

## Luke Chapter 2

In this chapter, Luke sets out the details regarding the birth of the Lord Jesus. There is no mention of His birth in Mark's account for who would want to know about the birth of a bondservant. Hence Mark begins with the start of the Lord's public service. Similarly, there is no mention of it in John's gospel but for a very different reason. The origins of the Son of God are not in Nazareth but in heaven. He is the eternal Word, come from the presence of God. Luke is the gospel of the perfect man hence he writes in detail regarding the circumstances surrounding the Lord's birth.

Typically of Luke though, he first sets the scene around these circumstances.

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

Before the child could be born, there was a problem to be overcome. Micah the prophet had written in chapter 5 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. This was common knowledge and in Matthew 2, the priests passed this knowledge on to Herod. But the child's mother Mary and her husband were not in Bethlehem but in Nazareth, many miles to the north of Jerusalem.

Naturally speaking, there was no way that Joseph would have brought his wife on this journey, as it was nearing the time for the baby to be delivered.

But God intervened in a remarkable way. He could have done it by speaking to Joseph in a dream as He does in Matthew's gospel. Instead He chooses to use the most powerful man on earth at this time – the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. He issues a decree that all the world was to be taxed or enrolled. Every man had to return to the place of his birth, and for Joseph, this meant Bethlehem. Try and picture the scene – throughout the vast Roman empire, thousands of people are on the move. Many would be murmuring, "Why do we have to do this?" It was probably a whim of Caesar just to satisfy his pride, just as David did many centuries before. But the real reason for this huge movement of people was to bring a humble carpenter and his wife from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It is all the more remarkable that the census was incomplete at this time. Luke adds the comment in verse 2 that it was first carried out when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Historians tell us that this was several years after the Lord's birth. Caesar's plan was incomplete but God's plan was fulfilled.

Note, however, the contrast between God using Augustus here, yet in chapter 3, Tiberias is mentioned but completely passed by when God is seeking someone to be the herald of the Messiah. This was a spiritual work and could only be undertaken by a spiritual man like John the Baptist. Herod is bypassed, so too are the tetrarchs and the high priests, and the word of God comes to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

In verse 4, Luke tells us about Joseph that he was of the house and lineage of David. The Lord therefore had a claim to David's throne through His supposed

father Joseph. The true heir to David's throne was a carpenter from Nazareth. Verse 7 records the birth of the babe. "She brought forth her firstborn son". Mary had at least 6 other children for we read the names of four of the Lord's brethren and also his sisters. (at least 2). Roman Catholics in their attempts to deify Mary insist that these other children were the children of Joseph by a previous marriage but that is a concocted story to try and get round what they see as a problem. We simply believe the Bible – she brought forth her firstborn son – and laid Him in a manger. This was a strange place to lay a new-born child, but the reason follows on immediately. "There was no room for them in the inn". There are a number of possibilities for this. From a purely natural point of view, the enrolling was taking place throughout the land so the inn would be full. Or perhaps there was simply no room for a humble carpenter from Nazareth of all places. And would they have known about Mary's claim to be with a child of the Holy Ghost, conceived before her marriage to Joseph? Whatever the reason, the world's inn had no place for Mary and Joseph, hence no place for Him.

This is the first of three inns in Luke's gospel. We find a second inn in chapter 10, in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan is a picture of the Lord Jesus, Himself despised yet still willing and able to bless men. In the story, the Samaritan finds the wounded man, set him on his own beast, takes him to an inn, and there he takes care of him. The inn is a delightful picture of the assembly. It is a place for strangers and pilgrims. It is a place of care. It is a place of service and reward. It is a place of expectation of the Samaritan's return. It is the Lord's inn, where sinners are received and cared for.

The third inn is not so obvious. In Luke chapter 22, the Lord sends two of His disciples into Jerusalem. He tells them that as they enter the gate of the city, a man would meet them bearing a pitcher of water. They were to follow him to a house, and when they got there, they were to ask the master of the house, "Where is the guest chamber where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?" The word for "guest chamber" is the same as the word for "inn" in chapter 2. We see now the activities inside that part of the inn reserved for the guests. The Passover is celebrated then the Lord's supper is instituted. Once again, it is the Lord's inn.

So far, the birth of the Lord Jesus has gone unnoticed by the world. It is the middle of the night – the world is asleep. Yet the Christ, the Son of God has arrived. Does no-one know that this has happened? In verse 8, the news is about to be spread. Every one is asleep in and around Bethlehem, apart from a few shepherds in the fields, watching over their flock. The angel of the Lord appears to them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. The angel tells them the great news:

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

What great titles this babe has, and that from the moment of His birth, He is a Saviour; He is the Christ, the anointed One, the promised One. And He is the Lord.

They are titles which would be fully understood by the people of Israel. That is why some commentators say regarding the last phrase of verse 10, not "to all people" but to "all the people" ie to Israel.

How and where would the shepherds find such an amazing baby. Would it be in a palace, or in some rich man's home? Would He be found wrapped in beautiful garments and lying in a beautiful cradle? There might have been other new born children in and around Bethlehem that night. Well, they are given a sign in verse 12:

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

The babe would be unique, not in its outward glory but in the humility of its surroundings. It would be found lying in a manger. There would be no other babe like it in Bethlehem. He bore the sign of humility.

The shepherds then have been informed by the angel of the Lord. But in verse 13, it seems as if the host of heaven cannot contain its joy. As soon as the first angel has spoken, there comes forth a sudden burst of angelic praise.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men

"Good will toward men" should really read "good pleasure in men". Here was something that God had not enjoyed since the fall of Adam. Sin had marred God's pleasure in men. But now a man child had come into the world, a man in whom God could find great pleasure. God's delight in this man is expressed twice in this gospel – once at Jordan, and once on the mount of transfiguration.

At the Lord's first advent, the host of heaven worshipped God. When He comes again in glory, God will issue His commandment:

6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. (Hebrews 1)

The shepherds obey the angel's instruction and go towards Bethlehem. There they find the babe and they went out to publish abroad their good news. Many wondered at what the shepherds told them, But Mary seems to have a more contemplative spirit. She "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

After eight days, the child had to be circumcised, according to the law. Leviticus chapter 12 had said:

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.

3 And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

The law was set aside by Paul in his later epistles, but the Lord Jesus came under the law and indeed came to magnify the law and make it honourable. Hence, Mary and Joseph had the babe circumcised after eight days. They also named Him as Jesus. In Luke chapter 1, Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her

about the birth of the child. He also named Him:

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

The angel of the Lord later appeared to Joseph and named the child also, as we read of in Matthew chapter 1:

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Mary then waited a further 33 days until the days of her purification were accomplished according to Leviticus 12 again:

4 And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.

After the end of these 33 days, they brought the babe to Jerusalem. They came to accomplish one more thing that the law demanded. Leviticus chapter 12 commanded the woman to bring a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon for a sin offering::

6 And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest:

God however made provision for the poor in Israel and so instead of a lamb and a pigeon, He would allow her to bring two turtle doves or two young pigeons.

8 And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

It underlines for us the poverty of the home in Nazareth. Not only was Nazareth itself a despised place, Joseph and Mary lived in relative poverty in this town.

Verses 25 to 35 now describe the encounter that Mary and Joseph had in the temple with the old man Simeon. What marks this man out are the three references to the Holy Spirit.

In verse 25 The Holy Spirit was upon him

In verse 26 It was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit

In verse 27 He came by the Spirit into the temple

Here is a man who is just and devout – a man living righteously under the law yet at the same time, a man moved and directed by the Holy Spirit. We learn over 33 years later, in the upper room with His disciples, how the Lord taught His disciples about the Holy Spirit, that when He was come, He would glorify Christ and reveal Him to His own. The Spirit was doing this work in the life of Simeon. How close did the Spirit bring Simeon? Simeon did not just speak about the child, he took the child up in his arms – an unnatural thing perhaps for a man to do. Verses 29 to 32 give us the eulogy of Simeon regarding the

child:

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:  
30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,  
31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;  
32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Simeon had received a promise from God that he would not die until he had seen the child who would be God's salvation. We assume that Simeon was an old man from what he says. God has kept him alive until this moment and now his life is fulfilled and he prays, "Lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace". Simeon had the same spirit as Paul many years later who could say in II Timothy 4:6, "I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand".

The salvation of God would not be confined to Israel alone – it would be for all people:

32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel

Simeon was speaking probably not so much of the church but of all the nations who shall be blessed with salvation after He returns to Israel again.

Despite what Mary and Joseph have heard from the angelic messengers before the conception of the child, and despite the appearance of the shepherds in the inn, Mary and Joseph marveled at the things spoken by Simeon regarding their child.

What follows in verses 34 and 35 is a prophetic statement regarding the child. He would be, not for the rise and fall of many but rather the fall and rising again of many. The Jews would be stumbled at His first appearing and would fall, but many shall rise again when He comes again to Israel in a coming day.

Simeon however also looks forward to Calvary when Mary's heart would be pierced through with much sorrow:

35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Many other hearts would be tested also in that day – many would believe in Him but far more would reject Him. The hearts of men would be revealed at Calvary.

Verses 36 to 38 bring us to another lovely character who met Mary and Joseph on this occasion – Anna. It is almost like a page out of God's book of remembrance. We know well the verses from the book of Malachi. "A book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name". The days of Malachi were dark days in Israel's history. Men were saying about divine things, "It is vain to serve the Lord" and "What a weariness it is!" But there was this little remnant who were precious in the Lord's eyes. A study of remnants is a precious subject but remnants only exist where there is general failure. That was true certainly of Malachi's day, and it was no doubt true in the days of Simeon and Anna. God now opens a page of His remembrance book and tells us what He has written about Anna. In the space of just two verses, God tells us how much He knew about her:

1. Her name – Anna
2. A prophetess
3. The daughter of Phanuel
4. Of the tribe of Asher
5. She was of a great age
6. Had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity
7. She was a widow of about 84 years
8. She departed not from the temple but served God with fastings & prayers

I understand the name Anna is the same as Hannah of I Samuel. The name means “grace”, and this lovely character showed much evidence of that in her life. God had given her a spiritual gift – she was a prophetess and would have a knowledge of the mind of God. Her father is not forgotten – Phanuel. But then we come to an interesting detail. She was of the tribe of Asher. This was one of the smallest and seemingly most insignificant of the tribes of Israel. Asher indeed was of the ten northern tribes led off to Assyria and never to be seen again. They were given into captivity because of their gross idolatry. But here was an exception. She not only survived the captivity but survived the idolatry of her peers. So what does the bible have to say about Asher?

In Genesis 49, Jacob speaks of his 12 sons – some details are historic but some are prophetic. What does he say about Asher?

20 Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses makes some statements also, not about the twelve sons of Jacob, but of the twelve tribes that have arisen from these twelve men. He says about Asher in Deuteronomy chapter 33:

24 And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil.

25 Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

It is lovely to see that most of these promises regarding Asher were fulfilled, not by some great warrior or prophet, by the widow Anna.

**His bread shall be fat** – here was a widow woman who feasted upon divine things. We could devote our whole life to the study of God’s word and never exhaust it.. It is a rich treasure trove.

**He shall yield royal dainties** – This was certainly true of Anna. She left the temple after seeing the Lord and went and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. She knew all the faithful saints who were looking for the coming of the Messiah. She was in fellowship with them – sadly there were few enough that an old widow could get round them all.

**Let Him dip his foot in oil** – Someone who had literally dipped his foot in oil would leave impressions behind him. Anna was a spiritual woman who was leaving spiritual footprints behind her. Oil of course would speak to us of the Spirit Himself. It is always sad to attend the funeral of a Christian, but it is comforting and also challenging to hear good reports of someone who has left spiritual impressions behind him.

**As thy days, so shall thy strength be** – Anna was 84 years of age, yet she

was still active in her service for God. She departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. She was known for her faithfulness and her consistency at the temple. And as we have just said above, she went round Jerusalem to speak of Him to the faithful few.

Verse 39 ends this section at the temple – Mary and Joseph then returned to Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

If we stop for a minute, and think now of Matthew's account of the Lord's birth and the events that followed it, we can see apparent difficulties. In Luke chapter 2, the Lord is taken by His parents to Nazareth some 40 days after His birth. But in Matthew chapter 2, after the departure of the wise men, Joseph takes the young child and His mother down into Egypt. Is this an example of the Bible contradicting itself? – certainly not! It just needs some further study to resolve the matter. When the wise men went to see Herod, he enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared to them. Once he realized that the wise men were not coming back, he sent his soldiers to kill all the male children from two years of age and under – according to the time that he had diligently inquired of the wise men. So Herod must have reckoned there could have been anything up to 2 years between the wise men first seeing the star and their arrival at Jerusalem. So how do we explain all this and reconcile Matthew and Luke. Luke does indeed give an account of the Lord's birth and after 40 days He is taken to Nazareth. At the time of the Lord's birth, the star appeared to the wise men in the east. They made their preparations and set off on their long journey to Jerusalem. They tell Herod when they saw the star, giving Herod some indication of how old the child would be now. They are instructed to go south to Bethlehem to find the young child but as they started off, the star re-appeared to them. I believe that the star now directed them northwards – to Nazareth. And they found not a babe as Luke speaks of, but a young child, and they entered not the inn, but a house. The visit of the wise men therefore took place some time after the Lord's birth, and that is why, after the departure of the wise men, Joseph and Mary take the young child down into Egypt. Luke and Matthew therefore give accounts of different events and certainly do not contradict each other.

Verses 41 to 50 describe the last major event in this chapter – the Lord Jesus as a boy of 12 in the temple. Luke is the gospel writer who tells us most about the humanity of the Lord Jesus, so it is hardly surprising that Luke gives us this brief insight into the boy of 12.

We have seen how meticulous Mary and Joseph were when the child was born. They circumcised the child at eight days and then offered what the law demanded for Mary's purification. They were also faithful in coming down every year to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. On one such occasion, they have kept the feast and have started out again on their journey. They have assumed that the boy was with them in the company and continue a whole day without Him. They lost touch with Him for one day but it took them three days to find Him again. There is an obvious spiritual lesson that we can learn. It is possible to travel on the Christian pathway without the Lord, and it may take longer to find Him than it took to lose Him.

And what was the Lord doing in this time? He was sitting with the doctors and

lawyers in the temple – discussing with them the scriptures. He was doing His Father's business. Or as it should read, He was "in His Father's business".

From here He went back to Nazareth and was subject to His parents. Verse 52 concludes:

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.