

Unexpected Joy (Luke 2:8-20)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 December 2025

Preacher: Johan Linder

[0 : 00] So we're going to read from Luke chapter 2 if you want to find it in your Bibles, verse 8. Has everybody got it? Luke chapter 2, verse 8.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. But they were terrified. But the angel said to them, don't be afraid. I'll bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people.

Today, in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you.

You will find a baby wrapped in clothes, a cloth, sorry, and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.

[1 : 22] When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they'd seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praying to God for all the things that they'd heard and seen, which were just as they'd been told. Thanks, Debbie.

Hi, everyone. I'm Johan. I've been here a few times before. I came to the Cantonese services just a couple of months ago. And it's great to be back here again with you.

[2 : 38] We're just about to head off to Australia to see our family there. They're all in Sydney. So it's great to have this opportunity to be with you before we go back.

And we'll be back in January, so we're not going for that long. Debbie and I have worked with OMF for over 30 years now. And we've worked with Thai people in Thailand for a long time.

And I'm going to tell you a story from Thailand in just a little while. And now we're working with OMF as an agency for people who want to share the good news about Jesus in Asia somewhere.

And so we're following people up and trying to talk to people about what it's like to serve cross-culturally in mission with Asian people.

Because I work in a kind of a leadership role, I really like to follow the news. I don't know if many of you read the news a lot, but I read a lot of news.

[3 : 41] I read about politics and international tensions and major developments that's going on in the world. Unfortunately, most of the news is bad, isn't it?

When you read the news, a lot of it can be really depressing. But occasionally, there's news that brings joy as well. And here, here's what I've learned.

It's that the most significant events that happen don't often make the headlines. Often there are really significant things that go on that don't actually become news.

Real turning points in history often happen in obscurity, in places where no one is really watching. And the story that we're looking at today is kind of the ultimate example.

And it's not bad news. It's actually good news, which is great. It's really good news. At the time, it probably didn't make the Jerusalem Morning Herald or the major news outlets in that time.

[4 : 52] There was no press conference. There was no royal announcement. Just shepherds in a field and a baby in a stable. But Dr. Luke, who recorded this account for us, he makes it unmistakably clear.

This is the most significant event in human history. In earthly terms, it was just another birth. One of billions that have happened in the world.

It's happened to all of you. But in the spiritual realm, everything changed. And even though it happened a long time ago, it still has huge impacts for us today.

And that's maybe why this story is familiar to you. Because it is so different. What do you like about this story?

I want you to just turn to the person next to you and say, what do you like about this story? You've probably heard it before.

[6:03] What do you like? Just share one thing that you like about it. Okay? Tell me. What do you like about the story? The birth? So what is it that you like?

Yeah? Okay? Not just because you like babies, but... Do you like watching births? It's pretty messy. Okay. All right.

Someone else? What do you like about it? What do you like about the story? Yes. Yes. Yes. I think I like how...

Good news. Yeah. Okay. Great. Someone else? What do you like about the story?

The promise of better things to come. Yes. Very good. Okay. Anyone else? A little too shy.

Anyone?

[7:16] Okay. All right. Well, I'm going to tell you what I like about this story. All right? What I like about this story is that it was perfectly planned. Okay? This was no accident.

Dr. Luke told this story, and it's obvious that he wants us to know that this story was planned out beforehand. There are so many things that lead up to this birth.

For instance, you've got the Old Testament, right? So, you've got hundreds of years of Bible history that all point forward to the coming of the Messiah.

A Savior who's going to come and who's going to release Israel from their slavery. Okay? It's a magnificent promise.

And then, the first chapters of the book of Luke, which, you know, the first chapter, lots and lots of things happen that lead up to the birth of Jesus. We see how the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, the priest, who was offering incense in the temple, and to tell him that his wife Elizabeth is going to give birth to John, who's going to prepare the way for the coming Messiah.

[8:31] And Gabriel was a very busy angel, because he also visited Mary to tell her that she was going to have a baby. And the Holy Spirit was really busy as well, because he came to both Elizabeth and Zechariah, and they, so that they prophesied about the Christ, the Messiah who was going to come.

And so, there are a lot of pointers. And then we see at the beginning of chapter 2, we see how the Roman Emperor Augustus, God used him to move Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to the town of King David, to make the point that Mary would then give birth to a new king in the line of King David, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, because Joseph and Mary were both from the line of David.

So, Luke, as the author, he says right at the beginning, he researches things very carefully, and he makes it very clear that Jesus' birth was planned by God himself, and it was for a specific purpose, to send a saviour into the world.

A child born into a very vulnerable situation. Reminds me of another child that was born. In South Thailand, in a small village next to a rubber tree plantation.

This birth happened about 50 years ago. So, the person that I'm talking about is about my age. I actually met him. He was coming to see my boss in Bangkok, and I met him, and I thought, he's a little bit dorky, this guy.

[10:13] He didn't seem very self-confident. But I'll tell you later who he actually was. And in this village in South Thailand, very remote, a long way away from the nearest city, there was a deaf and mute girl in the village.

That means she couldn't hear and she couldn't speak. Everyone in the village knew why she was pregnant. She was pregnant because on the previous New Year's Eve, one of the boys in the village probably got a little bit too drunk and dragged her off into the rubber plantation and molested her.

And that's why she was now going to have a baby. And the grandmother, she had a plan because this pregnancy brought a lot of shame onto the family.

And so, she decided it was better just to get rid of the shame. That meant that she was intending that as soon as the baby was born, she was going to smother it, and that that baby was then going to be gone forever.

But it didn't happen that way. The angels must have intervened because just as the baby was born, it started crying. And there was a big group of people coming back from a Buddhist festival at the local temple, and they all heard the baby crying.

[11 : 39] And so, there was no opportunity for the grandmother to carry through on her plan to get rid of the baby. And so, the baby was, you know, thrived, lived, but it was quite neglected.

He only got his first set of clothes when he went to school at about the age of five. So, before that, he would just run around without clothes on. But he did well at school.

He turned out to be a very capable student. And it seemed that God had his eyes on this little Buddhist boy. So, God has a plan.

God has a plan for, had a plan for Jesus. And he had a plan for this little boy. But it's also quite unexpected. You see, God's plan might have been perfect, but it didn't work out the way that people might have thought that it would work out.

You see, often we expect God to work in a certain way, but God doesn't work that way. You see, in Jesus' time, when he was born, most people expected the Messiah to come as a figure who was very much like King David, a warrior who would conquer his enemies.

[13 : 06] But the way Jesus was born blows these expectations out of the water completely. His parents were ordinary people from a small town with a poor reputation.

He was born in the most ordinary place, a stable. You would expect a king to be born in a palace under proper care, at least. But it didn't work out that way. And the poor shepherds didn't know about all the build-up to this event.

They didn't know about Elizabeth and Zechariah and the angel Gabriel coming to visit them and coming to visit Mary. They didn't know any of this. They had no expectations at all.

Here they were, minding their own business out in the fields, probably sitting around their own campfire in the middle of the night, just telling stories to each other, looking after the sheep.

Everything is dark and quiet, except for the bleating of a few sheep nearby.

And suddenly this bright light appears. No wonder they're frightened. And although they would not have understood very much, they did understand what the angel was saying to them.

[14 : 13] That is that the Saviour, the Christ, has now been born. The one that Israel had been waiting for for centuries has finally arrived.

And then something else unexpected happens. You know, a great company of the heavenly host of heaven appears with the angel.

It's so unexpected that they would appear before a small audience of angels. You know what? It doesn't quite make a lot of sense. You know, one of the questions I have is if the whole host of heaven is going to appear before you, why not do it in the big city?

Why not do it in Jerusalem, where everybody can see you? Why do it out in the middle of the field somewhere, where there's only a few shepherds watching? You know, I wish they could have at least taken a few photographs for the rest of us, so we could see what it really looked like.

But the way that God chooses to work says a lot about himself. What does it show us about God? What do you think?

[15 : 27] Well, it makes sense if you know that God looks out for those who are not in the spotlight.

Shepherds weren't high status. It was a dirty, low-paid, rough and unclean job. They worked with dead bodies, with, you know, poo.

It wasn't a very clean occupation, wandering around in the fields, not being exposed to the elements. And these are the people that get to see heaven rejoicing at the birth of a saviour.

How unlikely. The least deserving, the kind of the marginalised people in their community get the front seats. They are the ones who get to see heaven rejoicing at the Messiah coming into the world.

See, Luke does this. He often writes down stories of how God and Jesus went out of his way to help the poor and the unclean, the marginalised, people who were second rate, especially women as well.

[16 : 48] You see, God has a special heart for the outsider, those who are marginalised. And I wonder, too, if the shepherds point to Jesus' ultimate fate, that he will be the shepherd who will give

up his life for the sheep.

He came into this world as a baby, but later he would die a cruel and unfair death on a wooden cross like a lowly criminal. He would be executed for claiming that he was the Messiah, the King of the Jews, the great shepherd who came to save the world just as the angels proclaimed.

You know, it's a huge irony that Jesus died on the cross and losing his life for what he really was. It's so unexpected.

But it's good because God's way is amazing in that he can use the downtrodden, belittled, low-status people in this world to achieve his purposes. The lowest people in this world are invited to see heaven rejoicing at the birth of the Messiah.

So you know this little boy that I was telling you about who was destined to die? You won't read about him in the newspapers or find him in an online search. I actually did search for him, but I couldn't find him anywhere on the web.

[18:09] But his story is very significant for God's kingdom, and I'll tell you why. You see, this young boy, he's finished school, and he did very well at school, but because he was from a low-status family, then he got a job as a motor mechanic in his local village.

But he wanted to study. But he didn't have any means to do it because the family didn't have any money. But he had a friend who went to Bangkok and came back on his university break.

It's a long way to Bangkok. Like, it's 2,000 or 3,000 kilometers. It's a heck of a long way. Anyway, his friend came back, and they spent a lot of time together, and his friend said, well, actually, you can go and study in Bangkok if you really want to.

There are open universities, and with your grades, you can easily get in, and you don't have to pay fees. It's provided for you. And so he stowed away on a train, for free, made his way to Bangkok, and he didn't have any money.

So what happened was he managed to find, he managed to agree with the owner of a toilet block that he could build like a shelter on top of the toilet, and he lived in this little shelter on top of the toilet in exchange for cleaning the toilet on a daily basis.

[19:34] And so he had a little house to live in, and he had, you know, washing facilities and facilities to do his business. So that was all he needed.

And then he managed to agree, he managed to kind of get an agreement with some of the local street vendors to wash all their dishes in exchange for a bowl of noodles every day.

Okay, so he had free food. This is how he described it. He had free food, free toilet, and a free place to sleep. And that is how he studied to get through three or four years of university.

During that time, he also got involved with an OMF project helping some of the homeless street kids in Bangkok. And he would help them because they don't have any identification, and so they're basically illegal people trying to live in this society.

And so he was helped because he was a law student. He knew how to help them to get their ID, help them to find where they were born and be able to get a birth certificate and then be able to get registered so that they could get into school and get bank accounts and all that kind of thing for the future.

[20:51] And through this project, he heard about Jesus for the first time and made a decision to become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as time went by, he finished his law degree.

He became a solicitor. And then he went even further. He became, he tried three times to pass a very difficult exam and eventually became a judge in the law courts of Thailand.

So this boy, who was destined to be killed at birth, became a judge in the law court representing the king of Thailand. But not only that, he was also representing the king of kings and the Lord of lords. Isn't that a wonderful story? It's so unexpected. But that is how God works. What about us? What does the story of Jesus' birth mean for us?

You see, it's not just about Israel or the Jews or an occasional Thai person, but it's for us as well. Because the angel says in verse 10, he says, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

[22:07] This baby that has been planned for, that the angel and the Holy Spirit of God has announced, that was announced to the shepherd, he's for all people. No longer is God revealing himself just to the Jewish people, but now, he has come for the whole human race.

He is Savior, Christ and Lord. You see, the time has come now to reveal God's plan of salvation, which is for the whole world. It's for you and for me, for your children and their children.

God is not remote anymore. He is here. He's come to us. Out of all the billions of planets that are in the universe, he's chosen to come and make his home on our planet in our solar system.

He knows us. He knows what it's like to feel pain and hunger. He knows the joy of living in a family, the heartache that selfishness and broken relationships bring to people.

He knows about the sinfulness of the human heart in those who reject God and want to go their own way. And yet, he chose to enter into our world because he knows that each of us needs to be rescued from sin and brought into a relationship with God.

[23 : 31] And the only way to do that was for Jesus to come, to live in our world, to show us who God is and then to take our punishment on the cross. and because of his death, we can know that the punishment for our sin has been taken away.

And so, the great shepherd, the king of the Jews, himself becomes like a sacrificial lamb who takes away the punishment for our sins and sets us free to live in a relationship with God.

God is that good news. Isn't it good news? Isn't it just like, wow, that is amazing that God would do that for us, that he would show his love in that way?

It's good news that will bring great joy for all the people. our saviour has come. He is Christ the Lord. And when the shepherds had confirmed that the baby was real and that everything was just as the angel had said, they glorified and praised God for all the things that they'd heard and seen. Will you praise God? Will you glorify him because of Jesus? Will you lay down your life in response to the great love that he has shown you?

[25 : 05] If you do, it will change your life. It's certainly changed mine and I know that it can change yours too. It's changed Patrick's life, the way that he explained that God has changed him from the inside out.

You see, following Jesus in response to the love that he's shown us gives us a whole new reason for living our lives. It's set us free from being enslaved to bitterness and anger and dysfunctional relationship and our own habits and addictions.

It gives our life a purpose over and above the boredom and the emptiness and the pointlessness of our everyday lives. It gives us a message of hope and joy that we can share with those around us who don't know Jesus and being transformed and changed and given joy because of our relationship with him.

This story is not just for shepherds in an ancient field. The angel was clear. I will bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. He is Saviour, Christ, and the Lord.

So this planned, but also in a way unexpected baby who was announced by angels to the lowest of society, he is for you.

[26 : 32] He is Saviour, Christ, and Lord. God is no longer remote. He's entered into our world. He knows hunger, pain, joy, heartache. He understands your heart.

The great shepherd became the sacrificial lamb. The king of the Jews took the punishment we deserved on the cross. And because of his death, we are set free.

Free from sin's penalty. Free to live in a relationship with God. Free to become the people that God created for you to be.

And that's why the angel called it good news of great joy. Will you praise God? The shepherd saw the baby, confirmed everything the angel said and glorified God.

The question is, will you, will you praise God for Jesus? Will you respond to his love by giving him your life? It will change everything.

[27 : 37] Following Jesus gives us a reason to live that transcends the emptiness and the boredom that so many feel. It breaks the grip of bitterness and anger and addiction.

it shows us that our lives matter, that like Jesus himself, we have a purpose. That Thai boy who was meant to die at birth, he became a judge serving two kings.

But your story matters too. God specializes in doing the unexpected. He might have had a plan, but you don't know what that plan is yet.

He looks for those the world overlooks and he loves you and he wants you to know the joy of living in a relationship with him. So this Christmas, will you let the unexpected joy of Jesus transform your life?

Will you allow that to happen? Will you ask him to do that in your life? I'm going to pray for you and I'm going to ask God that he will do that in your life too.

[28 : 50] Heavenly Father, we thank you for the birth of Jesus, the Saviour, Christ, the Lord, the King of our lives, the King of the universe.

Thank you that you entered into our world. Thank you that you lived your life here, that you know what it's like to be human, to face the stresses and the strains of everyday life, to know the pain that we all experience in our lives.

And then Father, to take the punishment for our sin on the cross. Thank you Father for your great love and your mercy for us. And Father, we just want to say thank you.

We want to worship and praise you for what you have done. Thank you for being part of our lives and we want to invite you to be the King of our lives too.

Father, to serve you in the ways that you want us to serve you so that we can know you and know your love in a deeper way, to walk in obedience to the things that you have shown us, to become the people that you want us to be with our whole lives as we serve you wholeheartedly.

[30 : 11] We thank you for that. We ask that you would continue to lead us. We ask in Jesus' mighty name. Amen. Amen.