

# SERMON GUIDE

## Good News of Great Joy



12.3.2023

### SCRIPTURE:

2 Timothy 1:8-10 | Micah 5:2 | Luke 2:1-7

### SERMON NOTES:

Last week we finished the Gospel of John. At the turn of the year, we will resume the book of Genesis and pick up in Genesis 12 (the covenant with Abraham). We will stay there until Easter, and then after Easter we will start the book of Hebrews. So lots of fun teaching is coming up for us in the months ahead. Today we begin a 4-week series called: **Good News of Great Joy**. We are going to examine the Incarnation. God becomes a man. The birth of Jesus, the Christ, our Savior. It is that time of year where people are celebrating Christmas and talking about the birth of King Jesus. We are going to spend our next 4 Sundays exploring all the different facets of that reality as well.

While we should always reflect on the gracious gift of God in sending His Son into the world, this is a particularly special time of year when we direct our focus there. Studying the birth of Christ can be a lot like a diamond. It has many facets, and its beauty can be admired from many angles and points of view. The aspect of the birth of Christ that I want to look at this morning is often overlooked. Many Christians have never stopped to consider this angle at all when celebrating Christmas. And it's this: **the coming of God in the flesh, in the birth of Jesus Christ the Son, was an eternal plan from the foundation of the world, not a Plan B or reactionary response to sin.** Let me repeat that again. The coming of God in the flesh, in the birth of Jesus Christ the Son, was an eternal plan from the foundation of the world, not a Plan B or reactionary response to sin. When did God determine to make a people for Himself? Was He watching the events unfold and reacting to it? Hardly. **Jesus Christ coming into the world to save sinners was not a reactionary plan.** God's determination to rescue the undeserving, to form a people, to create a bride, was eternal.

This truth is massive. It's far higher than our minds can climb. But I want us to put our hiking boots on and attempt to scale it today. I want us to get as high up that mountain as possible because the view is breathtaking. I want to take you to see it, because in seeing it, you and I will be left marveling in wonder and awe at our God.

I want us to look at three key passages that will bring this facet of the diamond into amazing focus.

### I. First Passage: 2 Timothy 1:8-10

**2 Timothy 1:8-10 -- 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to**

***a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,***

So I want you to see what this passage says, Paul urges Timothy to share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, and now he is going to describe what this God has done. *“Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace.”* So Paul says that God saved us and called us. God did this. What were the terms? *“Not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace.”* So the answer is, not because of anything we have done, we have not earned it. It is not our works or actions that produce a response from God to save us. Rather, he has saved us and called us because of his own purpose, meaning for His own reasons. His own purposes and grace, meaning he did it though we did not deserve it. It was grace. So these statements alone are quite informative about the work of God toward sinners through His Son Jesus, but the mountain top is still further up.

He then says, *“which he gave us (meaning this saving grace) in Christ Jesus (it only comes from the finished work of Jesus) before the ages began.”* Wow! When was this salvation and grace given, before the ages began, at the foundation of the world. So I want you to catch this: before the ages began, before there was a world or anything or anyone in it, there was only God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Triune God, a spirit being, with no body, in perfect harmony and relationship within Himself. The relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit was all there was. But it was here, in eternity, while nothing else existed, that our Triune God determined and planned to create a world, to fill it with people, each person with a story, He determined the beginning from the end, because He is the Alpha and the Omega. And from this vantage point of eternity, the Father designed and planned that His Son would become flesh and enter into this creation to rescue it by dying a death in the place of sinners, and in this plan, the Son would return to Heaven, and God the Holy Spirit would go and dwell among them, mediating the presence of the Son, convicting of sin, regenerating hearts. All of this from eternity. All of this with one goal and one aim in mind: that God would receive maximum glory! The whole plan of creation and life and salvation all exists for the magnifying of God and the bringing of glory to Him.

Now, I want you to consider something further, and this is the astounding part: it was the eternal plan of God before the ages began, to send His Son to redeem a people for Himself...friends, there was no world, no people, no sin...but this eternal plan required that there be a world, a people, and even sin, so that in the defeating of sin through Jesus, God would receive more glory than He would have had another plan been deployed. Now, if you don't like this idea, my challenge would be, then what do you do about a passage like this one? *“He saved us and called us, not because of our works but because of his purpose and grace, before the ages began.”* How do you interpret this passage that this was the plan of God before the ages began if not by saying this was God's plan from eternity, not a response or reaction to sin. Through Jesus before the ages began. Our salvation is rooted in eternity, but so was the plan for Jesus to come and die for the sinners who did not exist yet. Is your mind blown yet? You don't have to have every knot untied to believe it. You don't have to understand it fully to marvel at it.

Now let me conclude what this text says, “*and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*” So this salvation was given through Jesus before the ages began, but has now been manifested, meaning it has now happened in real time events in history. This is what is theologically called “Providence.” Providence is the events and happenings on the earth in time and history which are the unfolding of God’s eternal decrees and plans. Nothing is coincidental. If God rules and has an eternal plan by which He governs, then nothing unfolding is accidental, it is all a part of the unfolding plan of God in time. Jesus’ birth was not an accident, a Plan B, or an addendum. Jesus was born into history, nearly 2,000 years ago, and Paul says God, “abolished death and brought life and immortality (eternal life) through the gospel.”

This passage is incredible for showing us the eternal scope of God’s design in the coming of Christ to save sinners. Before I move on, I want to quickly pepper you with a few other texts that affirm this. I’m not going to spend a ton of time explaining them, but I want you to see them so you don’t think I’m building an entire doctrinal position on just this verse.

***Revelation 13:8 -- all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of the life of the Lamb who was slain.***

Jesus is the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. Before there was a world, there was a book called “The Book of the Life of the Lamb who was Slain.” So...before the world, or people, or sin, the Lamb of God was the Slain Lamb.

***Revelation 17:8 -- The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.***

The book of life contains names, and those names were written from the foundation of the world. Before anything existed, including the people who bear those names.

***Matthew 25:34 -- Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.***

Jesus talks about the final judgment, and He (the King) will say to those on His right (those separated from the goats), to come and inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Before the world began, this inheritance was determined and prepared.

***Titus 1:1-2 -- Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.***

God's elect have the hope of eternal life, which God promised (and He cannot lie) before the ages began. Just so you're clear on all these "before the ages began" and "from the foundation of the world" references mean before creation and time, in eternity past. All these promises and plans from the time where the only thing in existence was the Triune God. Nothing else.

Friends, in all these examples, you can seek to argue and debate. You can let your mind swarm with questions rather than worship. However, these truths are not meant to create war, but worship. They are not intended to divide, but delight. We can't do that if our response to these things is to throw our hands up and say, "*I don't fully understand*" or "*I still have questions.*" Don't let unanswered questions hinder unrestrained praise. These truths are designed for the comfort and courage of mature believers. But they also serve to shock the presumptions and flippancy of others. Friends, the best response to these truths is awe. What an amazing plan of God!

Now, this text (and other examples) would be enough this morning to blow our minds and leave us marveling. We could close here and have enough to chew on, but I want to take it further, less we deprive ourselves of more reasons to be blown away at what we are celebrating this Advent/Christmas season.

## **II. Our Second Passage: Micah 5:2**

***Micah 5:2 -- But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.***

So God did not just create this eternal plan and then leave everyone in the dark about it. No, God raised up prophets and individuals who would serve as His mouthpiece to communicate His plan and will to all. So throughout the Bible we have these individuals communicating messages from God to the people concerning His plans and will. And in those plans we see that God is going to send a Savior to the people. In fact, we see it as early as Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve sin in the Garden, the promise of One who is coming to crush the enemy (Genesis 3:15). This wasn't an on-the-fly decree by God, it was a revealing of His eternal plan. We see it in promises to David about His kingdom reigning forever, and the ruler that would come from Him. We see it in Isaiah where the Suffering Servant is foretold who will bear our iniquities and be crushed for our sins. Do you think Isaiah is just making some great guesses or that God is making up a plan on the fly? No, these are revelations from God about His eternal plans which come to pass in time, through His providential workings.

One of the great passages often overlooked in this regard is Micah 5:2. Here we see the prophet foretell of one who will be born in Bethlehem, this small and insignificant town in the land of Judah. Why Bethlehem? It's not like God is constrained to make it Bethlehem. God chooses Bethlehem as the place where the birth of this ruler who is from ancient of days will happen. Why does He choose that place and tell them? So that when it happens, they can be assured of God's promise being fulfilled.

A ruler will come forth who will be ruler in Israel, and whose coming forth is from old, from ancient of days. The idea here is like that in 2 Timothy, a ruler “from old, from ancient of days” implies eternity. This would not be a sudden decision to have the birth of the Messiah happen there, for it had already been determined long ago by God. This is such a phenomenal passage, and it is rarely ever emphasized during the Christmas season. But now you begin to see the story of the birth of Christ in perspective.

So let’s go there and marvel at what God does.

### **III. Third Passage: Luke 2:1-7**

**Luke 2:1-7 -- 1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.**

When we come to this text in Luke 2, we have already seen in Luke 1 that Mary has been visited by the angel Gabriel who has informed her that she is going to conceive and have a child. She does not understand how this can be, for she is a virgin. The angel informs her that this will be from God, and she will name this son, Jesus. He will be a ruler who reigns over the house of Jacob, Israel forever, and to his kingdom will be no end. So time has passed since this information is relayed to Mary and we come to chapter 2 of Luke. I want to realize that Mary and Joseph had every intention of staying in Nazareth where they lived to have the baby. And this baby is the Promised One. But the promised one will be born in Bethlehem. That is clear from Micah 5:2. But they’re not planning on going there.

The Caesar of Rome is Augustus. Augustus is the adopted nephew of the famous Julius Caesar. Augustus became ruler over the Empire of Rome 27 years before the birth of Jesus, and his empire stretched across the Mediterranean world, including Israel. So this is the most powerful man in the entire world. What did this man do? He ordered a decree that everyone be registered in their homelands so that a census could be taken of the kingdom. This forces Joseph, engaged to be married to Mary, who is pregnant with Jesus, to go and register in his hometown of...Bethlehem. They live in Nazareth. If they are not summoned to Bethlehem to be registered, they do not go there, if they do not go there, this child will be born in Nazareth because that is where they live. Are you tracking?

So they go. And vs 6 says that “*while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.*” You don’t say! And she gave birth to her son, Jesus, the Savior, the Christ, and “*wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.*” Now, the humble birth of

our Savior is often one of the facets of the diamond that we explore during Christmas. How our God above all things, lowered himself to become man, even to be born in the humblest of conditions is astounding. But that is not our focus this morning.

I believe something just as grand, perhaps more so—you can be the judge—is taking place for us to marvel at. The Christ is born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet Micah foretold. Now was God lucky that all this worked out for Him instead of Mary delivering the baby in Nazareth and messing up the whole plan? No, you know where I'm going with this. This is the magnificent plan of God from the eternal foundations of the world, before the ages began, being played out in time and history, through His providential workings. And how did God providentially bring His eternal plan to pass? He led the most powerful and influential man in the world, to decree a census, so that Joseph would have to go to Bethlehem, so the true ruler and king of the world would be born! What a God we serve! This is why in Romans 11, Paul breaks out in praise:

**Romans 11:33-36 -- *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.***

How did God lead a pagan man like Augustus to do such a thing? I don't know. The Bible does not provide the specific details and mechanics. But God has His ways. And I believe Proverbs 21:1 is sufficient for our answer today:

**Proverbs 21:1 -- *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.***

It should strengthen our hearts and liven our spirits to hear and see such amazing truths about the workings of our God. That He determined to send forth His Son from the foundation of the world, to save sinners, before there was even a world or a human on it. And then God brings these eternal plans to pass through historical events and we get to see the unveiling of God's decrees through His providential outworking. It's simply amazing. I wanted us to take the diamond of the birth of Christ and rotate it around to look at a facet that I believe we rarely peek at and let its radiance and light and beauty captivate us this morning. No matter how well I have described it this morning, the reality of what I have tried to describe is far more glorious than what I have been able to communicate. It is simply stunning. It is something we should pray God would use to fan into flame our affections and love for Him.

**\*\*That God is working His eternal plan in this world gives me great hope. Nothing is by accident. God is not reactionary.**



**\*\*That God can move the heart, actions, and will of the most powerful of men, even pagans, reminds me that He alone is sovereign over all. And that gives me comfort. Even actions that we would consider against us are being used by God to bring about His glorious plan.**

**\*\*That God went through all of this to save a wretch like me, to give His Son Jesus in my place, gives me great joy. It is not this earth we live for. We long for the City of God. We were made with eternity in our hearts. Our only hope and opportunity to fulfill this eternal longing is through Christ, his sacrifice for our sins in our place. This should provoke us to great joy!**

And this hope I find in His eternal plan, this comfort I have in His sovereign rule, and this joy in His saving grace through Jesus, leads me to glorify Him, which is the root cause for all God's actions in these things.

What a beautiful and radiant facet of this diamond we have indeed beheld today!

## LOOK BACK

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you GROW in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you GO to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?

## BUILD UP

- **REVIEW:**
  - Read 2 Timothy 1:8-10, Micah 5:2, Luke 2:1-7 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
  - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
  - Additional Scripture:
    - 2 Timothy 2:6-7
    - Ephesians 2:8-10
    - Isaiah 43:7. 42:8
    - Ephesians 1:4-5
    - John 1:14
    - Hebrews 1:3
    - Isaiah 46:10
    - 1 Peter 1:20
- **REFLECT:**

- Why is Timothy not to be ashamed?
- Why did God save us and call us to a holy calling?
- What is the significance of God giving us this through Christ before the ages began? How does this relate to Paul being a prisoner of the Lord?
- What is the importance of all this being manifested through Jesus Christ?
- How do we see God's providence through Caesar requiring a census that would force people to go back to their hometowns?

- **RESPOND:**

- Does this give you comfort? Why or why not?
- Should this motivate us to share the gospel? Why or why not?
- Do you live unashamed of the testimony of the Lord? What does that look like?

- **MEDITATE:**

- 2 Timothy 1:8-10 -- *8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,*

- **MEMORIZE:**

- Proverbs 19:21 - *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.*

**SEND OUT**

- **GROW:** How will you abide in Christ this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him?
- **GO:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story or the gospel?
- **PRAYER:**
  - Pray over any request from your group members.
  - Worship Pastor - **Brett Perkins**
  - Ministry - **Journey Worship Co.**
  - **Pray for our long-term families on the field:**
    - The Wilsons
    - The Grays
    - The Starks
  - **Pray for our mid-term sent ones on the field:**
    - Kaesi
  - **Pray for the lost - Unreached People Group (UPG):** Ramgarhia in India





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- **Population in country:** 6,700
- **Global population:** 6,700
- **Christian Adherent:** 0.00%
- **Evangelical:** 0.00%
- **Primary Religion:** Sikh
- **Primary Language:** Punjabi, Eastern
- **Summary:** Hailing from the Punjab state of northwestern India, the Ramgarhia community classifies as Sikh. Today the Ramgarhia hold the identity as a very well-educated and well-respected people, a significant change from their early low status designation of India. Since the 1700s, Ramgarhia Sikhs have created a new reputation for themselves. Due to the determination of early Ramgarhia influencers, the Indian status system fell in the Sikh community. Known for their craftsmanship skill in carpentry, blacksmithing and masonry, the Ramgarhia have contributed much to iconic structures throughout India.
- **Prayer Focus:** May the Ramgarhia walk in the light of the Son who created the light of the sun, knowing him as their creator and Savior. Pray that God would increase their influence among Sikhs as he increases their understanding of his loving nature. Pray for disciples from the Sikh community to disciple others in the ways of Jesus Christ.
- Want to keep up with other Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>