

December 24, 2019 VA

Isaiah 9:2-7 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

Today we celebrate the birthday of Jesus. This is a happy day for us, but the Bible reminds us that Jesus was born into unhappy times.

Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem because the Roman Emperor Augustus made them go there for the sake of taxes. Augustus had declared that Julius Caesar was a god and that he was the son of this god. Augustus took power by killing people, and he kept power by killing more people.

Remembering the Exodus, many Jews thought that Augustus was like Pharaoh and that Rome was like Egypt. They hated what Rome was doing to their country. They prayed for somebody who was even better than Moses to deliver them. They prayed that God himself would come in person to get rid of Augustus and everybody like him. They prayed that God himself would rule the whole world through Israel.

Jesus was born at night, the night of powerful people doing horrible, evil things all over the world. Sound familiar?

Into this darkness, angels brought good news to shepherds. This was downright strange. Why would God the Father send angels to people who had no power, no respect, and no money?

Instead, God could have sent angels to the big shots, to those who might help this baby to rise to the top. It seems that God had a different idea of what's important and a different idea of how to rise to the top.

What did the angels say? They said that a Savior was born in David's city, the Messiah, the Lord.

The greatest Messiah so far had been David, who was anointed king and who had saved Israel from its enemies. Rather than say God's holy name, Israel said, "Lord." So the angels said that the Lord was born in David's city, born as Messiah and King, born to save his people.

Finally, Israel's prayers were being answered. Since the Lord Jesus was born a king in Bethlehem, that meant that emperor Augustus really was not the actual Son of God. He had great armies, navies, and wealth, but the greatest power in the whole universe came in the form of this baby.

People like Augustus are like people who think that they're really rich because they have monopoly money. They just don't get God's big picture.

For Jesus is the real king over even more than this world: the real king who would choose to sacrifice his life on the cross in order to save his people, the real king who would rise from the dead in order to defeat all of the powers of evil and death, the real king who shall come again in total victory. So we celebrate his birthday on this happy day.

It's a little bit as though we have a Christmas present of a million dollar cashier's check. This check won't bounce; but until we cash it, it's just a piece of paper.

Still, wouldn't you love to have that piece of paper? Its promise would change our lives even before we cash it.

Jesus brings us something like that, but even better. He forgives us of all of our sins and opens doors for us to a new heaven and a new earth, where every tear shall be wiped away, where death shall be no more, and where righteousness shall have a home.

Jesus shall overthrow all the forces of evil, so that God's kingdom shall come and God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is born anew among us now through Word and Sacrament, and through even more gifts of the Holy Spirit. He comes to us now through prayer and through our fellow believers. Jesus also comes to us now through those who need our compassion the most and seem to deserve it the least. He changes our lives now, as he promises to change our lives so much more for all eternity.

Today, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We give thanks for his life, his death, and his resurrection. We celebrate the ways that Jesus is here now with us. We hope in that day when all of his promises shall be kept completely, when he shall rule over everything everywhere.

So we sing together "Joy to the world." For the world's Savior, Messiah, and Lord has been born in Bethlehem. Jesus also has been born again now in the hearts of his disciples. "Come let us adore him." Amen

Pastor Carl A. Jensen, livingsystemsconsult@gmail.com