

## I. The Birth of the Messiah (Lk 2:1-20)

- A. In Those Days (vs 1) - In the days that John was miraculously born to Zacharias and Elizabeth, a decree went out from the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. Born with the name Octavious, he became the sole ruler of all of the Roman-ruled world. It is of note that Octavious arranged for the senate to change his name to Augustus which means “*exalted savior*”. Upon securing the entire Roman world and ending decades of war and turbulence, Augustus changed the dynamics of the republic of Rome to a dictatorship. As dictator of the known world he commanded that a census be taken in order to levy taxes. All inhabitants would have to go to the city in which they were born.

Jesus declared to the Roman governor of His day that, “God gives power to rulers”, and in this light it could be said that power given to Augustus was given to him simply to fulfill the prophetic will of God that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

1. While they were there (vs 6) - Most historians and scholars agree that the implications of this verse is that Joseph and Mary arrived quite some time before her delivery date. The trip to Bethlehem was over 80 miles from Nazareth; the trip was long, dangerous, and costly. Joseph had already shown that he wanted to spare Mary from the disgrace of rumor and public shame by getting her out of Nazareth secretly. Legally, Mary did not have to report to Bethlehem with Joseph, so this was a choice they made.
- B. And She Gave Birth to a Son (vs 7) - The simple understatement of this verse is profound as it could quite possibly be one of the greatest moments in the entire redemptive narrative. The injustice of obscurity and unrecognized glory is almost offensive. Why? Because God delights in humility. He will choose it every time. He longs to be seen by those who are willing to look and leads them into wonder. Love wants to be wanted and pursued, how much more does God, who embodies Love, desire to be sought out. (Matt. 11:25-26)

The traditional and celebrated birthdate of Jesus of December 25th is actually very highly unlikely. That date was set somewhere around 400 AD. Most scholars believe Jesus was actually born in the fall, somewhere between mid-September and mid-October. There are many factors that contribute to this conviction. The timing of Zacharias’s work in the Temple as well as the historical dates of the Roman census confirm that it wouldn’t be December. Also,

Shepherds would not have been keeping their flocks out in the open fields in the winter.

1. She wrapped Him (vs 7) - Mary had no one there to help her with her pregnancy; we must wrestle with the divine will of God in this story. God chose that there would be no comforts or the security of Doctors or Midwives. Just a scared teenager with the young man she was betrothed to in a strange city amongst strangers giving birth in an insignificant cave where animals were kept. Here in this setting and under these circumstances God chose to bring forth the Savior, King, and restorer of humanity.
  2. Laid Him in a Manger (vs 7) - The Word made flesh spoke of who God is and what He is like even when He could not utter any intelligible words. His cries echoed from the cave as by God's will they laid our Creator in a feeding trough. There, He declared with the same clarity as He did in His multiple teachings that God was near to the poor, weak, and broken.
  3. There was no Room for Them (vs 7) - As we looked at earlier, the original Greek strongly suggests that Joseph and Mary had been in Bethlehem for quite some time. The original language here speaks of the reality of being pushed out to make room for others. It could very well be that Joseph and Mary were forced to vacate a room or multiple rooms that they had previously been staying in as more "important" or "wealthy" individuals came into the city for the census.
- C. Proclamation to the Shepherds (vs 8) - Shepherds were looked down upon socially in Jesus' day. Their work made them ceremonially unclean, and they had a reputation for being untrustworthy. Thus, God first sent the gospel (good news) to these individuals. There is a lot of symbolism here. David had been a shepherd, but God had elevated him to be the ruler of His people. Throughout the Old Testament, God used shepherds as symbols of those who cared for His people (Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 23:1-4; et al.)

In addition to these things, scholars and historians of the region and religion of that day all agree that these particular sheep being cared for outside of Bethlehem were actually the flock that belonged to the temple priests. The ewes they were caring for would be giving birth shortly to the lambs that would be sacrificed in the spring at the feast of Passover. These shepherds were being sent to gaze upon

the true passover lamb who would put a permanent end to the sacrificial system to atone for and cover sin.

1. Good News of Great Joy for All People (vs 10) - The angels declare that “all people” would be able to connect with the birth of Jesus as good news for them personally and would bring them “great joy”. From the worst to the best of us, for every tribe, tongue, and language, this Child was born for all of us.
2. Christ the Lord (vs 11) - This particular title of Jesus is only found right here in Luke's Gospel. It means, “Messiah God”, thus, the full divinity of the Messiah is declared from the very beginning twice now from the mouths of Angels. (Lk. 1:35)
3. This is a Sign to You (vs 12) - Them finding the new born child lying in the manger in the cave was the sign to look for that the Angels were telling the truth concerning the destiny and identity of the baby. However, there is more to this “sign to you”, including the fact that they were shepherds of the temple sheep who specifically brought forth spotless lambs for sin. In addition, they were possibly the most rejected and lowest social class in Bethlehem; that this child was born in the poorest of places in the lowest of conditions must surely be for them. If He had been born in a palace and placed on a bed of feathers and satin sheets, then the fact that He came for the poor would have been questioned.

D. Mary Treasured and Pondered (vs 19) - This is the second of three verses where Luke points out that Mary had a very contemplative personality but kept her thoughts to herself. I believe that one of the reasons God chose Mary is because she would not brag or talk about who Jesus really was.

## II. Dedication Ceremony of Jesus (Lk 2:21-38)

A. According to the law of Moses (vs 22) - The Mosaic Law directed that the parents of a male child were to circumcise him on the eighth day after his birth (Lev. 12:3; Gen. 17:12). The mother of a male offspring was unclean for 33 days following her son's circumcision. On the fortieth day after her son's birth, the mother was to present a sin offering to the priest at the sanctuary to atone for her uncleanness. Normally, this offering was to be a lamb, but if the woman was poor she could bring two doves or two pigeons (Lev. 12:4-8). In the case of a firstborn

son, the parents were to present him to the Lord (Exod. 13:2, 12; Num. 18:16; 1 Sam. 1:24-28). The parents would normally redeem the son (buy him back from the Lord) by paying five shekels for him (Num. 18:16).

1. Shall be called Holy (vs 23) - The setting apart of the firstborn of both animals and children was commanded by the Lord in order to be a constant reminder that He delivered them out of Egypt by His own hand. Specifically, the judgment of the firstborn. This command was given by way of reminder or memorial to never forget that God delivered them by His own will because of His great love for them.
  2. Offer a Sacrifice (vs 24) - God required a cost concerning this memorial of His work of deliverance from Egypt. That which costs us something is far more significant to us than that which costs us nothing. God commanded that every firstborn child and animal would be a costly reminder of His love, intentionality, and zealous judgment (1 Chron. 21:24)
- B. A man named Simeon (vs 25) - There is not much in the text concerning the identity or role of Simeon and much speculation has arisen concerning him. Traditionally, he has been thought of as an old man but the text does not say that either. What we are meant to focus upon is his prophetic song and word to Mary.
1. Holy Spirit Activity (vs 26-27) - The Holy Spirit is clearly the revealer of Jesus to men; this theme so fills the pages of Luke's Gospel that it is impossible to miss. The implication is clear that if one wants to know more about Jesus, the Holy Spirit brings that revelation. (John 16:7-15)
  2. Prophetic Song (vs 28-32) - I believe that what Luke wants us to zero in upon is that Simeon had significant understanding by the Spirit of the universalism of the salvational mission of Jesus. We should consider that Simeon's words caused both Mary and Joseph to be in amazement even though they had already experienced so much supernatural activity. The truth that the Messiah would be for the Gentiles as well was surely the statement that caused them to be in wonder, for everything else uttered by Simeon was something they had already heard or known.
  3. Prophetic Word to Mary (vs 34-35) - In His kindness God wanted to prepare Mary's mother's heart for the difficulty that awaited her. All people from that day forward until now would scrutinize the identity and worth of her child. Ultimately, he would be rejected and killed by the

nation He was promised to. She would endure a sword of pain and anguish in her soul constantly throughout his ministry, and ultimately upon his death.

- C. A woman named Anna (vs 36) - Anna, whose name in the Hebrew is actually Hannah, was a female prophetess. It's interesting that Luke labels her specifically as a Prophet but none of the other individuals who have prophetically spoken in his gospel are given that title. Luke clearly wants us to see the renewal of prophecy at this time, and I believe it's not mere coincidence that the first he validates as an actual prophet is a woman.
1. Prophetess (vs 36) - We now have five prophetic words up to this point in the story. Three of those voices are women and two are men, and also to this point, the women's voices and roles are far more significant than that of the men.
  2. Lifestyle of Fasting and Prayer (vs 37) - This is the first mention of a faithful lifestyle of prayer and fasting in Luke's gospel but definitely not the last. This will be developed into a major theme as his gospel unfolds and Luke will tie it to the level of spiritual maturity and power just as he does here.
  3. The First Evangelist (vs 38) - This is the first mention of an individual specifically being led or released by the Spirit to publicly give witness of who Jesus was. Once again, it is someone whom society today would not have chosen to be the first individual seen as worthy or deserving of such an assignment. (1 Cor. 1:21-29)

### III. Childhood in Nazareth (Lk 2:39-40)

- A. Holy Hiddenness (vs 40)- We know very little about the childhood and adolescence of Jesus. It was the will and glory of God to live in hiddenness among us for 30 years, working and living among His beloved ones. This is a reality that must be meditated in and delighted upon.

### IV. Adolescence Revealed in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:41-52)

- A. When he became twelve (vs 42) - This is the only story we get concerning Jesus's childhood and adolescence from Luke's gospel. Culturally, Jewish boys were regarded as ready to learn their fathers trade at age twelve, and at age thirteen,

they were believed to be ready to be accountable to the requirements of the Mosaic law. Luke points out that Jesus at age twelve was ready to learn the trade He was called to and embrace fulfilling the righteous requirements of the law.

1. Passover in Jerusalem (vs 42) - Again, Luke pointed out the godly characters of Mary and Joseph and their devotion to the Torah. Jewish males were to go to Jerusalem three times a year: at the feasts of Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. In Jesus' day, women usually attended with their husbands or fathers. Those who could not attend all three festivals tried to attend Passover at least.
2. The boy stayed behind (vs 43) - Mary and Joseph probably did not miss Jesus for a whole day because of how they traveled in the culture of that day. Each may have supposed that He was with the other, since men often traveled with men and women with women. They also traveled in large caravans in the hundreds, and would have easily assumed that He was with the other boys, or the other adults, in their caravan of pilgrims going back home.
3. Why have you done this (vs 48) - This question gives us insight into the kind of child Jesus was. As you may have guessed, the question suggests this was very out of character.
  - a. Had to be in my Fathers house (vs 49) Jesus did follow in Joseph's footsteps as a carpenter, but His words here show that He was at least beginning to understand His unique relationship to His true Father and was ready to take up the trade. It is impossible to say when, in the context of the self-imposed limitations of His humanity, Jesus realized who He was and what He was sent to do, but it was early in His childhood as this is probably not when it began, but rather when it was revealed.
4. They did not understand (vs 50) - This verse is actually a bit surprising that Mary and Joseph did not understand. More than likely their surprise was not in the general knowledge that their son was unique, but rather, it was something specific concerning this situation that surprised them. I will offer a couple of possibilities.

- a. They may have been surprised by the knowledge that unbeknownst to them, Jesus at age twelve, had already developed His unique relationship and role with His heavenly Father, not understanding how and when it had been happening.
  - b. They may have not understood that He was going to take up the mantle of a Rabbi. The Messiah prophetically was not seen as a Priest or a Rabbi but rather a King, Judge, and Deliverer.
5. Mary treasured and pondered (vs 51) - Here again, we see the simple obedience and yielding to the will of God that Mary walked in. Though she clearly did not understand, she yielded and went into a stance of embracing the unclear things and treasuring them in her heart.
- B. Jesus continued to increase (vs 52) - Jesus' mental, social, and spiritual maturity and empowerment developed along with physical human growth. He was fully man as well as fully God. But He voluntarily set aside some of His divine prerogatives temporarily in the Incarnation. The Greek word translated "increased" or "grew" literally means, "to move forward by chopping down obstacles", which is a vivid description of the maturation process. (Phil. 2:7)

Another clear theme in Luke's gospel is the embracing of the slowness and mundane process of maturation of understanding, Godliness, and perfect timing and preparation of God in our lives.

1. Favor (vs 52) - The word translated "favor" is the same word translated "grace" in the rest of the New Testament, but this was not unmerited forgiveness as in the pattern when grace is extended to sinners. A literal translation of this verse would be better understood as the pleasure of God was upon Him.