

December 21, 2025 Luke 2:1-21

Sermon Title: "Great Joy for All People"

[From Today's Sermon]

"A decree was issued for a census of the entire world." The power of the Roman emperor was immense. People "from the entire world" moved under the command of one king. He who moved the Roman Empire, estimated at 45 million people, moved the world. The emperor issued decrees to the world wielding such power.

Joseph and Mary were among those swept up in this movement. From Nazareth to Bethlehem—a journey spanning 150 kilometers with significant elevation changes, taking a full week on foot. Mary was already heavily pregnant. The journey there went well, but "however," before they could return to her home in Nazareth, she went into labor while staying in Bethlehem, Joseph's hometown, the city of David.

Yet we know all the pieces were in place. Jesus was born in the town of David, just as the angel had foretold: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Bethlehem, the town of David (meaning "House of Bread"). This is the town to which Naomi, who had lost both her husband and son after fleeing to Moab during Israel's famine, returned with Ruth. It was here that Ruth met Boaz, and Obed, the grandfather of David, was born.

God places even the emperors of world-ruling empires in the palm of His hand to accomplish His purposes. All of God's works are beautiful in their time. We too have been given a life to praise God, believing in all His works that turn our fear into joy.

Introduction: The Story of Naomi and Ruth

Ruth 1:1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from the town of Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

1:2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of the two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went to the land of Moab and remained there.

1:3 Naomi's husband Elimelech died, leaving her with her two sons.

1:4 The two sons each took a Moabite woman as a wife. One was named Orpah, and the other was named Ruth. They lived there about ten years,

1:5 and both Mahlon and Kilyon also died. So Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

1:6 Now Naomi heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people and given them food. So she and her daughters-in-law set out from the land of Moab to return to her homeland.

1:7 She left the place where she was and set out with her two daughters-in-law to return to the land of Judah.

1:8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to the dead and to me.

1:9 May the Lord grant you husbands in the homes of those who care for you, as you have shown kindness to my two sons who are dead." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud.

1:10 They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

1:11 But Naomi said, "Go back, my daughters. Why would you come along with me? Do you think I still have sons in my womb who could become your husbands?

1:12 Go back, my daughters. I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought I might have a husband tonight and then give birth to sons,

1:13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them?

No, my daughters, for the Lord's hand has gone out against me, and I am in deep sorrow because of you."

1:14 They wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

1:15 Then Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods. You too should return with your sister-in-law."

1:16 But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from following you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

1:17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal severely with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death parts me from you."

1:18 When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

1:19 So the two of them continued on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women asked, "Is this Naomi?"

1:20 But Naomi said to them, "Do not call me Naomi (Pleasantness); call me Mara (Bitterness), for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

1:21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, since the Lord has afflicted me and the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me?"

1:22 So Naomi returned from the land of Moab, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, came with her. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

2:1 Now Naomi had a relative of her husband Elimelech, a man of great wealth, whose name

was Boaz.

2:2 Then Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the fields and glean behind someone kind enough to let me." Naomi said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she went.

2:3 Ruth went and gleaned in the fields behind the reapers. She happened to come to a part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

2:4 Boaz, who was from Bethlehem, came to the reapers and said, "May the Lord be with you." They answered, "May the Lord bless you."

2:9 Keep your eyes on the field where they are harvesting, and follow along. Did I not instruct the young men not to touch you? When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the young men have drawn."

2:10 She bowed down with her face to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

2:11 Boaz answered her, "I have been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died—how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people you did not know before.

2:12 May the Lord reward you fully for what you have done. May you be fully rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."

2:13 She said, "My lord, I am not worthy of all this kindness you have shown me, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant."

2:20 Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May the Lord, who watches over the living and the dead, bless him." Naomi also said to her, "He is one of our relatives, one of our closest kinsmen."

4:9 Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I have bought from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Kilyon, and Mahlon.

4:10 I have also bought Ruth the Moabite, who was the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife. This is to raise up the name of the dead man in his inheritance, so that his name may not be cut off from among his kinsfolk and from the gate of his hometown. You are witnesses today."

4:11 Then all the people at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you prosper in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.

4:12 May the Lord make this young woman's children a house like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

4:13 So Boaz took Ruth as his wife, and when he went in to her, The Lord enabled her to

conceive, and she bore a son.

4:14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer today. May his name be renowned in Israel!"

4:15 He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For she bore him, your beloved daughter-in-law, who is more precious to you than seven sons."

4:16 So Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom and became his nurse.

4:17 The women neighbors gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

4:18 Now the descendants of Perez were as follows: Perez fathered Hezron,

4:19 Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab,

4:20 Aminadab was the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

4:21 Salmon was the father of Boaz, and Boaz was the father of Obed.

4:22 Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David.

Isaiah 9:1 But the land that was in distress shall be glad again and rejoice; and shall be glad, even as they that rejoice at the harvest, and as they that divide the spoil.

9:2 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

9:3 You have increased the nation; you have enlarged its joy; they rejoice before you as with the joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.

Good morning, everyone. And Merry Christmas.

Tomorrow is the winter solstice. Mornings come late, and evenings darken quickly. The time of darkness's rule has only grown longer, but finally, the power of the day begins to increase.

Isaiah 9:1 But the land that was in trouble shall see the light; the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, where there was the reproach, where they said, "The way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles," shall be glorified.

9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shone.

9:3 You have increased the nation; you have enlarged its joy; they rejoice before you as with the joy at the harvest, as they exult when dividing the spoil.

John 8:12 Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

1:2 He was with God in the beginning.

1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

1:4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

1:6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

1:7 He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that through him everyone might believe.

1:8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

1:9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

1:10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

1:11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

1:12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned,

Whoever does not believe has already been judged, because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

3:19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

3:20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

3:21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been done in God.

We give thanks for the radiant grace of Christmas. The light that shines upon us is the

forgiveness and eternal life brought by the life-giving sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not like the lights of Christmas decorations, which shine vainly only when the switch is turned on. This light shines eternally for those who believe.

There was a woman named Naomi in Bethlehem of Judah in Israel.

Bethlehem, meaning "house of bread," was originally a place abundant in food. But at that time, a famine occurred, and Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons moved to Moab, where food was available. Her husband died in that land, leaving Naomi and her two sons. The two sons took wives in that land. But after about ten years, both sons died.

1:6 At that time, Naomi heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people and given them food. So she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return from the land of Moab to her homeland.

1:7 So she set out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law went with her on the road to return to the land of Judah.

1:8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's house. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown kindness to the dead and to me.

Her sister-in-law left, but the other woman refused to leave her mother-in-law.

1:16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

1:17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates me from you."

When they returned to Bethlehem, her former friend came to see her. Then Naomi said, 1:20 Naomi said to them, "Do not call me Naomi (Pleasantness); call me Mara (Bitterness), for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 1:21 I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, since the Lord has afflicted me and the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me?" We too have times of smooth sailing and times of headwinds. Do we ever look back fondly and brightly on happier times, thinking, "Those were good days"? Now we may be desolate and fallen, longing to return to those days, yet we cannot turn back time. But for those who truly believe in God, can we never believe that God will bring joy again?

No, is not our Christmas about believing that God is with us, making the impossible possible,

shining light on the seemingly forsaken, giving great purpose, filling us with great joy, humbling the proud, and bringing a land of warmth and kindness? How blessed are those who fully believe that what the Lord has spoken will surely come to pass.

In the land of Moab, a place of despair. Yet though it may have been a land of despair, Ruth, a wonderful bride surpassing even seven sons, surpassing even a biological daughter, was given to her.

And then came the encounter with Boaz. When Ruth went out to glean, it was “unexpectedly” the field of Boaz, her nearest kinsman.

In times of despair when our own plans fail no matter how much we scheme, God steadily advances His gracious plan. We call it “unexpected,” but everything is being guided within God's plan. Indeed, Naomi is Naomi (delight), and the Lord delights in her.

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Someone was watching Ruth working desperately for her mother-in-law.

2:8 Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field, nor leave this one. Stay here with my female servants.

2:9 Keep your eyes on the field where they are reaping, and follow along. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink what the young men have drawn."

2:10 She bowed down to the ground and said to him, "Why have you been so kind to me, a foreigner?"

2:11 Boaz replied, "I have been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died—how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people you did not know before.

2:12 May the Lord reward you fully for what you have done. May you be fully rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."

God is steadily carrying out His plan.

Jeremiah 29:10 For thus says the Lord: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill my promise to bring you back to this place.

29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

29:12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

29:14 I will be found by you, declares the Lord. I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile, declares the Lord.

Hebrews 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your struggle against sin.

12:5 You have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him.

12:6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

12:7 Endure it as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

12:8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

12:9 Moreover, if we revered earthly fathers who disciplined us, should we not much more submit to the Father of our spirits and live?

12:10 For earthly fathers discipline us for a short time as they think best, but the Father of our spirits disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

12:12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

Life brings many things. Sometimes it may feel like the Lord's judgment. Going to the foreign land of Moab and marrying a local woman—perhaps that was not according to the Lord's will. Yet the Lord has deep plans. Who could have imagined that from his great-granddaughter would come the mighty King David? And that from his descendants would come Jesus Christ?

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

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

2:3 All went to their own towns to be registered.

2:4 Because Joseph himself belonged to the house and line of David, he went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, 2:5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was already pregnant.

The power of the emperor of the Roman Empire, which held 45 million people, was formidable. At his command, vast numbers of people moved to their places of origin. The Roman Empire. It was an empire that could be said to represent the world itself at that time. They obeyed his voice alone. Though the emperor was deified, he too was in the palm of the hand of the God who had imagined the world.

The census ordered by his decree was merely the stage set for Joseph and Mary to bring Jesus into the world in Bethlehem, the town of David. Did the world belong to the emperor? No, the world belongs eternally to the God who created heaven and earth.

Joseph must have thought, “Oh dear, what terrible timing for my pregnant wife,” but no, it was the best timing.

2:6 While they were staying there, the time came for Mary to give birth.

2:7 She gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The journey there was fine. The hope of returning home to give birth proved futile; “but” she went into labor while traveling.

No, no—that was the best timing. The Lord does all things beautifully in their time.

But it was a humble place. A manger in a stable. And when he died, it was on a cross on a hill of skulls outside the city. How pitiful. Yet it was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53.

53:2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

53:4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2:8 Now there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

2:9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

2:10 The angel said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

2:11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. Here was the first Christmas worship service. The call to the first Christmas worship.

"Do not be afraid. Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

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

This One is the One who takes away our fear. He is the One who frees us from the bondage of sin.

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born for us; he is Christ the Lord!!

Thank you, God. Jesus, we are truly sorry that you were born to die as our Redeemer, and we thank you so much.

The only Son of God who created the world, God Himself, is there as an infant, dressed in humble swaddling clothes, lying in a manger in a stable. What a thing! What humility, what love!!

The angels could not contain themselves and offered great praise.

2:12 "You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. This will be the sign for you."

2:13 Suddenly a great heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
2:14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

2:15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

2:16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

2:17 After seeing him, they told everyone what had been said to them about this child.

2:18 All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

2:19 But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

2:20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, which was just as it had been told them.

And now, the first Christmas service.

"Hurry and go, and worship Him."

2:16 They hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.

2:17 After seeing him, they told everyone what had been said to them about this child.

2:18 Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds said.

2:19 But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

2:20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, which was just as it had been told them.

Everything happened just as they heard!! What God speaks always comes to pass. And there is great joy and praise.

Today, the God of grace is alive and well. He is still performing His gracious works. The Savior has been born. We can always be saved, walk without fear, and move forward in joy. This is true in any circumstance we face.

◇Prayer; Heavenly Father God, **we thank You for today's worship. Thank You for the birth of Your Son, Jesus.**

When tossed about by the world, wondering why such sorrow must come, may we believe that God's beautiful, perfect work is unfolding in His timing, and that we will receive great joy. Thank You that the Lord is with us. Lead all who suffer into God's salvation and peace. Bless our families and our neighbors. Use us. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.