

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and his Son, our Lord,
Jesus Christ. Amen

It's ironic that Jesus' birth took place during a time when the Roman government was short on revenue and seeking raise some with a head tax – or what economists call a per capita tax.

And municipalities should get their fair share.

For this reason, the expectant couple were traveling to Bethlehem, the City of David – because the tax was levied according to the birthplace of the man of the house.

Was it coincidence that this meant Jesus was born – and would also be counted as a citizen of the City of David?

Was it coincidence that over 700 years before, a humble prophet named Micah announced that the ruler who would restore God's people and bring peace would be born in Bethlehem?

I think a lot of coincidences are the work of God.

Is it a coincidence that a phone call reaching out for prayer just the other day was from someone who had been welcomed more than a year ago at our clothing giveaway?

Is it a coincidence that an open door to receive food becomes the occasion for sharing faith in Jesus Christ?

Is it a coincidence when our listening ear for someone else's problems becomes an opportunity for prayer?

I don't believe these things happen by mere chance, but by God's loving activity in our lives.

So, Jesus was born in Bethlehem – the city of his ancestor king David.

But there is much more to this coincidence than just a special birthplace.

There are all the other prophecies of salvation and redemption that filled the hopes and dreams of God's people.

Psalm 89

*Lord, you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said:
"I have set the crown on one who is mighty,
I have exalted one chosen from the people.
²⁰ I have found my servant David;*

*with my holy oil I have anointed him;
21 my hand shall always remain with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.
...26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'
27 I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.
29 I will establish his line forever,
and his throne as long as the heavens endure.*

And Isaiah 7

*4 ... the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive
and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

And Isaiah 9

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice ^{and} righteousness
from that time on and forever.*

With these promises and prophecies in their hearts,

Some shepherds heard God's messenger Gabriel tell them:

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the City of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, God's anointed king, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Did you hear all those keywords?

City of David,

Savior,

Messiah,

Lord,

Son

They knew it in their bones, from this message:

God's promises of redemption – all that they had been waiting and hoping for – was being fulfilled.

They ran to Bethlehem to find their Savior -- and when they found this baby, they probably did what most of us would do –

They asked his name.

And when Joseph and Mary said, "His name is Jesus", those shepherds rejoiced, because that was a familiar word.

In the Aramaic spoken in those parts, it was pronounced Yeshua or Joshua

And in the Hebrew Scriptures, the word for salvation and Savior in all those psalms and prophecies of old, is Yeshua.

Listen to what happens when we substitute the word Jesus for the word salvation or savior:

The words of David the King and Isaiah the prophet:

- my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the power of my **Jesus**.
- Oh, that **Jesus** for Israel would come out of Zion!
- The LORD is my light and my **Jesus**— whom shall I fear?
- But as for me, afflicted and in pain— may your **Jesus**, God, protect me.
- Surely God's **Jesus** is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.
- The LORD has made his **Jesus** known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.
- ... the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment ... But my **Jesus** will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

Wow!

I encourage you to read the Old Testament Scriptures with this in mind – substitute Jesus every time you read salvation or Savior.

You will be amazed! As were the shepherds...

As were the shepherds when they found their Savior lying in a manger, as the angel had told them.

But there is more to Gabriel's good news than the fulfillment of God's Word.

There is the personal impact – The personal impact on each person who hears this message.

Today – the Savior is born – *for you*.

Not someday in the future,

Not yesterday's old news,

Not rhetorically or philosophically

But really, truly, **today!** Your Savior – and mine – is here.

- Amid uncertain changes in tax law,
- Amid fears of war in Korea,
- Amid anxiety over housing and health care,
- Amid concerns for the future for ourselves and our children and grandchildren.

Now – Today – our Savior makes himself known to us as the One who has our backs – who loves us more than his own life.

Today – with the shepherds – we find our Savior – our Jesus – swaddled in bread and wine

Himself Given and shed – for you – for the forgiveness of your sins, and the sharing of his everlasting life.

It is no coincidence that you are here to receive your Savior and Lord.

His Holy Spirit brought you and will go with you as you rejoice and tell others what you have heard and seen here.

For now you know, there are no coincidences

– just opportunities to participate in God’s work in our world.

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