

TEXT: **LUKE 2:1-7** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to his own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

TITLE: **A king in a manger**

INTRO:

1. The Christmas song away in the manger is a beautiful song that we often sing this time of year that talks about the birth of Jesus and the place where Jesus was placed after he was born.
2. We often think of that song and our mind is filled with beautiful thoughts of a wonderful setting where the animals are all standing at attention, the stars are shining brightly and everyone is just standing around admiring the beautiful new baby that has been born. We kind of picture the scene like a Christmas card. All clean and neat and tidy.
3. But I am pretty sure that it wasn't quite that way.
4. I decided to rewrite the words of that song in a way that would describe how the scene really was that day.
5. Away with the manger just give me a bed, I'm tired of the smell and that cow licked my head. Be quiet little lamb I'm trying to sleep, what's that on the floor it looks kind of deep? This hay is very scratchy, and it makes me want to sneeze. What I wouldn't give for a Holiday Inn and a continental breakfast if you please. I thought this would be different, like a fairytale in a book. Not a baby in a feeding trough while everyone takes a look.
6. I'm not being sacrilegious. That is not my intent. I just really think that may be a better description of how the scene really was.
7. Several years ago, Mark Lowery wrote a song titled **Mary did you know?** Mary did you know? I am fairly convinced that Mary didn't have a clue what awaited her.
8. In a couple of weeks we are going to consider the song Mary sang after the angel appeared to her, praising God for being mindful of her, thanking God for choosing her, rejoicing because she believed that God could work it all out, I wonder if she ever thought she would be having her baby in a stinky, smelly, unsanitary stall full of animals.

9. When I think of a place where animals are kept I don't immediately think of the birth of Jesus. As a matter of fact, the last thing I think of is the birth of Jesus. When I think of a place where animals are kept my mind goes back to my childhood.
10. As a kid I was raised out in the country. We were 16 miles from the nearest anything. I cut and chopped and carried wood for the wood stove. We raised cattle and pigs. I carried water for the animals, carried feed bags, gave the animals their shots, delivered newborn piglets, buried newborn piglets, spent about every other Saturday at the sale barn. I was a country boy.
11. During the wintertime to keep the animals out of the snow and ice and bitter cold we had several indoor stalls where we would keep the animals penned up. We had feeding troughs and watering troughs; we would throw straw down on the floor for the animals each and every day I was out there feeding and watering and taking care of the animals.
12. There was one job that I particularly hated and that was cleaning out the stalls once a week. Every week during the winter, for several years, I would go out to the stalls, get a shovel and a scraper and a wheelbarrow and I would clean out the stalls. How many here this morning understand what I was cleaning up?
13. I would wear rubber boots, layers of cloths, gloves a hat, every part of my body was covered, but do you know that somehow the smell of the manure would get in my skin and even though I scrubbed and scrubbed I would literally smell like manure for two or three days afterwards?
14. When I think of Jesus being born in a place where animals were kept and being placed in a manger my mind can hardly imagine that the savior of the world would be born in a place like that.
15. Mary and Joseph knew that the birth of Jesus would be approaching soon. Probably the last thing they wanted to do was travel but they were forced to do so because of the decree of Caesar Augustus. During this time in history Israel was an occupied territory. Augustus was a pagan leader. It was probably very difficult and insulting to be ordered around by this dictator, but Mary and Joseph obeyed because the Roman army was never very far away.

16. They arrive in Bethlehem and it comes time for the baby to be born, but there is not any room for them in the inn. Now before we misunderstand what this inn might have been we need to understand that it was not like the Hampton here in Batesville. The inn was probably just a little room they would rent from an innkeeper. But it was full, occupied there was no place for them.
17. So, they go to the only place they can think of, a place where animals are kept, and there in that smelly place, without a nurse or midwife, this teenage girl delivers a little boy.
18. The bible says they wrapped him in cloths. Probably a better translation of that word would be rags. They wrapped the savior of the world in rags, put him in a feeding trough, and spent the night there with the animals.
19. I wonder if in that moment Mary wondered to herself, man I must have missed God. I must have misunderstood what the angel really said to me.
20. I thought I was blessed. I thought I was something special to God. I thought God could work everything out, I dreamed it would be very different than this. But here I am.
21. Mary started out saying Lord I am your servant, I will do whatever you want, but Mary didn't know that this was what God would want.
22. I think at this time of the year we have the tendency to lift Mary and Joseph up and kind of think of them as super human, bigger than life, but the truth is they were normal people just like you and me, trying to make it through life in the midst of difficult situations.
23. When we are younger we plan out our lives, we dream, we form this mental picture in our minds of what life will be like when we get older, when we get out of school or college, when we get a job, when we get married or have kids, when we buy a house.
24. And then when life doesn't go according to our plans we can be tempted to wonder if God really exists, if God is real, if he really cares. The answer to all three of those questions is yes. **Yes, God really exists. Yes, God is real. And yes, he really does care.**
25. Forgive me for stating the obvious, but we must understand and accept that life is not like a post card. Life isn't like a fancy Christmas card. Life is life with all of its joys and disappointments, victories and defeats, good times and bad times, ins and outs, ups and downs life is life, but life is good when Jesus is your Lord and savior. Life is worth living when Jesus is in control.

26. I want to look at three life lessons that Mary and Joseph learned the day that Jesus was born.
27. The first thing they learned was that...

Life is a journey.

1. Luke 2:1-5 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to his own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.
2. I can only imagine that when Mary planned or imagined the birth of Jesus in her mind the last thing she expected was that she would have to travel just a short time before she delivered the baby.
3. The bible says that because of the decree of Caesar Augustus everyone had to go to their own town to register. The bible says that Mary and Joseph traveled from the town of Nazareth to the town of Bethlehem.
4. Now that phrase they traveled is very misleading to us. It is extremely difficult for us to imagine the travel conditions of that day.
5. To say that they traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem doesn't seem like a big deal. For all we know it's as easy as getting in your car and driving to Cave City or Newark. But that couldn't be further from the truth.
6. Bethlehem was between 60 and 70 miles away from Nazareth. As you can well imagine they didn't have cars or buses or public transportation.
7. Joseph probably would have walked while Mary rode on a donkey. Under normal circumstances it would have probably taken 4 days for them to get from one town to the other.
8. So, this pregnant lady, probably in her last trimester rode on a donkey for four days, up and down hills, on bumpy, uneven roads traveling because some dictator was making her.
9. Now I can only imagine back to our childbearing years if I came home one day and told my wife we had to travel four days by donkey.
10. When my wife was pregnant she was tough. She didn't whine or complain, but in her last few weeks she didn't want to get in a nice comfortable car and travel four minutes much less travel for four days on the back of a donkey.
11. This journey was not what Mary wanted or hoped for, but it became a part of the process and the plan that God had for her life.

12. This may seem like a very simplistic statement, but **life is a journey.**
13. Just as Mary's experience wasn't a rosy, Christmas card experience neither is the journey of life for you and me.
14. Sometimes like Mary we find ourselves heading in a direction that has been forced on us by someone or something else. Mary would have never journeyed four days on a donkey if not for the decree of Caesar Augustus.
15. Maybe you wouldn't be walking down your particular pathway of life if not for the events of your past. Maybe you never planned the journey of your life to lead you where you are right now.
16. Sometimes the journey is uncomfortable, sometimes the journey is bumpy, and sometimes the journey takes longer than we anticipated. Often times the journey is anything but smooth sailing, but none of that changes the reality of who God is. **God is still God. God is still in control.**
17. Life is a journey.
18. The second thing Mary and Joseph learned was that

Life is messy.

1. **Luke 2:6-7** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because **there was no room for them in the inn.**
2. Again, I believe it is important to remind ourselves about the setting in which Mary gave birth.
3. She gave birth to a baby in a place where animals are kept.
4. Not in a place where there were doctors and nurses everywhere, medical equipment, emergency care available.
5. There was no nice hospital bed. No medical equipment. No monitors. No wood grain furniture, not even a bathroom.
6. Now most of us understand that things were very different in the time of Mary and that those things I have just mentioned were not available, but even for Mary's day the place and the conditions where she gave birth were extremely below the norm of the day.
7. Mary probably gave birth on a pile of straw or hay. There was no sterile environment.
8. I don't mean to be gross but if there were animals there was manure. That manure brought with it disease, bugs, & stench.
9. I am sure that running water was not available and so they probably used a nasty bucket that was used to water the animals to draw water and clean up with.

10. I can assure you that within 30 minutes of being in that environment the smell would have permeated everything they were wearing and everything they had with them. Within 30 minutes they smelled and had on them everything associated with a barn yard.
11. The chances of survival would have been very low for Mary and the baby.
12. That is the exact environment where Mary delivered her baby. Mary and Joseph discovered that **life is messy.**
13. Now you may be here this morning and you have never been in a manure filled cattle stall, but I would be willing to bet that you have discovered that life is messy.
14. Life is not clean and tidy and organized. Life is dirty and messy and often times chaotic. I'm not talking about the condition of your house I'm talking about the stuff of life.
15. Sometimes relationships are messy, our finances are messy, and our mistakes and failures are messy.
16. Sometimes the inside of our mind is messy, the condition of our heart is messy, and the condition of our soul is messy. Life is not always postcard pretty, more often than not it is back alley ugly.
17. And then on top of that truth, 2020 has taken messy to a whole new level.
18. Mary and Joseph discovered that life is a journey, and that life is messy, and if that were the end of the story then it would be a pretty sad story. But they also discovered something that put it all into perspective.

Jesus is a savior who understands the messiness of life.

1. I often wondered why Jesus the son of God was born in a stinky, smelly, stall with animals. Why wasn't Jesus born in the fanciest hotel with servants and service and all the comforts due the king of kings and the Lord of Lords.
2. But then I realized that if Jesus had been born in that type of place then people like you and I wouldn't be able to identify with him. We wouldn't be able to see how a savior like that could have anything to do with our lives.
3. But I want you to know that **Jesus understands everything there is to know about your life.** Jesus wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth; he was born in a manure filled stall with a bunch of animals.
4. Jesus didn't have a nice fancy crib to lie in; he had a feeding trough stuffed with hay or straw.

5. You have probably seen pictures or video of children in Africa with flies and bugs all over them; I believe the little baby Jesus had many bugs on his body.
6. Often times when the difficulty of the journey catches up with us, when the messiness of life lays in plies all around us we can be enticed to ask where is God in all of this?
7. When we have more questions than answers and we question if anybody really understands we can be assured that Jesus understands because he was born into a messy life just like us. **He understands the messiness of life.**
8. I started to make this a really unforgettable illustrated message this morning. I started to bring in some manure, but I was afraid you would run me out of here.
9. I didn't and I'm not going to but it sure would have been a fitting illustration, because sometimes that's the way life seems.
10. There is a saying when the stuff hits the fan. Some folks use another word in the place of stuff, but I will be kind this morning. Have you ever had the stuff hit the fan in your life?
11. Maybe you're here today and you have more stuff going on in your life than you can even explain.
12. Maybe some of that stuff in your life is the result of a life of sin or rebellion. Maybe some of that stuff in your life is the result of events and happenings that were out of your control.
13. Maybe some of that stuff in your life is there because of the mistreatment by someone you thought really cared about you.
14. Maybe some of the stuff in your life is just the reality of being human.
15. Whatever the cause, Jesus understands, because Jesus has experienced every one of those struggles and trials in his life.

Conclusion:

16. I know I am the only person listening today who ever does this so please don't think too lowly of me.
17. But I must confess, sometimes I have a pity party.
18. If I'm not careful, I can get caught up in that negative attitude I told you about a couple of weeks ago and I can get overly focused on how bad I have it. How hard it is to be me.
19. I was having one of those moments this past Thursday morning. Thinking about several things.

20. And it's not that God was being indifferent to what I was experiencing. It's not that he doesn't care. It's that I needed an adjustment in my perspective.
21. All at once the Holy Spirit said, yeah, but have you ever been killed by the very people you came to help.
22. Well, no God. Ok then. Boom. Perspective.
23. Can we put some things in perspective this morning?
24. You may have been through a hard journey in life. It may have been bumpy and tough and rough.
25. You may have been through the mess of life. You may in fact be in a mess right now. You may cover it up really well on the outside but if what was on the inside of you was to come out it would be stinky and smelly and messy.
26. But Jesus understands because he is a savior who understands the mess of life. He came from the mess of life.
27. But he didn't stay there, and you don't have to stay there either.
28. You have an option. That option is to run to Jesus.
29. Every time Jesus found himself in a mess he would run to his father. What an example.
30. Will your turn to Jesus with your mess?
31. Confess your sins, and ask him for help in lifting you up out of the mess of life. (salvation)
32. I'm a Christian but I am in a mess, or I have made a mess of something and I need God's help. Pray for me.