

A sermon outline about a Christmas story with two saviours and two kings.

Read Luke 2:1-14;

Anchor verses Luke 2:1 and 11.

Introduction

In the very beginning of Luke's Christmas story he tells us about Caesar Augustus. Then in verse 11 he tells about a baby in a manger, who is a saviour - Christ the Lord!

Why mention Augustus and Jesus in the same passage? Why include Caesar in the story of the birth of Jesus? There are a few reasons. Luke wants to firmly establish that the birth of Jesus was a real historical event that happened at a specific time and place. Without sophisticated calendars it was then the custom to provide a "date" by mentioning the reign of a well known ruler or important event. We have to know that this Christmas story is not one of the many legends and myths that became part of the Christmas tradition. This is the real, true, gospel story. This is the factual first episode of the personal history of a historic Jesus.

And still the question remains, why did Luke choose Caesar Augustus to provide a geopolitical setting for the birth of Christ. It was not done by chance!! You see, Caesar Augustus also claimed the title "saviour of the world" for himself. He demanded that "the whole world" acknowledge him as their king.

The main reason, then, that Caesar and Christ are mentioned together in this version of the Christmas events, is because this Christmas story is a one about two saviours and two kings.

Unknown to Augustus, in the year 4 B.C., a rival was born, someone who is till today called Saviour and King.

1. The story of two saviours.

At the time when Jesus was born, the people living within the Roman Empire **were for more than 90% - a conquered people!** Now consider the psyche of conquered people. Anger, confusion, despondency, scepticism, negativity and discouragement would be some of the words to describe the mood within the mighty empire! Not an approach conducive to growth, prosperity, hope and peace! After many years of warfare and turmoil the Roman armies were completely in control - of dispirited people.

It also had implications for their religious beliefs and practices. Conquered peoples did not know what to believe in anymore. In those days each nation had its own gods and when a nation lost a war, that meant their gods had forsaken them and they were not powerful enough to save them from their Roman enemies. The Empire was filled with subjugated people who had no trustworthy gods left to depend on. These people were discouraged, dispirited, and confused.

Ambitious Augustus planned to change all this. He would provide the security they needed. He would give them a new way of life, a new world order and new gods to worship. He would give them the order, peace, justice and gods of Rome. In this new way of life, he, Caesar Augustus, would be the symbol of peace, power, discipline! Was he not a son of the gods? Did this not qualify him to be the saviour of the world?

An important part of reengineering a new society with a new religion of Caesar worship, was a census to be taken of all the people and nations under his rule.

Augustus proclaimed himself as the saviour of the world's depressingly sceptical and despondent people. He was going to save the world by his stringently executed politics, his excellent administration, his most powerful military resources, a booming world economy and by the sophisticated magnificence of the Roman culture and its exciting, fun loving - yet often cruel - gods.

This man, Caesar, would be a saviour as never seen before! To him an anthem could be sung that said, "Glory to man in the highest."

People today still practice the religion of Caesar Augustus. People today still believe in the greatness of man, his politics, culture, abilities, discoveries and strategies to provide his own salvation.

As in Caesar's day, leaders put their heads together and proclaim new orders and new saviours. Political groupings, mighty nations standing together, the UN trying their very best to stop climate change, world wide plans supported by science to provide food security, new leaders and programs are to be the salvation of the

world. Scientific discovery and achievement will make life meaningful and safe. Technologists propose the might and power of the computer, internet based information and communication solutions as the key to our future happiness. Researchers are looking for the perfect cure. The perfect teaching model will end the painful skills shortage and psychologists will find the key to contentment and happiness and joy!
"Glory to man in the highest" seems to be an appropriate anthem for a world order where man can save himself, create utopia, build a perfect society and bring an end to despair. Where the beginning of hope is man himself.

But Luke comes to us with a different message. For hope and salvation, Luke directs us to "a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (vs 12). Luke comes with the Gospel News that is the truth. He comes with God's news that will result in true, everlasting and complete salvation: "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you" (vs 11). This Saviour's name is not Caesar Augustus - "he is Christ the Lord" (vs 11).

And how is this Saviour going to save a disappointed, sceptical, discouraged, irreligious and despondent people? He would not order a census. He would not send his armies into the world. He would die upon a cross.

This Saviour brings hope and salvation through his blood and his Holy Spirit. He is God who comes to earth as a man, dies upon the cross, brings about a kingdom built on reconciliation, forgiveness, grace, mercy, righteousness, justice, love and peace, by changing the hearts, the minds and the destiny of all who would follow him.

Caesar, as saviour, was worth nothing. His plan of salvation came to nothing. But Jesus is a Saviour beyond worth. His plan of salvation makes a difference to the world and to our eternal expectations, because it results in redemption. And this so, because the salvation of Christ depends upon God. It is God who works out our salvation through the blood and Spirit of Christ. Only God can succeed where Caesar fails. Only God can save!

The anthem that we hear on Christmas Eve on the fields of Bethlehem resounds the glory of this Saviour by praising God, who gave his Son - who gave the Saviour. In the heavens, says Luke, there was a multitude of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest" (vs 14).

That's the big difference between the two saviours and the two salvations: one gives honour and praise to God and the other relies on weak, silly man who always thought that he could save himself!

2. The two Kings

The Christmas event is a story not only about two savours, but decisively also about two kings. The name of the one is "Caesar Augustus." This is a title that he took for himself which means "The Exalted One." The other one, Luke says, is Christ, the Lord!

Caesar indeed was one of the greatest men of the world. He commanded thousands of the Roman legions, his empire stretched to the furthest corners of the earth. He was a powerful, mighty man. Augustus just had to give one command, and the whole world was on the road to be enrolled and counted. Nobody would dare to even ask why! People observed his every command and his every wish. His birthday was a national holiday for the entire Empire. And on his birthday they probably sang an anthem that sounded a lot like "Glory to this man - in the highest."

And then the Christmas story also is about another king, a little child born in the city of David. He is called "Christ the Lord." His title and the details of his birth in Bethlehem are in the Bible, because he is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the everlasting King.

Could he really be such an important King? Could he be God, born as a human king on earth? There is no room for him at Bethlehem's inn - and he is born in a stable and laid in a manger. The only ones bowing before him are poor, lowly shepherds. His is an invisible kingdom that is not of this world. His armies consist of angels - not soldiers. But he claims to be The King. But for him and about his rule, those very angels bring honour to the One who gave his only Son to be King for the sake of our salvation, redemption and joy: "Glory to God in the highest."

Nearly 2000 years passed since the days of Caesar Augustus. And where is Caesar today? He is dead!!! His empire has been dismembered - although it took 1000 years to do so! He died and eventually his empire died as well. His legions are gone. And King Jesus? Jesus is alive! Jesus is victor over all our enemies, even death! Christ reigns for evermore!

Application:

What a turn-around this Christmas gospel has! Christ's birthday, not Caesar's, is a time of celebration for many millions of his followers. Christ's Kingdom, not Caesar's, is growing day-by-day. Christ's rule, not Caesar's, is in effect. Christ sits at the right hand of God and has been given all authority and power. He is the almighty Christ - Saviour and King of heaven and earth.

Caesar and his empire has long been something of the past.

But Christ still rules. The Baby in the manger's Kingdom, is getting bigger and grows unto the ends of the earth.

The dictators, empires and all the rulers of this world are shown to be nothing within God's scheme of things.

Yet man continues to elevate himself to the throne as saviours and rulers of the world. Man still pretends that he is master of his life and controller of his destiny. Man fools himself into thinking that he is in control. Man loves to play God!

Man plays at being God. But Christ reigns.

Who is our saviour: Caesar or Jesus, man or God? Who is our King: Caesar or Jesus, man or God? We have to make a choice between "Glory to man" and "Glory to God."

Choose Christ! Choose life! Choose salvation!

This is the Word of God.

Amen.