on. He's singing it with Michael Ball. Right? Scoring a million points on the cheese factor scale. Okay?

But we loved it. And we get it. And yes, absolutely. There is sacrifice. There is the idea of somebody giving up their rights, laying them aside in the cause of lovingly serving others.

[12:14] Friends, you will not find a king like Jesus. And you will not find a sacrifice like the one Jesus is prepared to make. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who knew heaven's riches, who knew glorious joy with his Father in heaven, who was willing to leave it to come into the world in order to show us what the Father is like.

In other words, if you want to know what the God of the Bible is like, you'll look at Jesus. And he left it in order to come and serve and to save. And let me encourage you to come tonight.

We're going to think and marvel and feast more on this truth. Come tonight. Dial in. If you're thinking of coming in person, there's still spaces left. I'm sure if you email and let us know you're coming, we'll tell you if there's a space.

Dial in tonight. We're going to think more about this truth. Here is the king come to serve and save. You see, the whole idea of having a perfect, firstborn, sacrificial lamb at the temple is that sin and all its ugliness against our creator deserves death.

And as you watch the lamb die, you can have certainty and assurance and peace because you know that the spotless lamb took my place and it died my death.

[13:35] And as it were, I get its life. And so here, verse seven, here is Mary giving birth to what? Her firstborn son.

And Mary really did love a little lamb whose fleece was white as snow. Here is Jesus who lived a perfect life driven by a love for his father and a desire to show us his father and win his people for himself so that we can share in and know the love of this delightful God.

Life as it was always intended to be, who shed his blood and dies for us, a sacrificial and a substitutionary death from the cross. And as we trust in him, and maybe you need to do that today, we can know the truth of those six words that Micah spoke about the ruler who would stand for us. Born in Bethlehem. Not just what he would give us, but what he would be for us. He will be our peace. And he will be our peace.

You know, I used to study with a guy called Suraj. He's now church planting, starting a church in Nepal, where he's from. In a previous life, he was into drugs and gangs, running with the police, and repeatedly in and out of jail.

[15:00] And inside, he just used to, he just called himself, I'm just angry, is what he said. Right? Just angry all the time. Angry. And he heard about Jesus and about his sin that he knew was there, but he didn't know what to do with and he didn't even want to admit was there.

And he heard about the Jesus who loved him. And by dying for him, and as he gave his life to Jesus, as he said, that's the king that I'm going to follow for the first time in his life, as he gave his life to Jesus, he said, I had peace.

Because he'd been arrested by the Prince of Peace. And so friends, how fitting then, in many respects, that a group of shepherds should be the ones to know about, celebrate, and declare the news concerning the birth of God's Lamb.

This good news. That's what the angels call it, isn't it? It's not medium news. It's good news. This gospel that is for all people.

No wonder the angels celebrate in glorious unison, telling what God is doing in this moment. No wonder. Here is Jesus. Friends, where were you born?

[16:16] Where were you born? Here is the birth in little Bethlehem, the city of David, the city of shepherds, of the greatest shepherd king there ever was.

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in. Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell.

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel. Let us pray. Amen. O Father, we thank you so much that into our world right now of disappointing news, that we come face to face this morning with the good news.

We just praise you, Heavenly Father, that the birth of Jesus tells us who you are and what you're like. Thank you so much, Lord, for your wonderful love for us and sending Jesus. And so, Father, I pray that at this time especially, Lord, that we would know the one who is the Prince of Peace.

Thank you that he, Lord, is the King above all kings and he's the Lord above all lords. And so, Father, I pray for us here today, wherever we're at, that we would know him as our Lord and our Savior, our friend and our brother.

[17:47] And we pray these things in his precious and in his worthy name. Amen.