

LUKE

Leon L. Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

Chapter Two

Luke gives a brief narrative of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the most important event in human history. He stresses three important points about His birth: 1.) the birth of Jesus taking place in Bethlehem, 2.) that Bethlehem was the town of David that states His messianic focus, and 3.) the humble circumstances of His birth.

Luke 2:1-3

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. (2) This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. (3) And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

The miraculous birth of our Lord is as important as the resurrection. If either is incorrect then there is no salvation. It had been prophesied seven hundred years earlier by Micah: "*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.*" (Micah 5:2). The Savior must then be born in Bethlehem, a city of Judea.

This Caesar was Octavian who had defeated Antony and Cleopatra at Actium and was the first to receive the high title of emperor. He was at the height of his power and the census was necessary for the taxation process for there was no taxation without registration. Of course all the inhabited earth only involved that portion over which Caesar Augustus ruled but such seemed like all the earth to those living in that time and area. He ruled from 27 B.C. until his death in 14 A.D. There have been some arguments about which census this was for Quirinius, the governor of Syria, had an important census in A.D. 6 that is too late since we know Jesus was born in 4 B.C. However we know that Quirinius was governor of Syria for the first time in B.C. 12-3. He was governor for the second time in A.D. 6 when another census was taken. So we infer that Luke is correct in stating that this birth took place during the first census of Quirinius that was in 4 B.C. The people were given a year to complete the census so as to minimize the influx of so many people in a short time. Joseph would have been one of those required to go to his home city for the taxation process. Caesar was part of God's divine plan!

Luke 2:4-7

Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, (5) in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. (6) While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. (7) And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Joseph was required to go to Bethlehem to register but Mary did not have to go. It is possible that Joseph took her to guard her from gossip in Nazareth since they were only engaged and the marriage had not been consummated: *And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, (25) but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.* (Matt 1:24-25) We know Mary was three months pregnant when she left Elizabeth and she probably was in her third trimester when Joseph took her away. If that is the case she would have been very visibly pregnant and gossip would have been very disconcerting. Stating that Joseph was of the house and family of David establishes the lineage of Jesus (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8) through Joseph even though he was not His biological father. The trip fulfills the prophecy of the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem:

Mic 5:1-3 "Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops; They have laid siege against us; With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek. (2) "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." (3) Therefore He will give them up until the time When she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren Will return to the sons of Israel.

Luke does not tell us when they left Nazareth or how long they had been in Bethlehem before the birth. They were very poor and had probably not made reservations for a place to stay so there was no room at an inn for them. However Luke states that the birth occurred while they were there, implying that they had been there before the birth. She placed Him in a manger that was used for feeding the animals. The place was probably a cave rather than a building. The custom was to wrap new born babies in long cloths folded around the baby to keep him warm and to provide a feeling of comfort. The Savior who is to die on a shameful cross began life in a lowly trough for barn animals when He was born. Mentioning that Jesus is Mary's firstborn son might reinforce the concept that Jesus is to be the heir of David's throne: *Yet the LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David because of the covenant which He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and his sons forever.* (2 Chron 21:7)

Luke 2:8-12

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. (9) And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened (10) But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; (11) for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (12) "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Luke is the only gospel writer who includes the shepherds in the incarnation event. Shepherds were considered unclean because of their profession so some have said that the gospel first came to the social outcasts of this time. Except for lepers they were considered the lowest class of people in Israel. We are not told the time of the year although it could have been in December since the winters were not severe. The traditional date was set long after the event to coincide with a pagan festival and December 25 was widely celebrated as the date of the birth of Jesus by

the end of the fourth century. If the birth took place in the winter the shepherds could have been raising sheep for the Passover that would occur a few months later.

At first there is only a single angel appearing to the shepherds and a large group would be stated in verse 13. Note that the shepherds were not terrified only of the angel but because of the glory of the Lord shining around them. Neither Zachariah nor Mary had the visible manifestation of the glory of the Lord when an angel appeared to them. However the angel spoke assuredly to the shepherds as did the angel to Zachariah and Mary. The angel gives them the announcement of the gospel at the time of the birth of Jesus. He specifies to them that the Messiah has come and that this will be of great joy for all the people. The angel says that the baby will be great news for all **the** people, rather than for all people. All **the** people is a way of stating for the Jews since indeed Jesus did come first for the Jews: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* (Rom 1:16) He tells them that they have a special sign for them to know that they are at the right place since the baby will be wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. All babies were wrapped in tight fitting clothes but not many would be lying in a manger! The angel also tells them that there has been born a Savior for you. This statement makes the announcement very personal as He is born to be their Savior.

Note that Luke tells us three important concepts about this baby. He is Savior, Christ, and Lord. Savior indicates His role as the deliverer. Messiah is His office as the Anointed One of God who the Jews had been anticipating for centuries. Lord indicates His sovereign power and authority over all. If the angel had never appeared to them to point them toward Jesus they would not have known of this awesome event. The same is true today as we all need to be told about Him.

Luke 2:13-14

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

Miraculous events in Scripture are often described as happening suddenly such as the coming of the Lord to His temple (Mal 3:1), the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost (Acts 2:2), and the appearance of the Lord to Saul (Acts 9:3). We also read in Mark 13:36 and 1 Thessalonians 5:3 of the sudden occurrence of future events. The heavenly host is used in the OT to describe a band of angels around the Lord: *Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left.* (1 Kings 22:19) This is the third Christmas carol presented by Luke. It is commonly known by its first Latin words: Gloria in Excelsis Deo (Glory to God in the Highest). It is different than the others because it is sung by angels so it came down to earth from heaven. They added a benediction proclaiming peace on earth. Verse 14 is often misquoted by the world by leaving out "with whom He is pleased". The peace that Jesus brought to the earth is not what the world seeks but is as previously noted (*"to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."* Luke 1:79) and in:

Matt 10:34-36 *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; (36) and a man's enemies will be the members of his household."*

This peace of Jesus is a peace that cannot be obtained solely by man but is peace between God and man and such is only available to those who are in Christ and thus among those with whom God is pleased. Once people have this peace with God they can then enjoy the peace of God among similar people.

Luke 2:15-18

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." (16) So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. (17) When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. (18) And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

The angels are not said to disappear but to have gone away from them into heaven. Luke lets us know that the shepherds rapidly left their area to go to Bethlehem so they could see for themselves what the Lord had revealed to them. They thus knew that the angels had been sent by God to reveal this mystery to them. Having found Mary and Jesus as described by the angels, they quickly spread the word about what had been told them about the Child. They became the first evangelists as they shared the good news to anyone who would listen. This is the process used by God to spread the gospel message as all who have believed are desirous to share it with others. Everyone to whom the angels witnessed pondered greatly what the shepherds told them.

Luke 2:19-20

But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. (20) The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

The word "but" seems to contrast the reaction of Mary to that of the others. Mary did not just wonder at all the events but treasured them all and pondered them in her heart as opposed to her mind. As the life of Jesus advances she will need to have these wonderful thoughts in her heart and mind to help her understand even the horror of the Cross. The shepherds returned to their flock full of praise to God, not just at what they had seen but that such was foretold to them.

Luke 2:21-24

And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. (22) And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (23) (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED

HOLY TO THE LORD"), (24) and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS."

Luke records more details about the baby Jesus than any other Gospel. Jesus had to be circumcised according to Jewish law (Gen 17:12) because He came to save those under the law: *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, (5) so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.* (Gal 4:4-5) Luke emphasizes the naming of Him rather than His circumcision, which he does not even explicitly record. He was given the name revealed to both of them by God (Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31). The circumcision demonstrated that He was a true son of Abraham. Note that Luke states that the time of their purification was to be completed. There are two ceremonies involved, the purification of the child and the mother according to the Law of Moses. The child did not have to be present for these ceremonies but, since they were all close to Jerusalem they were both brought. The Levitical law stated that after the birth of a son a woman was unclean for seven days and for 33 more days she was to stay away from all holy things. It would then have been five weeks after His circumcision that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple. For the birth of a daughter the times were to be doubled (Lev 12:1-5).

The need for purification of the mother was because of the child's sin that was inherited from Adam. Of course Jesus was not a sinner but this purification indicates that Jesus would take upon Himself the sins of those people for whom He died: *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2 Cor 5L21) Jesus was the firstborn of Mary and God made His claim upon those firstborn: *"Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me."* (Exodus 13:2) They would still raise their children but they had to make a sacrifice (Exodus 13:13-15) acknowledging the sovereignty of God. They were then setting the son apart for service to God. The woman was to offer a lamb or a dove or pigeon unless she was poor in which case she would offer a second dove or pigeon instead of the lamb. Mary then made a sacrifice of the poor (Lev 12: 6-13). Luke then reports that Jesus received the lawful sign of the covenant in His circumcision and in His presentation He was consecrated to God. For the remainder of His life He then lived in perfect obedience to all the will of God.

Luke 2:25-28

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. (26) And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (27) And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, (28) then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

Apart from this event, we know nothing about Simeon, whose name was very common. Saying that he was righteous means his behavior toward people and his being devout refers to his being very cautious about religious duties. The consolation of Israel is another term for looking forward to the coming of the Messiah to free Israel. The time of the coming of the Messiah was to be preceded by times of great suffering that had certainly been upon Israel during the 500

years since Daniel and the 400 years of silence of God toward His people. Thus he would have been greatly anticipating this arrival. Stating that the Holy Spirit was upon him seems to imply that this was a continuous presence that was rare in Old Testament times when He would come upon people for specific occasions. Luke does not record how the Holy Spirit had informed Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died. Stating that he was “in the Spirit” infers a special sensitivity as well as inspiration from the Spirit. Bringing Jesus into the temple to fulfill the custom of the Law was when the parents brought five shekels on behalf of the child (Num 18:15). Simeon then took Jesus into his arms and gave thanks to God. For Simeon this event also meant that he could now die.

Luke 2:29-32

"Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; (30) For my eyes have seen Your salvation, (31) Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, (32) A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel."

We do not know the age of Simeon but now he could die. This song is known by its opening words in Latin: Nunc Dimittis. Simeon's song is poetic and is better understood in the original language but it is a great thanksgiving to God for now he can be released from life here and can depart in peace since the promised revelation of the Messiah has been completed. He states that he has now seen God's salvation that has come both for the Gentiles and for Israel. Being the light of revelation to the Gentiles is because He is the way to salvation to those people who had been excluded from the Law. He would also be the glory of the Jews to the world.

Luke 2:33-35

And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. (34) And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed-- (35) and a sword will pierce even your own soul--to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

What Simeon said about Jesus goes much further than what was said by the shepherds and Joseph and Mary were amazed although they had the revelation from the angel and the fact of the miraculous birth. Simeon blessed them all and then spoke to Mary in a way that would have brought amazement and sorrow. He seems to be referring to two groups of people. One group will reject Him and fall and the other group will accept Him and receive salvation. Saying that He is a sign means to point toward God and those who reject Him will also be opposed to the concept of Him being the only way to the Father: *Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.* (John 14:6) He tells Mary that a sword will pierce her soul and that pain will reveal the thoughts of people as to whether they are with Christ or against Him. We have learned that Jesus will bring peace to many but here we also learn that he will be an object of opposition for many and the revelation of their thoughts will reveal their true standing before Him. It was then known from the beginning of the life of Jesus that His death would not be for the salvation of everyone. God also used this prophecy to prepare

Mary for the crucifixion when she would find herself at the foot of the cross. The piercing sword would be the death of her firstborn son.

Luke 2:36-38

And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, (37) and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. (38) At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Remember that God had not raised a prophet for Israel for over 400 years and now He brings forth a prophetess. The Talmud recognizes only seven prophetesses so this was a very unusual event. The tribe of Asher was one of the lost ten tribes so evidently some members of it had survived and kept their genealogies. She had been married for seven years and then widowed. She probably had not been a widow for 84 years but was now 84 years old. Saying that she never left the temple may mean that she had a residence there but it probably means that her total waking time was spent serving there with fastings and prayers. At the same time as Simeon was giving thanks to God she also appeared and gave thanks to God. The redemption of Jerusalem is another way of stating the coming of the Messiah to liberate Israel. She then kept on speaking of Jesus as this Messiah to the group of people who were expecting Him.

Luke 2:39-40

When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. (40) The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Upon completing the two ceremonies required for the cleansing of the mother and the blessing of the child they returned to Galilee to their home town of Nazareth. Luke makes no mention of the trip to Egypt (Matt 2:13) and there is no way to know if he was ignorant of it or if it occurred before or after the trip to Jerusalem. Luke only gives a brief overview of the childhood development of Jesus as He developed physically, mentally, and spiritually. He does state that the grace of God was upon Him, which means a continual presence of that grace. Stating that His growth occurred in all those areas means that He was born truly a man and had to go through all the maturation processes of any male. He had to learn from birth how to walk and talk, how to reason as a human, and to learn more about Him regarding His mission from the Father. He was not just a human male with the mind of God as some have stated but was truly God and truly man. He would have spent eighteen years working as a cobbler in Nazareth with His brothers and sisters. He also had conflicts with His brothers and sisters:

- Matt 13:55-56 *"Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? (56) "And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"* (Matt 13:55-56)
- John 7:5 *For not even His brothers were believing in Him.*
- Mark 3:21 *When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."*

Later James became the leader of the church at Jerusalem: *Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. (19) But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Gal 1:18-19)*

Luke 2:41-44

Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. (42) And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; (43) and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, (44) but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

We have no knowledge of the boyhood of Jesus other than this one incident that only Luke records. All male Jews were required to go to the temple three times each year, at Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Exod 23:14-17). The Mishnah (the first major written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions) states that women were exempt from this trip (Hagigah 1:1) but some rabbis seem to have taught that they should go also. This was a great hardship for the Jews who were scattered all over the Roman Empire and beyond. The custom of Mary and Joseph was to go to the temple every Passover that was the feast commemorating the deliverance of the nation from Egypt (Exod 12). At the age of 13, a Jewish boy could become a full member of the synagogue and then assume all the responsibilities implied by his circumcision. There were some provisions in their teachings that allowed for a boy to go to the temple a year or two before his thirteenth birthday to prepare for this event but Jesus may have gone every year. Luke just records that Jesus was twelve years old at this event. Mary and Joseph returned with the caravan but Jesus remained in Jerusalem without their knowledge. This seems strange but usually the parents separated with the women and small children in front and the men and larger children in the back. They may have each thought that Jesus was with the other person and so did not discover His absence until they had been traveling for a day.

Luke 2:45-47

When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. (46) Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. (47) And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

Not finding Jesus in the caravan Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem to search for Him. The time of three days probably means from when they first began looking for Him in the caravan since Jerusalem was a small city and searching for Him would not have taken much time. It was not unusual for a child to attach himself to a group studying in the temple and they found Him there sitting among the teachers. There would not have been many excellent teachers in Nazareth so Jesus was taking advantage of the situation to be among these learned people. Jesus was not only listening to the teachers but also asking them questions. The educational system at the time had students learning by asking questions as Jesus did. Everyone who heard His comments and questions were amazed at His understanding and answers to their questions.

Luke 2:48-52

When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." (49) And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" (50) But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. (51) And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. (52) And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Joseph and Mary were astonished at this situation and Mary voiced a reproach to Jesus because of their anxious search for Him. Jesus then responded with His first words recorded by Luke. He was surprised that they did not know that He needed to be in His Father's house. Saying that the temple was His Father's house is very unusual and displays a unique relationship between Jesus and the Father. Mary and Joseph could not understand what Jesus meant by this statement as their understanding of His unique place in history would only be revealed bit by bit to them. Displaying his role as a dutiful son to them He returned with them to Nazareth. This is Luke's last reference to Joseph implying that Joseph died before Jesus began His ministry. Luke recorded that Mary treasured all these events in her heart and they would serve her well in the future. Luke then records that Jesus increased in social and spiritual ways so that He was in favor with God and men. The same statement is made of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:26). His favor with men would change when He began His ministry but, as a young man, He was evidently very polite and engaging with other people.