

A (CURIOUS) KING IS BORN

Luke 1:26-33

Even though non-religious Christmas symbols seem to be gaining favor, nativity scenes depicting Jesus' birth remain common during the holiday season. We are familiar with those scenes – loving parents in plain, but clean clothes, lovingly gazing upon their pristine baby lying in a manger surrounded by adoring people and animals. But those scenes, while they contain many elements recorded in the gospels, portray them in ways that loses the tensions that surrounded Jesus' birth. Many people in our country are thinking about Jesus' birth and so, even though he was not born around Christmas Day, we will take advantage of the holiday's focus to help us think about the tensions that were a part of Jesus' birth and what those tensions mean for our lives.

Jesus' royal identity

- Luke opens his account of Jesus' birth with a series of divine announcements declaring Jesus' royal identity. For example:
 - Luke records an angel predicting John the Baptist's birth to his father Zechariah, informing him that John would be the promised transitional figure who would prepare the Jews for the arrival of their messianic king and the end of their exile (*Luke 1:13-17; Malachi 3:1-4; 4:5-6*).
 - He followed his account of John's birth prediction with Jesus' birth prediction in which an angel announced to Mary that her future son would be God's promised, anointed king who would assume David's throne and who would rule over an unending kingdom (*Luke 1:26-33; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Ezekiel 37:24-28; Daniel 2:31-44; 7:13-14*).
 - Luke included Zechariah's Holy-Spirit-inspired prophecy following John's birth in which Zechariah declared that God had "raised up a horn of salvation"¹ to deliver His people from their "enemies" (*Luke 1:67-79*).
 - He also mentioned the angel's declared that Jesus' birth was "good news", using a word commonly used in the Roman world to refer to the emperor's pronouncements including the birth of a royal child (*Luke 2:10-11*).
- Luke's record of Jesus' royalty, however, contrasts with the other circumstances surrounding his birth and early life.
 - Jesus was born with the animals and under the rule of Rome rather than in the comforts of a palace or the temple (*Luke 2:1-7*).
 - Angels announced Jesus' birth to unimportant shepherds in a field instead of the Jewish political and religious establishment (*Luke 2:8-20*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- Jesus grew up in a disregarded, rural city to poor parents rather than in a cultural center with all the benefits afforded to wealthy and powerful people (*Luke 2:22-24, 39-40; John 1:45-46*).
- The contrasting circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth establish a pattern that defined his life. Jesus, for example, repeatedly talked about his royal, divine identity, yet he:
 - Took up an itinerant lifestyle rather than living in luxury (*Luke 9:57-58*).
 - Rejected status to embrace service (*Matthew 20:20-28*).
 - Taught that one should love their enemies rather than fight against them (*Matthew 5:38-48; cf. Luke 1:67-79*).
 - Resisted the Jews' effort to make him their king to instead embrace divisive teachings that drove people away from him (*John 6:1-66*).

Applications

The contrasting circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth reveal a truth he articulated at the end of his life - his rule and his kingdom do not operate by the logic of our world (*John 18:36*). As people who claim citizenship in Jesus' kingdom, we need to follow his example, which involves things like:

- Embracing selflessness rather than power by serving other people's needs rather than our own needs.
- Seeing the path to victory lies in trusting God rather than advancing in things like status, wealth, or career.
- Rejecting violence and enduring suffering by willingly forgoing our rights for the benefit of those who take advantage of us.
- Loving people rather than seeking to control them by pressing our ideas or opinions on them.

For the coming week:

To help extend the lesson and to encourage you to make it personal, take time during the coming week to consider the following material:

Read and reflect

Read Jesus' birth accounts in Matthew 1-2 and in Luke 1-2 and consider what details they record and what things they leave out. Reflect on what the details reveal about Jesus and how they prepare readers for the story of his ministry.

Act

Choose one detail from Jesus' birth stories that offers you insight into his identity, consider how that insight can impact your relationships, and pray for God's help in following Jesus' example in your life.