

Two Kings  
Luke 2:1-20  
The Nativity of Our Lord  
December 24, 2021 -- Christmas Eve

“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Tonight we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord! Joy to the World, the Lord has come! Our text tonight is the familiar Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke – a story that tells us about two kings. The first king is:

#### I. The Emperor, Caesar Augustus

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus...

People of the known world, behold your king and savior. His title is Caesar Augustus. Caesar is the title given to the ruler of the Roman Empire; it means that he is the emperor of the known world (even if all the known world doesn't agree with that assessment), so he's your king. And Augustus isn't his name, but another accolade given by the Roman Senate; it means "revered one." Your king, then, is "Caesar, the Revered One." And that title implies that this king is more than human, a little bit divine. In fact, after his death he would be called a god. Caesar Augustus: king, divine one; and, as your emperor, he's considered to be the savior of the world.

It makes sense that he lives in an extremely luxurious palace, doesn't it? And it makes sense that that palace is in Rome, the center of civilization. All of this shows his status and position. He's surrounded by his elite guard, demonstrating his power and authority. He's attended by philosophers and senators, acknowledging his wisdom and intelligence. When he speaks, or even raises a finger, everyone quiets down and pays attention. So behold how this king and savior goes about his work of ruling and saving.

For one thing, he sends out a decree, demanding that all his subjects return to their home towns in order to register for a census. This is not a suggestion, not an option if the people have nothing better to do. It's a command. When the Caesar speaks, you've got to do what he says. Better pack up your suitcase. He's your king and savior, and that's how it is.

Now, note the reason for the census -- Caesar wants you to pay taxes. In order to preserve the known world, he needs your money and he's going to take it. One way or another, he's going to take it.

So, paying taxes is not an option; the emperor is not ringing a bell and soliciting donations. Get out your checkbooks. Or else. Or else what? Or else imprisonment, scourging, beheading, even crucifixion. That's how this king works to save the world. "I'm your king, and you're my subjects because I have more power than you do. I need your taxes, and I'll punish you if you don't pony up. There are enemies to this kingdom; if necessary, I'll conscript you into my army and I'll send you to fight and die for me. I'm more important than you are, because I'm the Caesar, the Revered One."

All in all, as kings go, Caesar Augustus has the whole emperor-thing going quite well; he's hardly a tyrant, but a just ruler with a huge job of saving and preserving the known world.

But note these things about this king and savior, for these are three very important limitations. For one thing, while he's considered the savior of the world, he is not the savior of you, personally. His job is to keep the empire intact -- to conquer enemies and keep barbarians at bay, not deliver you from death to life. If you have to die to accomplish his work, so be it; he's willing to sacrifice you in order to be the savior.

This leads us to the second limitation: when you die, he won't raise you from the dead. Unless you're among a tight circle of friends, he has no idea who you are and doesn't really care if you live or die. And, in fact, the best way to live with this king is to live under his radar, unnoticed by him. Not only that, but he can't raise you from the dead, even if he wants to. He's a sinful human being.

Which leads us to the third limitation: this king and savior is going to die, too, and he can't raise himself from the dead. If this is your king and savior, his days are numbered -- so the guarantees of his care for you have a shelf life, and the next king might not like you so much.

No wonder Psalm 146 declares, Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish. (Ps. 146:3-4)

You need a **better** Savior than that. So rejoice, this night, dear friends in Christ. We do not gather here to celebrate a merry Caesaraugustusmas. This is Christmas, for the angels declare a far better Savior.

## II. The Savior, Christ the Lord

To the shepherds, the angel declares, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Lk. 2:10-12).

We move from Caesar Augustus to Christ the Lord. Instead of palace and comfy cradle, He's swaddled up and laid in a manger. Instead of senators and philosophers, grubby shepherds rush in from the fields to stare at the Newborn. No armies are present, although the shepherds say that they've seen and heard the hosts of heaven-singing! Singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Angels aside, though, compared to the pomp and circumstance of Caesar's daily activities, this baby is just a little blip in history, born while backwoods Bethlehem sleeps and can't be bothered.

The difference couldn't be greater -- but not the way you think. Once the angels have departed, Caesar will have a better floor show, but don't forget the angel's words: Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. We'll start at the end and work our way back.

That Baby is the Lord. He's Yahweh, Creator of all things. In a mystery far beyond our understanding, God has become flesh. The eternal Son of God, begotten of His Father from eternity, is now less than an hour old. The omni-present Lord is stuck, swaddled up in a manger and unable to move. Almighty, all-powerful, He has yet to coordinate His fingers or discover His toes. The all-seeing

Lord of the universe hasn't opened His eyes. But despite the human youth and frailty, He remains fully the Lord God Almighty. Even when He hangs on the cross and dies for the sins of the world, He remains fully the Lord God Almighty. He doesn't require your taxes to do His work or accomplish His mission -- though He delights to use people and their gifts as His instruments, as He has Joseph and Mary and even Caesar. He doesn't need anything from you, and you have nothing to add to Him; what in this world does not already belong to Him? Those gifts which we offer are only sacrifices of thanksgiving, returning to Jesus what is already His. The Baby is the Lord.

The Baby is Christ, the Lord, says the angel. That means that He is the Messiah, the anointed One, the real deal. He's the One that God has promised through the ages, the One for whom His people have waited through centuries of darkness and suffering. God the Father has specifically appointed His Son to go about this work, and He will accept Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf. No matter what appearances indicate, no matter how the manger and cross look, this Christ will not fail in what He has come to do. And because He is the chosen Messiah, His term of office will never run out. There will never be a time where He ceases to have mercy for you.

This Baby is the Savior, Christ the Lord. He is born to save, and this salvation is eternal. He is not the latest weapon in the fight against the barbarians at the fringes of the empire; no, Caesar and his armies are enough to take care of them. **This** Baby is taking on the **real** enemies, the ones that Augustus and all his armies can't defeat: this Baby is born to conquer sin, death and grave.

Now, are you ready for the really good news? The angel doesn't just say, "There is born a Savior, Christ the Lord." The angel says, "Unto you is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Unto you!

This Savior is not here to save the world in general, but you in particular. He's not your Savior if you manage to stay out of trouble and under the radar while He cleans up the place. He's born to save you, specifically. He is born with flesh and blood because you are flesh and blood. Because your flesh and blood get sick, He will bear all of your sicknesses and afflictions in His body to destroy them. Because He loves you so much as to number every hair on your head, He has the fine matte of a newborn on His scalp, a scalp that will later accept a crown of thorns for you. Because He desires the death of no one and earnestly desires that you have eternal life, He's become flesh to die in your place on the cross. That's the reason for this birth. He's been born to die for the sins of the world. Not just the generic world; He's born to die for you.

He accomplishes this. He wins your salvation on the cross; and as He does so, He doesn't save the world in general, but all the individuals in particular. He dies personally for the 7.9 billion different individuals who inhabit this world today, as well as all individuals through history. And He rises again so that they might live. So that you might live. And so that you might be certain, He gives you this forgiveness and life personally. He brings you to the font and washes you, by name, with water and the Word. He speaks His Gospel through His messengers, and says, "I forgive you." He feeds you His own body and blood, for the forgiveness of your sins.

Note one last thing about this, your Savior. He is not a coercive king. Caesar said, "I will force you to be my subject, and I will use my sword to make you pay your taxes. I'm not giving you a choice. Follow me or die." That's not how this Savior saves. As He requires nothing from you, He also forces nothing on you. He declares, "I win forgiveness and peace, life and salvation for you, and I give them to you

freely. But I will not force these gifts upon you. I will not make you be My people. If you don't want forgiveness and peace, life and salvation, you need not follow Me. If you do not want eternity in heaven, I will not compel you to paradise. If you want another savior, you may follow another -- but bear in mind he cannot save you."

This King and Savior does not rule His kingdom by force, but only forgiveness and mercy. That makes His gifts of grace and life all the precious.

Caesar Augustus is dead, and has been for a long time; great man though he might have been, he is not your Savior. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and remains your Savior now and forever. Do not listen to the temptations to make Him less than He is. Don't believe He was just a good man, nothing more, dead and gone and no longer able to save. Don't think He's a Caesar-savior, who saves you as long as you do enough and pay your heavenly taxes on time. Don't think He's nothing more than an arbitrator who keeps a list, checks it twice, and rewards you according to how nice you've been. Do not believe that He forces you into heaven, so that you can sin and do what you want and be saved. Don't think He's just a Baby in a manger to feel good about. If these are the sorts of things you believe -- as many do, then you don't believe in the Savior, Christ the Lord. All of these ideas demean Him, make Him less than He is. If He is less than He is, then He is no longer your Savior. He is no longer the Christ. He is no longer the Lord. If He is less, He cannot save you.

So instead, rejoice in who the angel declares Him to be: the Savior, which is Christ the Lord. Because you were born in sin, He is born to save you from sin. Because you're made of mortal flesh and blood, He becomes flesh and blood to raise you up to immortality. Because you face death, He is born to die and give you life. He is your Savior, Christ the Lord. And He is born for you. "Joy to the World, the Lord has come" – for you!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.