

A BIRTH

Luke 2:1-7

(Read Luke 2:1-7)

INTRO: I remember when my brother Steve was born. He is 23½ months younger than me, so I was just a couple weeks shy of two years old. I remember my parents bringing him home in our white '57 Ford station wagon. It shows how kids think and put two and two together, because I was sure they had brought him home from the stable. After all, that's where babies are born, in a stable, right? I'm not sure how old I was when I had my thinking corrected on that – though I'm sure I was thinking a bit clearer 20 months later when my brother Kent was born. I don't remember thinking he was born in a barn.

Sheila was born on a Friday night about two hours before the end of Kathy's shift at Samaritan Hospital. Kathy had been feeling a little funny, and when she told her co-worker and friend, Sally, the mother of three kids, who knew of such things, how she was feeling, Sally chased Kathy up to the Maternity ward. Preparations were made, I arrived, ready for a long labor, and Sheila was born about two hours later, at 11:30 PM. The room was clean, the atmosphere peaceful, and even quiet, there was the doctor and no more than two nurses in the room.

Things were a bit more frenetic when Emily was born. The room was equally sterile and clean, but there were about a dozen doctors and nurses in the room because Em was supposed to be a high risk delivery. There were no hitches. She was delivered perfectly normally and perfectly normal.

When Fiona was born, Kathy, Sheila, Andrew and I sat in the beautiful waiting room outside of the delivery room at Samaritan and played euchre until Evan came and told us we had a new baby girl. The room was peaceful, Emily had all the proper monitors and equipment in the room to insure a safe delivery.

Jesus WAS born in a stable. There were no doctors, nurses, monitors, delivery tables or eager grandparents in the waiting room playing cards and straining to hear a baby's cry. Jesus had a manger and two parents who loved him with a fierce love that every parent has and stoked with a vision of the destiny the angel have foretold for him. He was the realization of a promise. His arrival set off a celebration in the hearts of a hopeless people. In a little town, in a stable, with two completely ordinary people, his was a birth that set into motion the final chapter of God's perfect plan of salvation.

Most of us have heard this story more times than we can count. The text I read to you as we began this talk, Luke 2:1-7 is so familiar to us that we can almost recite it by heart just from sheer repetition. What can we learn new from some a familiar account? I'm not sure, but I'm going to make an attempt. Hopefully we can look at this text with some new eyes for the next few minutes as we see that this much more than a birth in a stable.

A decree and then a birth

- Our text from Micah starts out with a call to action and then shows how, if anything good is going to happen for Israel, God is going to do it. And he did. Here 650 years later in a town in the hills of Palestine a baby is going to be born.
- It would appear that the birth of Jesus was an accident when, stirred into labor by 70 miles of travel necessitated by a census, he was born so far from home in Nazareth. It looks for all the world then, like the decree by Caesar Augustus was the cause of Jesus's birth. In actuality, the decree was caused by Jesus birth. The Roman Emperor may have thought he was a god and a savior of humanity, but he was merely a player in God's perfect plan.
- We read in Matthew that when Herod was concerned about losing his power to a child king, he called in priests and teachers of the law to find where this was to happen, and they quote the same words we heard from our own Matthew earlier when he read from Micah 5, *But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.* Matthew 2:6. Long before Herod, and long before Caesar, God's plan was playing out.
- This past week, on a TV show that gives little credence if at all to things religious, one of the characters quoted a Yiddish proverb, "*We plan, God laughs.*" There is a lot of truth there. Not that God actually laughs at our schemes, or even that he makes light of them. But the truth is, we can never think that we can get ahead of where God is. God knew what he was doing when Augustus arrogantly called for a census. Augustus was the instrument in God's hand to assure there would be...

A birth in Bethlehem

- I pointed out last week that Mary was from Nazareth and not from Jerusalem. The same can be said for Bethlehem being the birthplace of Jesus over the holy city. Or why not Rome, or Alexandria, or Athens or any of the well-known and thriving cities around the known world? Why did Jesus have to be born in a genuine backwater with a population of perhaps 300 souls? I heard this past week that perhaps the town was so little there may not even have been an inn. Now, it seems that the original language includes the word “inn”, but perhaps the more accurate reading is, “guest room”. The point is, Bethlehem was tiny and overrun with taxpayers. There was no quiet, clean, room for a baby to be born.
- If there is any way the plan of salvation is going to be carried out, God is going to have to do it. So, we have a baby and he is born in a tiny insignificant town off the beaten path. Bethlehem fit the bill.
- And as if it’s not enough it’s a tiny town, God planned...

A birth in a stable

- We’ve heard the story countless times. There was no room in the inn. I just pointed out, there may not have been any lodgings in Bethlehem at all. Years ago Kathy and her sisters had a Christmas album by Evie Tornquist where she sang *“No Room, Only a manger of hay, No Room, He is a stranger today, No Room, In His world turned away, No Room.”* We’ve heard all our lives, Jesus was born in a stable.
- Why was that? God could have made it otherwise. While there were no hospitals in those days, he could have had Jesus born in a palace, or certainly in a nice home. BUT not a stable! Why a stable?!!
- I’m not God, so I’ll not presume to do any more than take a stab at why. If this is going to happen, if any good will come from this birth, God is going to have to do it. And he will do it regardless of any help from us.
- Through the years the idea of God’s Anointed One, the Messiah had developed into a person who would be born into humanity. But the idea had been of a royal birth, and not a birth to an unmarried peasant girl, and NOT in a stable. God doesn’t do things according to our plans. He does it according to his perfect plan. Thus we have a birth in a stable. And finally...

A baby in a manger

- No crib. No cradle. If they’d been home in Nazareth, carpenter Joseph would have had a dandy cradle built for Baby Jesus. But they were 70 miles from home and Mary was having the baby NOW! And in this stable there was no bed for their little one. Mary did what she had to do. She wrapped Jesus in cloths the way she had seen it done in births she had witnessed and then she laid her son, the Savior, in a cattle trough. That’s all that was there, and it sufficed. It was God’s plan, and that was good enough. Besides, God would take care of the rest, and he did.

Conclusion: It was far from home, this birth. It was a mandate from a distant Emperor who thought he had the reins of power. Here was a tiny baby in a tiny town, in a stable, probably in a cave, and laying in a manger. It was a birth only God could come up with to provide a plan of salvation only he could offer. That’s why, despite all the things that make it look so far from ideal, it was actually perfect. Amen.