

Luke 2

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Introduction:

- Only the Almighty God could bring the events into mesh to move Mary from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea for Jesus to be born. That is the everlasting ruler's birthplace according to the prophet Micah.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, One whose origins are from the distant past. (about 700 BC)

Micah 5:2 NLT

- The well-known religious leaders of the world had no one to foretell their birth. Not Buddha, not Confucius, not Mohammed. Only Jesus was foretold hundreds of years before his birth and by several prophets.

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HIS BIRTH AT BETHLEHEM

(1.) At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (2) (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) (3) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.

- Caesar **Augustus** began his reign in 30 or 31 B.C. Our month of August comes from his name. The entire Roman Empire was to be enrolled in the **census**. The time references in both verse 1 and 2 are something that the Roman governor Theophilus could relate to.
- God used a pagan, **Emperor Caesar Augustus**, in far off Rome to issue a command to take a **census** of the entire **Roman** world. In Israel, the **census** was taken, not by **census** takers, but by everyone going back to where his family archives were kept and enrolling in the records. For both Joseph and Mary, this meant a trip back to Bethlehem, a small town near Jerusalem. The official chronicles of David's descendants were kept there. So an edict from Caesar **Augustus** in far off Rome moved Mary to Bethlehem so the Messiah could be born there as the old prophets had said. Such a work of Providence!
- God often shows His involvement by the timing of events, even in our lives just like moving Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem at the right time.

(4.) And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. (5) He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.

- This trip was about 70 miles. The betrothal period may have been extended beyond the normal time because Mary's virginity was maintained until after the birth of the **child**. Matthew 1:24-25:

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named Him Jesus.

(6.) And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.

(7) She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped Him snugly in

strips of cloth and laid Him in a

manger, because there was no lodging available for them.



- It is impossible to establish the date of Jesus' birth with precision. The traditional date recognized in the West is December 25th and that is possibly correct. The inspired writer Luke may have known, but it was not part of God's design to communicate it to future generations.
- **McGarvey** says, "the new-born Jewish child was washed in water, rubbed with salt, and then wrapped in bands or blankets, which confined the limbs closely (Ezekiel 16:4)."
- Many families were traveling about because of the census and the commercial accommodations were full. Mary did not brag about carrying the Messiah in order for her to get a room. Each room had a stall beside it and one of these was available. A rather humble place to start on earth. There are other views about where the manger was located such as behind the inn or in a cave.

(8.) That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. (9) Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified,

- These were not ordinary flocks according to **Alfred Edersheim**, but temple **flocks** (vs 8) and would have been available any month of the year. The **angel** did



not recruit kings, but shepherds (vs. 9).

(10.) but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. (11) The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! (12) And you will recognize Him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

- Of the gospel writers, Luke the Gentile finds special interest in this announcement of the **angel**. This is for **all people** (vs. 10). It is international, not Jewish only. Aren't we glad?
- A new element is added by Luke. The child is **the Messiah, the Lord**. He was the long-awaited **Messiah** of Israel (vs. 11).
- Without anyone asking, the **angel** offered a **sign**. A newborn baby in a **manger** was far from normal village life (vs. 12). Kings on their thrones, but King of Kings in a **manger**!

(13.) Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

- "The event was too important to be heralded by any one angel. All heaven was interested in the departure of its Prince, and marveled at the grace of the Father who sent him." - **J. W. McGarvey**.
- This verse is frequently misconstrued. The **peace** is for those with whom God is **pleased**. It does not say "there will be peace on earth because God is pleased with everyone."

(15.) When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (16) They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.

- Faith was evident among the **shepherds**. They did not go to see **if** it were true. They went to see this thing that had **happened**. (vs. 15).
- They had been given a sign (v. 12) and the sign proved to be true (vs. 16).



(17.) After seeing Him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. (18) All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished,

- Now the **shepherds** became God's main source of information for others. Such a story to tell in the market places!
- This has the ring of personal interviews by the writer Luke.

(19.) but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. (20) The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

- The **shepherds** proclaimed, but **Mary** pondered (vs. 19). This pondering was a rich source of memory treasure for **Mary**. For Luke to know **Mary's thoughts**, he either interviewed her or read her writings.

- These humble proclaimers returned to their duties (vs. 20). But they had been changed. They **praised God** and spoke of his Majesty - and his new born Son.

(21.) Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, He was named Jesus, the name given Him by the angel even before He was conceived.

- Like the case of John before him, **Jesus** was **circumcised** and **named** on the eighth day. The **name** had been preassigned and Joseph could only obey.

A TRIP TO JERUSALEM

(22.) Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of

Moses after the birth of a child; so His parents took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.

(23) The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first

child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD." (24) So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."



- "Purification took place on the fortieth day after the birth in the case of males, and eighty days in the case of females (Leviticus 12:1-5). Until it was performed, the mother was not permitted to go to the temple, take part in any public service, or even to leave her house. It seems that the members of the family (their purification) were also ceremonially unclean, because they came in daily contact with her" — **J.W. McGarvey**.
- Every firstborn male child in Israel had to be redeemed because the Lord claimed them. Exodus 13:2:

Dedicate to Me every firstborn among the Israelites. The first offspring to be born, of both humans and animals, belongs to Me.

There was a redemption fee to pay at the temple.

- The second purpose of going to the temple was to offer a sin offering for Mary (vs. 24). The **pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons** were for Mary, not the baby. Here is the command:

If a woman cannot afford to bring a lamb, she must bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. One will be for the burnt offering and the other for the purification offering. The priest will sacrifice them to purify her, and she will be ceremonially clean. Leviticus 12:8

We learn several truths here:

- Mary was not sinless for she presented the offering for her sin. Instead of the normal lamb offering, she chose the offering allowed for the poor — **a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons**. God always makes provision for the poor.
- Therefore the wise men from the east had not arrived because they brought gold as an offering to the child. They **did not** arrive along with the shepherds.

JESUS IS IDENTIFIED BY SIMEON

(25.) At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him (26) and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

- Like Zachariah in Luke 1:6, **Simeon** was a high quality, mainline worshiper of God. Simeon has been looking for the Messiah, sometimes called the consolation of Israel.
- **Holy Spirit:** Luke tells us explicitly of his inspiration.

(27.) That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, (28) Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, (29) "Sovereign Lord, now let Your servant die in peace, as You have promised. (30) I have seen Your salvation, (31) which You have prepared for all people. (32) He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and He is the glory of Your people Israel!"

- God frequently arranges meetings and on this day **Simeon** was prompted (vs. 27) to go to the **Temple**. This was the climactic encounter of **Simeon's** life. Here was the long-awaited Christ (Messiah) (vs. 26). May God be praised! Perhaps his health was declining and life had become a burden. He was ready to die now that this moment was passing.
- **Peace** (vs. 29), Shalom, was and is very important to descendants of Abraham. It is still a common greeting in Israel.
- The outcome of Jesus' life would be **salvation** (vs. 30). Luke records the words important to all non-Jews: Jesus is a revelation for all **nations** as well as **the glory of Israel**.

(33.) Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about Him. (34) Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but He will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many

will oppose Him. (35) As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

- Joseph and **Mary** had gone to the Temple for routine rituals. They marveled at this encounter that confirmed their previous experiences about Jesus (vs. 33).
- "In his own earthly lifetime Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, Gadarenes, etc., sank down before his example and teaching; while fishermen, publicans and outcasts were elevated and encouraged by his sympathy." - **McGarvey**
- "... during his earthly lifetime Jesus was called "deceiver," "Samaritan," "demoniac," etc., and subsequently his followers were abused (Acts 28:22); later the Jews wrote of him as "the deceiver," "that man," and "the hung." Early Christians were charged by the pagans with committing cannibalism, incest, and every conceivable atrocity, and in this day "Christian" is—after Jew—the most stinging term of reproach known to the Eastern tongue." - **J. W. McGarvey**
- While Mary treasured the events surrounding Jesus' early life, yet there was pain ahead, too. This came to a climax when her firstborn son was nailed to the cross as she stood in his presence.

JESUS IS IDENTIFIED BY ANNA

(36.) Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. (37) Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. (38) She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she

began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

- **Anna** was a **prophet** (Luke writing in Greek used the feminine word *prophetess*) and inspired, yet God had not communicated with His people for more than 400 years so she wasn't a teacher of the Scriptures. What did she do as a **prophetess**? The **prophetess** of the Old Testament were music people and this may have been her primary role in the Temple. Miriam was a **prophetess** and song leader (Exodus 15:20-21). Deborah was judge to individuals, but wrote a song that has remained to the present (Judges 4:4; 5:1 ff). Undoubtedly **Anna** was a musician or singer.
- **Day and night** (vs. 37) describes the work of the **Temple** singers in 1 Chronicles 9:33. There may have been night services of sacred music. Psalm 134: 1-2.
- Luke calls attention to the meeting in the vast **Temple** area that must have been coordinated by the Spirit. **Anna** also connected the babe-in-arms with **the rescue of Jerusalem** (vs. 38).

THE FAMILY SETTLED AT NAZARETH

(39.) When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. (40) There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on Him.

- While Luke's narrative jumps to **Nazareth**, the events of Matthew that include the Wise Men and the trip to Egypt fit in before the return to **Nazareth**. That portion of the story is of more interest to Jewish readers. Luke is writing to a Gentile and for Gentiles.

- **McGarvey:** “His life expanded like other human lives. He learned as other boys; he obeyed as other children. As he used means and waited patiently for growth, so must each individual Christian, and so must the church.”
- Even **wisdom** did not come as a gift to **Jesus**. He learned it through experience, just as we do.

GOING TO JERUSALEM AT TWELVE

(41.) Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. (42) When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. (43) After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't miss Him at first, (44) because they assumed He was among the other travelers. But when He didn't show up that evening, they started looking for Him among their relatives and friends.

- **McGarvey** says, “Males were required to attend the Passover (Ex 13:7); but women were not. The great rabbi, Hillel (born about B.C. 110; died A.D. 10), recommended that they should do so, and the practice was esteemed an act of admirable piety.”
- The trip from Galilee would take about five days each way. It was a social affair with families traveling in groups. It included singing fifteen Psalms (120-134) called the “Songs of Ascents” as they climbed toward **Jerusalem**.
- While his group was returning home (vs. 43), Jesus was back at **Jerusalem**. Notice the freedom of this 12-year-old.

(45.) When they couldn't find Him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for Him there. (46) Three days later they finally discovered Him in the Temple, sitting among

the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. (47) All who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

- **Three days** (vs. 46) is probably one day outbound, one day for the return trip and part of a day to search the town and the **Temple**. The parents stayed together while they searched and located him in a class at the **Temple**. Jesus was fully engaged with the **teachers** of the law.
- Some recitation was involved and Jesus demonstrated a grasp of the law that amazed those listening (vs. 47).

(48.) His parents didn't know what to think. "Son," His mother said to Him, "why have You done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for You everywhere." (49) "But why did you need to search?" He asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in My Father's house?" (50) But they didn't understand what He meant.

- "As legal father of Jesus, this expression would necessarily have to be used when speaking of Joseph. But Jesus does not accept Joseph as his father, as we see by his answer" - **J. W. McGarvey**
- The response of Jesus puzzled Joseph and Mary (vs. 50).
- Jesus said he was in his **Father's house**. While we easily grasp the meaning today, his parents did not. But Mary remembered the **statement** and told Luke in years to come. Verse 51. These are the first recorded words of Jesus.

(51.) Then He returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And His mother stored all these things in her heart.

- It would be easy to conclude that this young man was disobedient, but Luke makes it clear this was a one-time event. Jesus had chosen the higher law.
- This is the final mention of Joseph being alive. He apparently died sometime during the next eighteen years. By the time the ministry of Jesus begins when he is thirty years of age, he is functioning as the family head.

(52.) Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.

- Aside from this comment, the curtain of silence is drawn over the next eighteen years of Jesus' life. He did not perform miracles or do any teaching.