

# Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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**Sermon Title:** The Nativity

**Sermon Text:** Luke 2:1-21

**Luke 2:1** In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

**Luke 2:2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

**Luke 2:3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

**Luke 2:4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,

**Luke 2:5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

**Luke 2:6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

**Luke 2:7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

**Luke 2:8** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

**Luke 2:9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

**Luke 2:10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

**Luke 2:11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

**Luke 2:12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

**Luke 2:13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

**Luke 2:14** “Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

**Luke 2:15** When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

**Luke 2:16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

**Luke 2:17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

**Luke 2:18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

**Luke 2:19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

**Luke 2:20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**Luke 2:21** ¶ And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

**Main Point:** The manger reveals a King whose worth is unshaken by his humility and whose glory is magnified in being worshiped by the lowly.

### **Outline:**

1. A King with a King
2. A King with a Crib
3. A King with Worshipers

### **Introduction**

Throughout history, the births of earthly kings have been surrounded by spectacle, splendor, and stories of divine omens.

It is said that Alexander the Great's arrival was marked by dreams of lightning bolts and the destruction of a great temple—interpreted as signs of world conquest.

Augustus Caesar was born into nobility and hailed as the “Son of God” and “Prince of Peace,” with legends of supernatural conception and celestial signs.

In France, the birth of Louis XIV was celebrated with fireworks and national rejoicing after decades of infertility for his parents.

Pharaohs were depicted as divine from the womb, and even the Buddha was said to walk the moment he was born, with lotus flowers blooming beneath his feet.

The world welcomed these rulers with fanfare and lavish expectation.

This morning's text presents us the birth of a king – and one who was superior to Caesar or Pharaoh or Buddha, or any earthly king.

Matthew 2:2 shows us the magi from the east who ask the question, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” Scripture teaches that Jesus sits on the throne of King David.

In John 1:49 Nathanael's confession when he meets Jesus is, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6:15 that Jesus is the “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Revelation 17 says that “the Lamb will conquer...for he is Lord of lords and King of kings.”

You see, this child is the true king. The seeming problem is, when the true King entered the world as we see here today, there was no royal proclamation, no earthly palace, no parade of nobles. Earthly rulers weren't eagerly waiting. Jesus Christ was born in a forgotten corner of the Roman Empire, not in a throne room but in a stable. His first bed was a manger, his first visitors were shepherds—social

outcasts. While heaven broke into song above the fields of Bethlehem, the *world* barely noticed.

This morning, let's not be like the world. Let's give Jesus our greatest attention and focus. Let's notice three things about this king who is born here today.

In the humility of Christ's birth, we see the real King—a King who submits to authority, stoops in weakness, and is worshiped by the lowly—yet in his humility still remains eternally worthy of worship.

## **1. A King with a King**

First, the nativity narrative of Christ shows us a King with a king.

The first thing, the passage tells us is that “a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered,” and this is the reason why Joseph and Mary have traveled from Galilee where they lived to go to Bethlehem.

Even though Jesus is the king of the whole universe, he is the king of kings, and lord of lords... even though this is him, the nativity story dares us to notice that Jesus lives under an earthly king: Caesar Augustus. Caesar is why Jesus is born in Bethlehem at all. Caesar is the reason why all of these human beings are migrating, *en mass*, and being counted in the census. It is the king flexing his authority that has driven Mary and Joseph to this place where Jesus is born. Even in his infancy he is under the capricious mood of an earthly ruler. He lives under earthly human authority.

The circumstances of his birth are dictated by Caesar Augustus: a man with blood on his hands, an idolater, and someone who did not love or worship the true God, but who instead proclaimed his own adopted father to be a god, and allowed himself to blasphemously be called the son of God. Augustus was a great ruler, but not a good man. And yet Jesus in his birth and life is willing to live under this man whom God placed over him.

And the fact that the Son of God became incarnate and lived under authorities reminds us of our own calling to do the same. Not only was he under Caesar, but he lived under his own parents. Authorities are an embedded part of life. And in a

fallen world, every authority except God is fallible and imperfect. Jesus lived under an imperfect emperor, and even under imperfect parents. Yet he lived with appropriate submission to them.

So when I was a teenager, maybe around 15, I decided that my parents were fools. I was very rebellious, and I looked down on them. Now, when I was 15 it is really I who was the fool, but I did think they were stupid and I knew so much more. And part of why I thought that was, there were grains of truth in my opinion. They *were* flawed parents. They didn't know everything. When you see the imperfection of your parents (or anyone in authority over you) it can be really hard to submit to it.

And so just think of the imperfection of *Jesus'* parents. We saw this last week, that Mary and Joseph are sinners. And yet Jesus perfectly embodied submission to them. When you can see those sins and flaws, it can sometimes be amazing to think, "God wants me to submit to them because they are my authorities."

But think of Jesus, though: he actually *was* smarter and superior to his parents, objectively. Unlike them he did not suffer the effects of sin on his mind and intellect. How hard must it have been to submit to such flawed parents? And yet he did submit to them.

We know that for us as sinners, we always resist authority, and we are always looking for reasons to resist authority. In fact, it is incredibly common for people to reject authorities, institutions... really anyone or anything that might make claims of authority we will look for a reason to say "no."

This is the air we breathe: an incredibly anti-authority age. So we might even be Christians, but still for us it is also challenging to live with flawed and sinful leaders over us. But Christ always honored his authorities, and he always did so in exactly the way he was meant to. He really is a model of submission.

If you yearn to be like Jesus, then meditate on him. Meditate upon his character. Meditate upon his obedience. We should spend time in the word seeing what Jesus is like there. But I want to suggest that this morning, at least, is an opportunity for you to even ask this question: am I rebellious? Am I someone who

rejects authority, or who looks down on those that God, in his fatherly sovereignty has placed over me?

Or here's a question: am I better than Jesus? Am I more worthy to rebel than Jesus was?

Whether it's parents or church leaders or government leaders, let's pray for those in authority instead of rebelling against them. And when we do that, let's look to Jesus who from the moment of his birth lived under flawed but God-ordained authorities in his life.

## **2. A King with a Crib**

Second, the incarnation presents us with a king in a crib.

In verse 7 we're told: "She gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger."

The word for this is humiliation. We may think of humiliation as meaning embarrassment, but really humiliation is bigger than that. It is God the son intentionally lowering himself for our sake. Here is how our larger catechism explains Christ's humiliation: "His being born, and that in a low condition; made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time."

The humiliation of the Son happens even at his conception and birth, but it also includes being born to poor obscure parents, in a stable, with animals instead of in a kingly place, being laid in a feeding trough instead of a cradle, and being unrecognized by the powerful.

But another aspect of the Son's humiliation is his genuine helplessness. Think about how painful helplessness is for us.

One of the biggest sources of stress in our life is when we feel powerless. Something happens that we can't control. There's a natural disaster... there's a nasty financial surprise... a medical emergency takes place... someone hits us in traffic... other people do things that drive us crazy... whatever it might be.

Inevitably one of the most human feelings is the feeling of powerlessness, and we all know what it feels like. In those moments, we are driven to prayer, and we're driven to cast ourselves on God because we are helpless and powerless.

We all experience this, but which of us would ever willingly choose to be powerless? Yet here today, God the son chooses willingly to descend from the realms of glory to live as a man with no human control and to sympathize with all of us who have tasted powerlessness and a lack of control.

In the incarnation, God is cared for by his own creatures. And sinful fallen creatures at that. Listen to St. Augustine:

“He was created from a mother whom He created.

“He was carried by hands that He formed.

“He cried in the manger in wordless infancy—He, the Word, without whom all human eloquence is mute.”

Here is the paradox (and it's glorious): the one who holds all things together is held in the arms of a young woman.

Even in the incarnation the Son continues to exist as God, and upholding the universe.

Christmas is a good time to learn a new theological concept. And what we're talking about here is what is called the *extra calvinisticum*. What is meant by this *extra*? What is meant is this:

*The Son of God, in the incarnation, truly assumed a human nature, but was not contained or limited by it. Even as Jesus lived, suffered, and died in his human nature, the eternal Son continued to exist and operate beyond the flesh—in the full power of his divinity.*

Jesus never ceases to be God, and God never ceases to be God over the universe even as the Son is incarnate. This means that The Creator is held in the arms of his creatures—yet at that very moment, he is also holding *them* in existence. He never stops upholding Mary, even as she is holding him; even as she is nursing him.

At his birth, Jesus is a king with a crib.

### 3. A King with Worshipers

Finally, the child is a king with worshipers.

It is in the very nature of who God is that, when we are in His presence, we are meant to worship Him. And when our hearts are right, we will *want* to worship. We were created for it. Worship isn't just something we do—it's the most natural and fitting response to the glory of God. There is nothing more unnatural than for God to be ignored, and nothing more right, more appropriate, more human than for us to worship God.

Part of the humiliation of the Son that we mentioned earlier was that though he was a king, he wasn't treated like a king, and he wasn't worshiped. He wasn't born in a palace, he was born in a barn. He wasn't celebrated like King Philip or Caesar Augustus when they were born. Instead, he was born to lowly parents in a lowly place, surrounded by filth and animals, cared for by his parents in the best way that they knew, but he did not receive a royal welcome.

But he may not have been heralded by kings and celebrated by the nations, but there is worship here. It's actually angels and shepherds who do the worshipping. And I think this is precious and important.

Jesus' worth isn't measured by the earthly status of the one who worships him. His worth and greatness and beauty is objective and true regardless of the recognition he receives from mankind. He is worthy of our recognition and worship, but his worth doesn't depend on our recognition. How do we know? Because God chooses in verse 8 to appear to shepherds instead of kings.

For us, the shepherds have almost been immortalized as this non-negotiable, essential part of the birth narrative of Jesus. We're very attached to them, perhaps. But that is not how first century readers would have thought of the shepherds.

For us, the shepherds have become almost beloved fixtures of the Christmas story. People carve them into nativity scenes and place them beside the manger. But that is not how they were viewed in the first century. Shepherds were not romanticized. They were poor, often ceremonially unclean, cultural outsiders, and

religiously overlooked. They were the kind of people you did not invite to testify in court, let alone make the first public witnesses to the birth of the Messiah.

And that's the point. God knows this. And so very much on purpose he doesn't announce the birth of His Son to Caesar or to the priests in the temple. He sends angels to the outskirts of society. He revealed his glory to these people that the world saw as unworthy. Why does he do this? Because the worthiness of Jesus does not depend on the stature of those who recognize him. In fact, the very pattern of the gospel is this: God lifts up the lowly and brings down the proud. The first people to hear the good news of this child's birth are not the powerful—but the poor in spirit, the overlooked, the outcasts.

Think of what they see: the heavens are torn open, and the glory of God shines in the open field of God's creation; not in a manmade palace, not in a courtroom, but in a field, to laborers and wanderers and nobodies. Because this King—the true King—hasn't come to be served, but to serve. And from the very beginning, even in his birth, he is drawing near to the lowly. And even in his death, he dies with outcasts and criminals. His life is bookended by humility.

In the first century after Christ's death, the Christian writer Melito of Sardis described how early Christianity didn't spread through philosophers or princes, but through slaves, women, and the poor. It was those people, Melito says, who bore witness to Christ.

Before he wrote his Christian classic work *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan was a poor, barely educated tinker (metal-worker), known for profanity and irreverence. Yet through deep conviction of sin and a long spiritual struggle, Christ rescued him—and Bunyan became a powerful preacher and writer. His enduring impact reminds us of the same principle we see with the shepherds in the field: that God delights to lift the lowly and use the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

These are people had no earthly importance—many of them were illiterate, socially invisible, or despised. Yet they were gripped by the gospel, and many of them endured horrible persecution and martyrdom with joy. Their faith didn't come from some kind of greatness in them. It did display the greatness of the God they worshiped, though.

These were lowly people who were captivated by God's glory and worshiped him. Would you see yourself as one of them? Please don't be captivated by a quest for status. It's a dead-end. Will you worship with the shepherds instead of with kings?

If you are waiting for the world to change first, or other peoples' minds to change first before you follow Jesus, don't do that. There are actually signs that very influential people in the world are turning towards Jesus. And I could give you their names right now. But let me say this: it's encouraging to see folks taking Jesus seriously. But don't wait for the influencers and the important people of this world to start following Jesus. Go with the shepherds and the lepers and the poor. Let those be your people. Don't wait for the mood or the vibe to shift toward Jesus. Follow Jesus because he is worthy, not because of the spirit of the age.

Worship is what we were all made for. We are never more at home than when we are treasuring, loving, serving, and worshiping the greatest good; and there is no one greater than God.

For so many people in our world, their normal and daily condition is worshiping and loving worthless things. As C.S. Lewis has said, people could have a day at the sea, but content themselves with playing in the mud. I could give examples of this, but I don't think you need examples of worthless things. I think you know it. We see it in ourselves. Even we don't love and treasure the good. Even we love things that are bad and worthless. We glorify ourselves, love ourselves, put ourselves first, and we do great harm to ourselves in the process.

Our self-worship and self-centeredness hurts us and does damage to our souls. Why? Because God made all of us to worship him. This is why we exist. We were made to notice him, acknowledge him, serve him, worship him. He's the maker! And so when he calls us to worship, he's not calling us to some horrible drudgery, he's calling us to the thing that our souls have always cried out for, whether we always know it or not.

Psalms 100:1 "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!" *All* the earth. We were *all* made for worship.

Isaiah 45: “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!...To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance” (45:22-23). There is that universal language again.

What does Paul say in Romans 1:21? That part of man’s condemnation is that “although they knew God, they did not honor him as God.” We were all made to worship, even the most ardent atheist was created to worship. And this is true of everyone, whether we are the lowest person in society or whether we are the mightiest king.

And God doesn’t just *accept* worship from all human beings, he *demand*s it because he deserves it. He demands it because he is the greatest good, the maker of all things, the glorious Lord, the immortal king. And He calls on *all of us* to worship: All people great or small. Sometimes he is worshiped by Kings and rulers, such as we see in the Old Testament. But he’s also worshiped by average people and the lowly. That’s what happens here, isn’t it? It’s shepherds who worship him.

## **Conclusion**

And I’d like to just draw a bit more inspiration from the shepherds here as we close. The shepherds didn’t keep this news to themselves. They “made known” what they were told about Christ. They glorified God. They didn’t hoard the good news, they shared it. These were humble men, men shut out of polite society, and yet it’s these folks who hear the gospel of the birth of this child and tell others.

You know the good news. You’ve heard it. How are you doing with what you’ve been given? Are you hoarding the good news for yourself? Or are you generously sharing it? Let me just be direct: this is news to share. Absolutely. We should be sharing it. We have neighbors who were made to worship. But how are they to worship or believe in him of whom they have never heard? We can tell them! Let’s do it!

Not only should we follow the shepherds’ lead, but we should want for the church to be filled with people like these shepherds. We should want this place to be filled with anyone who will come: the poor, the weary, the less educated... maybe people who aren’t very much like us. Are we as Christians willing to see everyone

come in – even those who like these shepherds may be different from us: different classes, different races, different educations and incomes... they may not fit into what we imagine is church culture, they may not have many resources to share... from a worldly perspective they may not have much to offer. Are we willing and excited to have them? You've already heard the call: all people are called to worship and are commanded to worship.

From God's perspective, people like these shepherds are rich, not because of who they are, but because of who they have. Made in the image of the king, made to worship the king, and yes, saved by the king... even this little king in the manger who will one day sit again on his throne, and before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess: "Jesus Christ is Lord."

*Let's pray.*