



**Fluffy Christmas #2**  
**Courage Church, Detroit, MI**  
**December 11, 2016**

This morning is part two of our mini series “Fluffy Christmas” - it is an exploration of a “not so fluffy” prophecy by the prophet Isaiah, the story it points *back* to which we looked at last week, and the story that it points *ahead* to, which is, of course, is the birth of Jesus Christ and all of the things that go along with *that*.

Because where it can be very easy to condense the story of the birth of Jesus to a watered down version that we heard in Sunday school when we were little kids, it doesn't take much to realize that there were some things going on there, that are, to say the least... troubling.

So lets get right into it, if you would please open your bibles with me to Isaiah 9, and then we will also read from Matthew 2 as well as Luke 2.

**Isaiah 9 starting in verse two:**

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.

3 You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

4 For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

5 *For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood*

*will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*6 For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;*

and the government shall be upon *his* shoulder,  
and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,

on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it

with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

now, if you would, turn with me to Matthew 2:16-20.

### **Herod Kills the Children**

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,  
weeping and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

### **The Return to Nazareth**

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life **are dead.**”

now, finally, turn your bibles to Luke 2:1

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.”

*lets pray*

Last week, we focused mostly on the story that Isaiah pointed back to, before pointing us forward to the birth of Jesus. And the story that Isaiah pointed back to was the story of how Midian fell...

Midian fell after God called a man named Gideon to stand up to them in the most peculiar way... Gideon led an army of 32,000 men, and just to show Him JUST HOW IN CONTROL God is... God had Gideon send home all but 300 men before going to battle... and when the time came for battle, the Lord fought for them. They didn't even go in with weapons, they just waved torches, smashed their jars and blew their trumpets, and it drove the Midian troops so crazy that they all attacked themselves.

It is a brilliant picture of the gospel, and the way that Salvation is of the Lord and only of the Lord. You are not saved because of anything that you did... that would be every other religion. Christianity is the only religion in which your hope is found in something that Jesus did *for you*. and to a world as broken as ours... that is really good news.

And Isaiah says in his prophecy that when the world is at its darkest, a great light will come, and it will be just like it was on the day that Midian fell.

then Isaiah says:

*For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;*

and the government shall be upon *his* shoulder,  
and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,

So he uses something that had already happened, the battle against Midian, to point to what was coming, the birth of Jesus... and what exactly it implies. A son is given. That son is a gift, and there is nothing you can do to earn that gift.

But then, the whole thing gets very political.

And we have all heard this line before... “the government shall be upon *his* shoulder” but what it is saying here is just astonishing when you drop this story into the historical setting that Jesus was born into.

Lets look at it, and see if we can’t make a little more sense of Isaiah.

Luke 2:1 starts by saying:

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that **all the world** should be registered.”

Now... this is the first and only time in the entire bible that Caesar Augustus is mentioned. But everything that is written in there, is written for a reason. So the question then should be, what was Luke trying to tell us, by telling us that it was Caesar Augustus who declared that everyone be registered...

Who was Caesar Augustus? and what did it mean to be living in *those* days? The days when *one man* gets to put out a decree that *the whole world* has to follow?

and the only way to answer those questions, is you have to look at history. Because there is only one line in the bible about Caesar Augustus, but the history books tell us all we need to know about what Luke is telling us here.

In those days... The Roman empire ruled the world.

They had, over the course of several hundred years leading up to this moment, established what was, at the time, the most powerful empire in history.

They controlled everything, everywhere.

They controlled everything from what we know as England, down to Spain and all the way over to India.

They even had their own system for dating events and recording history... basically saying that “**time started, when Rome started.**”

It was called Ab Urbe Condita (A.U.C.) which is a Latin phrase that means "from the founding of the City (Rome)”

They were **THE CITY**. not just a city.

Gideon faced the Midianites... Isaiah was dealing with the Assyrian invasion... the idea of “empires” was nothing new... but nobody had ever done it like Rome... and in those days, Rome was ruled by a man named Augustus Caesar.

Now, listen carefully to this...

Octavius (Augustus) was the (adopted) son of Julius Caesar... and people said that Julius Caesar was god.

And when Julius Caesar died, it so happened that there was a large star that had appeared in the sky. Does that sound like any story that we know? History records it as “Caesar’s comet”

and then suddenly the star shot away into nowhere... and this is what Caesar Augustus said about the star:

He said that Julius was god, and that star was Julius ascending to heaven... and he said that “if Julius Caesar is God, and I am his son, then that makes me **THE SON OF GOD.**”

and so Augustus initiated what he called “a 12 day advent” to celebrate himself. Sound familiar? Now, the word advent means “the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.” - and Augustus declares this holiday season, dedicated to his birth and his coming to power.

He united the whole world under his leadership... He was the first person to ever be credited as ruling the entire world.

These are some of the things that were spoken of him in those days by a well known Poet named Virgil, and these words spread amongst all of the people and a lot of stock was put in them:

“The one who is to come, will be the divine King of *salvation* for whom mankind has waited.”

“He will annihilate the evil of the past, and free the people from unceasing fear”

“He will establish a universal empire of peace and will lead in the golden age for the blessing of a renewed humanity.”

Do any of these things sound familiar to you?

Everybody literally believed that Caesar Augustus was Lord. They declared it from the rooftops. It was horrible.

Their armies would go into cities, and they would drag people out, and they would ask them who is Lord, and if they said “Caesar is Lord!” then they would be left alone, but if they would refuse, or they would say something like “There is no God but Jehovah” - they would be either made a slave or they would be killed.

So Augustus did rule the whole world, but it wasn't the way that Virgil described it as... it wasn't through peace.

It was through violence.

but another was coming... just look at the similarities:

Revelation 1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Hebrews 2:15 “He will deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery”

Isaiah 9:7 “Of the increase of *his* government and of peace there will be no end”

Revelation 21:5 “Behold, I make all things new.”

Hold onto all of this... (we will get back to it)

Now... the coins that were printed in those days had an image of Augustus, and on them were written DIVIF, which meant “son of the Divine”



Those would have likely been the same coins or similar to those that Jesus was handed by the Pharisees and the Herodians (Matthew 22:15-21) and when asked if they should pay taxes Jesus said “render to Caesar what is Caesars.”

but I think that there is something so much bigger happening in moments like these.

Think about this...

Jesus is handed a coin that gets distributed around the world that says that someone ELSE is god.

And He is not threatened by it.

He is saying “if Caesar needs to put his picture on a coin, and make it impossible for people to buy and sell without using money declaring that he is Lord...” If that is what Caesar needs to convince himself and others that he is Lord... let him do it.

So Jesus says, pay taxes.

But if you understand what taxes were in those days, you would understand that Jesus was not just telling them “give Caesar the portion owed to him” - he was also communicating that a person who lives their lives as part of the Kingdom of God does not need to rely on the worldly

systems at all. Because that system was crushing people and leaving them with nothing. Jesus wasn't just saying to pay into their corrupt system. He is saying to his followers that there is no need to cheat Caesars system, if you are trusting in Jesus' system.

and so the question then would have become:

Is it Caesar who takes care of you? Or is it God?

Because Caesar worked very hard to make sure that all people relied on him for everything. He would set up bread distributions in the streets and it was even spoken of him that he would be a multiplier of bread for all people.

But the best way to make people depend on you is to first make sure that they can't get *what they need* on their own.

So they taxed people like crazy.

It is widely believed that in those days, that before the census was taken, the people were already being taxed at a rate of about 80%, possibly higher. It is almost ALL of their money, that they were forced to give back to a system that they don't agree with.

Because the only way for Caesar to continue taking over and controlling the world through military efforts is *someone has to pay for it*. So now, you have all of these people being taxed so heavily that they can no longer afford to keep their land... the land that had been in their family since they were lead into the promised land, and since everything was divided up amongst Israel... their land that had been passed down from generation to generation... Some it was all that they had... but it was all that needed.

and God foresaw these types on injustices, and even prepared a solution to them which is laid out in Leviticus 25 called "The Year of Jubilee." It is a day, on the 7th set of sabbath years (so every 49 years) and on that day all debts are forgiven, and all land that was lost during the last half of a



century would be returned to its original order to make sure that nothing ever got so out of balance that there is no recovering.

But unfortunately, like many of the things that God laid out for the betterment of the people, the year of Jubilee was spoken of and mythified but there is 0 evidence that it was ever actually practiced.

So for God, it was nothing new, seeing people hurt each other for selfish reasons. Because the hearts of man are never satisfied, no matter how much they have, they always want more. And the problem with sin is it always makes the selfish decision. The one that benefits you in the immediate, but ignores the cost.

What it costs the person you are sinning against... What it ultimately will cost in your own life.

And Augustus, and Herod, they were not concerned with the cost.

but Justice is a really, really big deal to God, and they were robbing the world of it.

and one of the things that makes the Christmas story so incredibly powerful, is it broke through during a time in history when there simply was none.

People witnessed just absolutely awful things being done to people that they loved. People were robbed of the lives that had been built by their fathers and their fathers before *them*.

The very thing that the year of Jubilee was designed to protect against was rampant... the poor are getting taxed into total poverty by an agenda filled empire who came in from the OUTSIDE, that only thinks of themselves and their own gain, and people are being forced to sell their land off...

and so the whole system gets more and more and more out of balance... while Caesar uses all of *their* money to fund *his* mission of world dominion.

and Luke says that in *those days*, that a decree went out, that everyone in the world had to be REGISTERED.

What was the point of registering people?

To keep tabs on everyone, and of course, to make sure that they are paying all of the taxes that they are supposed to be paying.

You either gave everything that you had to Caesar, AND declared that Caesar is Lord, or you were dead or at least a slave, if you were discovered.

That was the world! To take part in the marketplace, you had to use coins that declared Caesar was Lord.

and it was in THAT world... completely ruled by an empire, that in a tiny town that was the farthest thing from being a world power... lying in a manger because there was no room in the inn...

a child was born.

and THAT government, shall be on THIS child's shoulder?

The first problem with that, is THAT government didn't want THIS child to live. And that is where Herod comes in.

We read all about him in Matthew 2, he is the guy who called for all of the male babies under the age of two to be slaughtered in Bethlehem, but to understand that, first of all we have to ask:

WHO WAS HEROD?

In an age where there were no airplanes, cars, or internet, the idea of one man ruling the entire world brought with it obvious complications. So what the Roman Empire did, was in towns that proved their loyalty to Caesar, they set up local governments that they called... *Ekklesias*.

Which is the same word that was later used to describe the church of Jesus Christ. A body, not a building. A gathering of people, with nothing to do with a structure. Are you starting to see what is going on here? All of these broken systems, created by an evil empire... from *Ekklesia's* to *advent*, were one day redeemed by the followers of the way.

So they had these *ekklesia's*, these local gatherings and local governments... and Caesar appointed Kings to lead and rule in various parts of the world, and Herod was the one who ruled in Israel during that time. So Herod was a King under Caesar.

A little bit about Herod...

He was incredibly wealthy and he was INCREDIBLY loyal to Caesar. Everywhere he went he had statues built to Caesar.

he was half Jewish, and half Edomite. (which is fitting... The Edomites were the descendants of Esau... the guy who traded his birthright for a bowl of red stew. The word Edom literally means red, so this entire group of people was defined by this moment when Esau dishonored where he came from. In fact, it is in that moment that he asks Jacob for the red stew, that the bible says "therefore his name was called Edom")

So he comes from a lineage that has a history of not honoring where they come from. And he is no different. A King who was 50% Jewish yet spent most of his time persecuting and killing *Jews*.

This guy did not know how to treat people. When he came to power, he had every person who was a part of the previous administration... killed... so there would be no challenging where he was going.

He was ruthless to ensure that he stayed in power. Anyone who he even thought may be plotting against him, whether there was any proof or not, he had killed, sometimes hundreds of people at a time.

He had three of his own sons, and his wife, and *her mom* executed because he believed that they were after his power.

Right before he died, he ordered that a building in Jerusalem be filled with people and held under guard until he died, and the orders were that the moment that he died, everybody in that building was to be slaughtered... just because he wanted the guarantee that people would mourn his death.

After he died, the guards did NOT carry out his wishes.

These are the things that the history books record about the guy that Matthew's gospel records as being so angry that the wise men tricked him, that he had every male baby under two murdered.

The things that before sounded so ruthless, suddenly fit the personality of this evil King.

And Matthew explains this, by pointing back to this prophecy in Jeremiah. and it is gut wrenching to think about.

“A voice was heard in Ramah,  
weeping and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Rachel had two children Joseph, and Benjamin. and SHE died while giving birth to Benjamin.

Which means that she never got to know what it meant to raise him. One of the greatest gifts in the world was taken from her... and now we have all of these families in Bethlehem that are having the exact same thing taken from them... only instead of the parents being the ones who die... it is the children.

and they refuse to be comforted, because they are left with a void.

When you really think about it, the greatest story ever told inserted itself in the middle of a world that was torn apart by its arrival.

Pastor Paul David Tripp describes Christmas this way, it was the day that “Glory collided with tragedy.”

and we read these awful words about these innocent lives being taken and it is just horrible... and most of us, if we can wrap our minds around what actually happened in Bethlehem in those days, all we can think to say is:

WHY WHY WHY WHY GOD? Why would you let this happen?

But we don't understand that the world was so incredibly dark in that moment that ONLY the gospel of Jesus Christ could save us. People were being slaughtered left and right if they stood in the way of the empire, so of course Herod was willing to take out children to preserve his faulty perception of what it means to sit on a throne.

and I don't have to tell you, The world is *still* broken.

and that is why in *this* season, some people can come together like we are doing right now, and celebrate the birth of our risen King, and enjoy amazing community together, yet it is the same season each year that the suicide rates always seem to sky rocket.

And depression goes up. And loneliness peaks.

Because if you understand what the birth of this child means *for you*, then all you can do is *celebrate*. But if you don't, it can become a cold reminder of what you *don't* have. A cold reminder of the two year old son that was slaughtered by a King who felt threatened by a baby.

It can remind you of the family you don't have, the career you don't have, the health that you don't have... the justice that was never done on your behalf toward the person who took everything from you.

It can be a reminder of every time you have been cheated on, or been robbed, or just let down by someone who was supposed to be there for you. It can be a reminder of every void that you tried to fill with material things, because every time you tried to fill it with people, they just sucked more life out of you.

For the mom of three whose husband is in prison, it can be another reminder that you are all alone. Trying to make ends meet for these little mouths to feed, with no sign a better life or a Christmas for your kids. Because it feels like hope hasn't come around in a while.

And if Caesar really is the son of god, then that means that Jesus is just another hopeless child being born into a hopeless world. Where diseases kill, and where people betray each other in order to take themselves a little further... and where the rich get richer while the poor get poorer and the voids get larger with every inch that we strive. Because just like Solomon says, everything is like chasing after the wind.

If. Caesar... really is the son of god.

But if Caesar really is the son of god, then why is Herod so afraid **of a baby?**

Lets compare.

When Jesus stood before the government (John 18:28-40), and Pilate asks him "are you the King of the Jews?" What Jesus essentially tells him is yes... I am... but my Kingdom is not of this world." He was not remotely threatened by the idea that his earthly world was going to be crushed. In fact he said that it *had* to happen.

Because when you are the King of the universe and you will reign for all of eternity, what can the Romans really do to you?

When Jesus is asked about paying taxes, and they show him a coin... he is not threatened by the fact that Caesar is spreading around coins that say that Caesar is Lord... Because Jesus knows, a few years from now, and that guy is going to be dead. Just like the last Caesar and just like the next.

But when Herod gets wind that there is "a baby", what happens? He feels threatened. He goes ba-zurk! Because he knows that his throne is not secure... he has killed his own kids to preserve it, of course he would have no problem killing other people's kids.

and what that shows us, is so much more than just about Herod's insecurity. It shows us about the implications of what it means to be a Christian. and particularly what it would have meant for a person living in the first century to be a Christian.

Because if you even lived in the same town that Jesus was born in... your baby sons were killed.

Because if you were a wise man, or a shepherd who went to worship Jesus... or as he began his ministry you began following him...

you weren't just following a rabbi. You weren't just following a star to a baby and then going home another route.

You were committing treason.

You were defying the government that ruled the entire known world.

Perhaps you remember that moment, several years later, in Acts 17 when an angry crowd drags a man named Jason before the city officials because they can't find the Apostle Paul and Silas, and this is what the crowd says about them:

"These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, <sup>7</sup> and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that **there is another king, Jesus.**"

Has the revolution caught on? Is the world turning upside by this new King?

Because Rome seemed pretty powerful.

They had all the money. They had all the armies. They had all the land. They controlled all the Kings...

and knowing all of that, could you imagine what it would have been like for the people living in the days of Caesar Augustus to realize that it was THAT enormous government that Augustus controlled...

that took over 700 years to build up to what it was...

that spanned from India to Spain and up to England...

that was growing every single day by taxing every single person of almost every single thing that they owned in order to continue in their violent mission...

That was lead by leaders who killed their OWN children and other peoples innocent children, in order to ensure that their power remained in their grasp... and those leaders were lead by an even bigger leader who sent out coins that declared that he is god...

Who sent out troops to make sure that everybody everywhere was worshipping ONLY him...

That it is THAT government... that has built its entire empire by oppressing people, and taking from people, and hurting people...

that it is THAT government... that will be on the shoulder of a child, who was born in the most humble setting you could possibly imagine... in a tiny town that isn't even a blip in the scale of the world that he is being born into... and to parents who were nobodies, just trying to find their way through Caesars world, but who were walking with confidence because the coins can all say that Caesar is lord...

and Caesar can kill people to prove that he is lord.

But all that it proves is that Caesar is not Lord. He is just another guy whose power is limited to the people that he can control.

Jesus is Lord. And He is alive and in the womb of a 14 year old virgin who had every reason to be afraid for her life, and for the life of her family and for her community in that time and yet she was not afraid.

Because Herod may be willing to kill to keep his power, but that only proves that he doesn't really have it.



and for every person who had been taxed into poverty and into slavery and for every piece of land that was unjustly taken by a system built to support the richest, on the backs of the poorest:

A year of Jubilee is coming.

The empires that were built from the blood of the poor and oppressed will come to ruin and there is a new Kingdom that is breaking forth and it is rising from a place that nobody expected. And the scales will be balanced, and justice will be served.

and it is here to remind us... That Caesars Kingdom may stretch from here to there... and people may say that it reaches to the ends of the earth...

but the world is much much wider than *that*. And beyond this world is another world... and oppression doesn't live there at all. And hate doesn't live there. And greed doesn't live there. And sickness doesn't live there.

Caesars Kingdom may be big... but Jesus' Kingdom is bigger.

And a day is coming and we know now, it has already come, when the Roman empire will collapse. and the CHURCH will still be standing.

And that is the message of Christmas.

That Assyria doesn't win. That Midian doesn't win. Caesar doesn't win. Herod doesn't win.

Jesus wins.

his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of *his* government and of peace  
there will be no end,

on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it

with **justice** and with righteousness

from this time forth and **forevermore**.

This child will be King. and this King will bring justice. and This King will reign and his reign will be forever and ever without end.

They said Caesar would reign in peace... but he didn't.

They said he would live forever... but he didn't.

And according to the Roman empire and the systems they had created,

The death of Caesar Augustus should have been recorded this way:

767 A.U.C. Ab Urbe Condita

So I wondered, and I knew the answer going into it but I had to see it with my own eyes... how does history record the death of Caesar Augustus?

So I googled it.

and as it turns out that (767 A.U.C.) is NOT the way that history remembers the death of Caesar Augustus.

History records his death as being August 19, 14 A.D.

A.D. is short for "Anno Domini" (anno dome-in-E) which is a latin phrase that means "in the year of *our Lord*."

Whose Lord? *our*.

Who uses this system for dating? **everyone**.

and it began not at the crucifixion, but at the *birth* of Jesus Christ.

The Roman way of dating was: "from the founding of the City."

and in *that* City, they said Caesar is Lord. But it would seem that *that* one didn't quite catch on the way they wanted it to... because all their gods

died, and when they died, they were dated with a time stamp that showed where in history their reign came to a close by mortality, and where that falls in line, with the birth of this child.

Because it is Jesus' birth that we record as *Anno Domini*... and today, the Christians write it... and the Catholics write it... and the Romans write it... and the Atheists write it, and the Agnostics write it. and google writes it.

It doesn't take a bible scholar OR EVEN A Christian to realize that Jesus Christ reshaped all of history.

Everything about history is based a timeline surrounding *His* birth. Surrounding Christmas.

He broke forth into our world in a time where evil was winning, and he came with a message... that evil does not win.

Darkness can not last in the presence of this great light.

To this day, Caesar Augustus is still dead. He died in 14 A.D. His Father, Julius Caesar: Dead. He died in 44 B.C. (Before Christ) and Because Jesus Christ *is* Lord, They even dated history *backwards* from the birth of *this* king.

Tiberias Caesar, who killed countless Christians... still dead. He died in 37 A.D.

Domitian Caesar, one of the most ruthless rulers to ever live... DEAD. He died in 96 A.D.

But **Jesus is alive.**

His name may not have been written on the coins declaring his deity... but all those guys are dead, and I'm guessing that all of those coins are gone now.

because stuff fades, it burns, it wears, it disappears... power is fleeting... governments are fleeting. empires fall.

there is appointed a time for EVERY MAN once to die (Hebrews 9:27), and Caesar is not Lord.

Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is the reason that 2,000 years after his life, his death, and his resurrection, we all woke up this morning and faced the cold and the snow to get to church... to worship him.

Jesus is the reason that millions of people will gather on Christmas eve and on Christmas morning in churches around the world... to worship him and rejoice in the fact that *a child was born*.

He is the reason that many dedicated servants give up their holidays to go out and feed people who are hungry, and spend time with those who are lonely.

He is the reason that we all come together this time of year, and will hold a huge Christmas party next Sunday and give away hundreds of presents to the kids in our community.

He is the reason that beyond that, our church adopted 12 families and will give them absolutely amazing Christmases, knowing that for some of them, it is the only Christmas they will get, and likely, we will be the only Jesus that they see this season.

Because we have been changed by Christmas.

Because the people who have walked in the land of darkness have seen a great light. And when you see that light, and it is a transformational light... you can't help but be transformed by the light... before long, you will start letting that light shine through you.

And that is what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about.

Hope invading our earth here and now.

That is Christmas. It is the light of hope breaking through in one of the darkest moments of history, with an assurance that is broadcasted to the broken, oppressed, sick, lonely, hurting world:

that everything *will be* okay.

Because a child is born.