

JESUS' UNEXPECTED SALVATION

Matthew 1:18-21

The Christmas season offers a time when many people around the world think about Jesus' birth. While his birth most likely took place in the Spring and the date of his birth possesses no sacramental value, as a family of people committed to following Jesus, we want people to think about him. So, last Sunday, we began a three-lesson series taking advantage of the attention given to Jesus in December. Last week, we considered the announcement that Jesus' birth revealed his royal identity and how his rule differed from the world's kingdoms and the expectation of those awaiting his arrival. This lesson continues the series by exploring the announcement that Jesus' birth would bring salvation to his people, a salvation that also differed from the expectations surrounding it. Today we will explore how...

Jesus' birth is "good news of great joy"¹ because, as God's promised king, he grants freedom.

"He will save his people from their sins"²

Luke's gospel opens with the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she would "bear a son...and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (*Luke 1:26-33*). Moved by the Holy Spirit, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, uttered a prophecy concerning the hope bound to the announcement of Jesus' royal identity:

*BLESSED BE THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL,
FOR HE HAS VISITED AND REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE
AND HAS RAISED UP A HORN OF SALVATION FOR US
IN THE HOUSE OF HIS SERVANT DAVID,
AS HE SPOKE BY THE MOUTH OF HIS HOLY PROPHETS FROM OF OLD,
THAT WE SHOULD BE SAVED FROM OUR ENEMIES
AND FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US (LUKE 1:68-71)*

However, the gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry reveal that the salvation connected to his birth did not free people from the enemies they anticipated.

- Matthew noted that the angel's announcement to Mary stated that Jesus came to "save his people from their sins" (*Matthew 1:21*). However, we should note that the Jewish people

¹ *Luke 2:10*. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

² *Matthew 1:21*.



connected their sins to their physical captivity, and they anticipated God's forgiveness would result in their freedom from their captors (*cf. Deuteronomy 28:15-68; Daniel 9:1-19; Nehemiah 9:32-37*).

- Jesus' kingdom frustrated that anticipation because it did not concern itself with Rome's pagan rule over his world (*cf. Matthew 22:15-22*), much less the physical borders, infrastructure concerns, fiscal policies, or military agendas upon which the kingdoms of our world focus.
- Instead, Paul informs us that Jesus pursues a goal larger than positioning his kingdom among the world's kingdoms - he seeks to unite all things in heaven and earth so that he can present to God a creation submitted to His rule (*Ephesians 1:9-10; 1 Corinthians 15:25-28*).
- But Jesus does not seek unity and submission through force or coercion; he seeks it through selfless, sacrificial service (*John 13:3-17; Matthew 20:20-28*).
- Jesus' selflessness and sacrifice reveal the real power of his rule - he is the expression of God's love (*John 3:16-17*).
- Because he represents God's love, Jesus' royal mission focuses on rescuing people from their enemy (*Luke 1:67-79*).
- As with Jesus' kingdom, the enemy he came to defeat does not possess physical borders - he came to conquer the co-regents of sin and death, the oppressive, evil powers at work in our world and the source of the cascading problems we experience in the world around us (*Matthew 1:21; John 8:31-37; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Ephesians 6:10-12*).

Applications

Jesus came to free people from the tyranny of sin and death. He calls all who submit themselves to his rule to be his witnesses, to advocate for his mission through their behavior in the world. As a family of people who claim to live under Jesus' rule, we should:

- Mourn the presence of suffering and death in the world rather than contribute to them in pursuit of personal comfort, economic gain, or political agendas.
- Seek to relieve the suffering of the people around us as an expression of Jesus' rest (*cf. Matt 11:28-30; 25:31-46*).
- Teach people to love and obey Jesus (*Matthew 28:18-20*), recognizing that he is the solution to the problems we experience in the world.

May God help us better understand the salvation Jesus offers and help us submit ourselves to Jesus so that our lives honor him and his agenda.

