

# Reigning Wrapped in Cloths

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## SPEAKERS

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2 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. 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Have you ever noticed how the presence of a

newborn in the room changes everything? You know, just kind of think about suddenly they sort of become the center of attention. Especially they can do anything, they can just sit and stare, and people are like, Ooh, that's really cute. They're sleeping. Look how quiet they are. And then of course, we were always looking for the new smell, the smell of them, but it's interesting they become immediately a source of praise. Well, Luke takes us into the presence of an infant. And Luke chapter two, he takes us into an unusual presence, the presence of an infant who reigns, the wrapped in cloth. And there's something distinct about this newborn that far exceeds anything else that a newborn could ever bring into one's presence. So open your Bibles to Luke chapter two. And as always, with Advent, we come upon a narrative that sometimes is dangerous, I think for us because we're so familiar with it. And we want to look at it from the perspective of Luke reminding us of two different spheres. And they both relate to obedience. And I hope we'll discover from this passage that admin is a call to joyful obedience. And so we're going to look at this text from one sphere and that is indirect obedience. Where's the main to speak of indirect obedience to God? And the second sphere we're looking at is what does joyous obedience look like? And so look with a Luke chapter two, and a verses one through three we have what I'm calling indirect obedience. And it features three main characters that Luke wants us to think about. Remember, Luke tells us in his prologue of this gospel, that he's writing both to keep a historically accurate record, and also to explain the faith. So there's a historical aspect to Luke's record here, and there will be an apologetics aspect, but let's get introduced to the first main character in the first line of One in those days, Caesar Augustus. I don't know what you may know already about Caesar Augustus. He also has the name Octavian. But there are some interesting facts that set the context here when you start thinking about indirect obedience to the king, and that is Augustus here chose that name purposely because Augustus means majestic, or majesty. So it tells you something about the way in which he not only viewed himself, but how he was enamored by those under his power, because Augustus had a long, peaceful reign in the Roman Empire 44 years, a reign in power, and he did provide that Pax Romana, that sense of peace, security, that not just Jews experienced and his empire but even many Gentiles experienced. He was also the great nephew of Julius Caesar, which I'm sure you've heard of, and in fact, historical records and Augustus himself was quick to receive the title at times Savior, and that he acted as a God before the people. So here you have this interesting character that Luke mentions to us who initiated this census. And the census is for the purpose of taxation. In other words, we want to try to as many communities today, we need more finances, we need more funds, how can we more effectively tax those who benefit from being a part of our community, or in this case, the Roman Empire then the second character that's introduced just briefly is quite a bit or Serena's depending on your translation. He was a very well known military leader, a celebrated military leader, who then eventually is promoted to governor of Syria. I know that he takes at least two different surveys or censuses like this during his reign. So so far, Luke takes us in chapter two, right into the Roman world. Whereas if you think about it in Luke one, we were in the Jewish world. We met Zachariah, we, you know, we're taking into the privacy moments of Mary and Elizabeth being told there will be a child. We were in the temple with Zachariah. Well, now in Luke

two, he brings us into the Roman world. And I think he's illustrating for us what we haven't clearly defined yet. And that is, what is indirect obedience main. But there's one other character and you notice in verse three that when this census is issued, this is not As an option, you must return to your town of birth. And so you notice it says and everyone went to his own town to register. Chief got everyone within the Roman Empire having to obey this census that was issued three examples of people being obedient. But it raises the question. Who are they obeying here? on face value could say, well, they're banging their leaders, Caesar Augustus, Octavian has set this command. They all need to obey it. But could it be that in all these meet moving pieces, they are in directly, being obedient to God that He is moving all these pieces into place. There's no industry at all, that Augustus was a believer or that he was concerned and wondering, how can we bring about the coming of the Messiah? But yet as you read this as a Christian, knowing the sovereignty of God, isn't it that they're all really submitting by force, to God's will, to God's perfect plan? JC Ryle, and writing in his thoughts on the gospel, when it comes to this passage in Luke simply says this, little did they know that they were all instruments and the hand of a God of Israel. I love that. And as you read this, that's what indirect obedience here is. These are not people who love God, but yet is God using them and their actions to say, here's my plan, and you will fulfill my plan. Whether you consciously doing it or not, and we could quickly start to think for a moment, do we have other examples of this in the Scriptures, where we have indirect submission, and obedience to God. And I'd like to present three of them that came to my mind. One is never canessa in the book of Daniel. And there's always a debate that he genuinely repent. And we can kind of hold that discussion for another time. But here he is the king of Babylon. And you may recall the incident where he looks at his kingdom and he is so impressed with himself. And what happens next? God says, You're done ruined right now. He was in a position of power. He thought this was his kingdom. But what do we understand from the book of Daniel was not his kingdom. He was put in that position. He had the title King, but but he's not King of kings. He's not the king of the universe. And again, think of the context here. Luke as a Gentile. Does he appear to be familiar with the Old Testament? Absolutely. You have Mary and Joseph who are steeped in the Old Testament. Yes. Let's turn our attention to maybe another example if you've heard of King Cyrus. He will play a role later in Israel's history. After they go into the Babylonian captivity, God disciplines them there, they will finally come out of that, because of King Cyrus, who will issue a decree and provide for them to, to release and return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. What is fascinating though, is the book of Isaiah talks about Cyrus before Cyrus is even born over century before him. Isaiah says there's going to come This King, any names him, he says Cyrus will be his name. And you know how Isaiah describes him, Cyrus, the servant, or Anointed One of the Lord. In other words, God is going to take a pagan king and make his heart favorable towards God's people. That he will not just issue a decree you can return but he will even provide the means and assistance for them to do that. What a picture to us of God's sovereignty and examples scattered throughout biblical history of indirect obedience, submitting to God even though they did not voice that was not their intent to fulfill the plan of God. One final example turn with you to the book of Acts. Remember, Luke is the author of Luke and Acts a two volume Compendium. But

look at the in Acts chapter 12. And now we have another hybrid here. This is Herod a grip, the first and you have a scene that unfolds where parody grippit in Acts chapter 12, is wreaking havoc against believers in the church. He has executed the Apostle James. He's had Peter arrested, but I want to draw your attention to x 12 and verses 22 through 24. You come upon this scene in the midst of what looks like nobody can stop Herod Agrippa the first but look what happens in verse 22. Here in this very public scene, I'll back up maybe the verse 21 on the appointed day Herod wearing his royal robes. sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. I give you a little side note on this Josephus speaks of this event, as if Herod also wore clothing that tended to be have gold in it. So it literally reflected the sun. So it gave him almost this appearance of being illuminated, and divine. So picks up then it says he sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted. This is the voice of a God, not of a man. Immediately because Herod did not give praise to God. An angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died. And then notice what Luke follows it with. But the Word of God continued to increase and spread. What a contrast between two Opposite results, heritage grip and all his power. God says enough. And yet what happens to his word continues, continues to spread. What a glimpse of what we could certainly see in many other places in Scripture is those who submit to God's will, without even realizing it. And that is true as we know that everyone will submit to God's will, whether by force by judgment, or hopefully we'll see. There's examples of joyous obedience as well. But I haven't caused us not to just weigh in this scene and Luke to these examples of indirect obedience. But now what is it the King of Kings requires? What is it we should offer him that clearly is joyful obedience. And Luke gives us another three examples of what does worship and witness look like. When you properly recognize this one who came as an infant, but wrapped and cloth but worthy of worship. So look with me at Luke chapter two. And now we'll look closely at verses four through six. So the first example is an obvious one, Mary and Joseph. Here are these very young we can assume at least Mary was quite young, maybe that Joseph may have been quite older than Mary. Typical agent. Weddings would usually require the man to be somewhat older and that he was financially secure, demonstrated some maturity. We know that Joseph quickly disappears off the scene after this. And many would say that at some point he must have died. But look with me at Luke two verses four through six. To get a good look at what this joyful obedience look like and the part of Mary and Joseph. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because you belong to the house and line of David. Now, in this scene, Joseph is obeying the decree that Augustus issued. But could you argue that in that obedience he is ultimately obeying God that is joyfully submitting to those God has placed over them with a growing awareness that based on the message he received from an angel, and that Mary received this was no ordinary child that Mary was carrying that this in fact was to be the Promised Messiah. And this is no minor trip to from Nazareth to Bethlehem is a three day trip, but add me 90 miles. So there's a there's a joyfulness you have no account here of this is taking grudgingly. Joseph complaining all the way to marry, you know, who are these Roman authorities to tell us what to do? Live Free or Die. I don't think that was their motto. But, you know, this thought that you see, without trying to read

too much into the text, an indication they went joyfully in response to what God had already communicated to them. Keep in mind where they go, they have to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, a place rich and historical significance. David, the city of David What did he promise the Messiah would come up devic king who being the line David, Micah himself had prophesied this 700 years before Christ birth. I was reading something about the city of Bethlehem at this time in which the first century would have occurred. It was kind of interesting, it was talking about features that might attract someone to Bethlehem. As Emily said this, not much there to attract anyone. And here before it's even on the map, Micah tells you centuries before, this is where the Messiah will come from. And we know later even when Herod is trying to ascertain where the Messiah will be born, the religious leaders know Micah five, two, and they're quick to pull it up and say, Well, this is what Michael told us. But looking closely as well notice in verse seven, we come to that familiar phrase that Mary gave birth and she wrapped him and clock And placed him in a manger. And I never thought of this detail before. Often we think of this wrapping in cloths, as an indication of their poverty, which which certainly they, we can tell that later when they make the sacrifice in the temple, they give a sacrifice that's in accordance with one who is of limited means. But what's interesting is this term is used a lot in medical writings. And often it's this reference to you would wrap a child in these cloth to help straighten their limbs keep them straight, but I found it interesting. The Prophet zekiel refers to wrapping one in swaddling cloth as a sign and indication of parental care and love. In other words, is equal use it the opposite way and says, if you're not wrapping cloth, it's a sign that you're not loved. And you will not be cared for Is it possible even in this every day, actions of Mary and Joseph, they are displaying joyful obedience. This is a tough situation when you read this, they can't even get a room. They're probably in some sort of makeshift, like shelter. You know the babies in basically like a feeding trough with some hay and they're not ideal circumstances for any pregnancy. And yet they're they're nurturing and caring for this one that God has blessed them with and has blessed us with. Then you go down to verse 17, or excuse me, verse 19, and a glimpse a little closer into Mary's thought processes. But Mary treasured up all these things and ponder them in her heart. You can replay that over and over again through the roughly 33 and a half years or so that Christ is her son on Earth. How she must have at times, treasured stuff. In other words held on to it, thought about it rehearsed it in her mind. And not only did she treasure things but the word ponder means to bring together sort of collect together almost as indication that the longer she watched and they raised Christ, that different pieces were getting put together. Expanding on that very initial message, Mary, this is the Messiah, you know, this child will be overshadowed by the power of the Holy Spirit. What a picture of joyful obedience in Mary and Joseph. But then our attention turns in verses nine through 12 to the shepherd's and I don't know about you, but I always Think of some kind of church scene family scene we act this out. People are in bathrobes or the shepherds come strolling in. But but there's a picture here of tremendous obedience on the part of the shepherd's. Notice in Luke's description there, they're out in the fields, they're doing their job. And I don't know if you know much about shepherds, but this is a low, low position. It's a despise position. This is not we're in the Old Testament, it had a little bit more of a glory to it, and a prestige and honor to being a

shepherd. The time we get into the New Testament that's kind of fallen by the wayside. these are these are basically people who are seen as unclean from a religious perspective. You know, they're out in the field keeping watch. They've got probably schedules, different turns are guarding the sheep. It may have been and it's highly possible the sheep are also Possibly sheep that would have been used in the sacrifice in the temple, which adds an interesting element to what happens after this. But here they are, and they're the ones that will receive this announcement. And you have to realize this fits perfectly with Luke's emphasis is all emphasis is on. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. And in particular, it's the downcast, the oppressed, the marginalized in society, that that Luke wants to zero in on and what better group to highlight, to receive this announcement by God's design, or the shepherd's. But you notice, if you look closely at the description in verse 11, you have the announcement given to them that a Savior has been born to you and he is Christ. The Lord three very Important christological terms. In other words, three titles are used their first that He is the Savior straight out of the Old Testament, a term used for God that He will deliver his people matches perfectly with what Mary and Joseph were told. He's the Savior. But then Luke does something that he does not do anywhere else in his gospel. He fits together. This one is Christ, the Lord, that that phrasing will not be found anywhere else in Luke's Gospel, but here in this announcement that he is the Messiah. Again, out of the Old Testament, he is the anointed one. And then he is Lord another term out of the Old Testament that is used specifically of Yahweh. And so you see Luke combining these three titles, and saying here you have one who is fully God and fully man, though wrapped in cloth, the shepherd's are told these news and then you go down to verses 15 through 18. You see their response, which speaks of joyful obedience. When the angel left, the shepherd said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing is happened which the Lord has told us. So they hurried off. Remember that same term we saw when Mary found out the news about Elizabeth she hurried off. She arose quickly to go and see it. Exactly what the shepherd's do here that same immediacy and urgency, joyful obedience. And then it goes on and tells us in verse 17, when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what about been told about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherd said to them. They want to think why are they so amazed? Well, the news itself that this promise has been fulfilled. But I think part of the amazement is these guys who are delivering this, that there's the shepherd's. In other words, you what you have here is high and deep theology, coming from the lowest of people. People have no religious credentials, or training. And yet they're speaking of this one who is worthy of all worship. Notice in verse 20, says the shepherd's returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things had heard, and seen, which were just as they had been told. How interesting if in fact, the sheep they are guarding sheep that would be eventually sacrifice in the temple. That word of this is good to spread. And you almost see Luke possibly taking us back to where did this all begin Zachariah in the temple, when he's told about the coming of john the baptist? What a way of connecting these pieces of helping us ponder this scene more effectively. But there's another example we have of perfect obedience of joyful obedience. And that's one we know is at the center of this, but we may be miss it. That's the angelic hosts. That when you think of what does joyful, perfect obedience look like. It's reflected in

the elect angels of heaven. And so you notice in verse nine, you have an angel of the Lord and it says he appeared and the glory of the Lord shone around them. Typical of Luke he tells us an angel appears you're terrified than the angel says, Don't be afraid. But think about the connection between the angel of the messenger of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord, that Angel reflects. Isn't that what joyful obedience and service is all about? That that we reflect the glory of God, the character of God. And so we don't want to miss in this scene What up picture for us, to me imitate here, not just Mary and Joseph, and the shepherd's, but keep before us in a healthy perspective, what obedience looks like when we see the host of heaven, who bow down continually, and exists for the one purpose of glorifying the King of kings. You get to the doxology and verses 13 and 14, where now you have this this angel is joined by a host of the heavenly hosts. And it says the appeared and listen to the doxology Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rush. What a message of doxology Glory to God in the highest. This is not a reference at all to what note you sing it in. But But your glory should reach the highest places in the universe, because God dwells over everything. And then their proclamation, that peace be upon those on whom his favor rest. In other words, those who joyfully obey Him will experience God's grace and kindness. Those who indirectly obey Him are not going to be recipients of His grace and His mercy and His kindness. And how odd that the angels proclaim. They'll be peace on earth. And those who are on earth proclaim, there will be peace in heaven. What a glimpse to us here when we think of Advent admin is calling us to pursue joyful obedience. Because modeled in this narrative is what obedience does not or should not look like and what obedience should look like. So let's remember as we look ahead and think about celebrating Christ, furred add first advent. That Yes, he is an infant, fully God fully man, wrapped in cloth Yet Worthy of all praise and honor. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I asked that Luke's account here would be a reminder to all of us this week, as to how we in Christ should imitate joyful obedience. may that be our desire, may you give us the ability to do so. In Jesus name, amen.