

CONCERNING THE WAY

December 13, 2011

LESSON 123: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 2

Welcome to one of the most beloved chapters in the Bible, portions of which are read every Christmas season in almost every church and in millions of homes around the world. This is The Christmas Story. This is why we celebrate this holiday – not because of gift-giving, not because of Christmas carols, or spending time with family; not for “peace on earth goodwill towards men”, although all of those things are good and what we look forward to this time of year. But we celebrate Christmas because God loved us so much that He gave His son, also fully God, to be born a human baby, who grew up to be a human man, and died on a cross so that we could spend eternity with Him. That is something we can celebrate every day, not just at Christmastime, and something that will last much longer than that new sweater and Christmas cookies.

Before we start with Luke chapter 2, let’s get a little background from the gospel of Matthew, who gave us some details Luke left out:

Matthew 1:18-25 Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened in this way. When his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, before they lived together she was discovered to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. (19) Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to disgrace her, decided to divorce her secretly. (20) After he had thought about it, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. (21) She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he is the one who will save his people from their sins." (22) Now all this happened to fulfill what was declared by the Lord through the prophet when he said, (23) "See, a virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel," which means, "God with us." (24) When Joseph got up from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary as his wife. (25) He did not have marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.

- Joseph, when he finds out Mary is pregnant and the baby is not his, decides to divorce Mary, which was proper under the Mosaic Law.
- Verse 23 is quoting Isaiah 7:14. Another prediction of Jesus’ birth in the Old Testament is Isaiah 9:6-7:

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (7) Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

- This is the Messiah that the Jews were waiting for. They expected Him to come and establish His kingdom, freeing Israel from the rule of the Romans. They did not expect the “suffering servant” Messiah that Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 53 or the “Anointed One” who would be killed that Daniel

spoke of in Daniel 9.

- This prophesy of the conquering Messiah will ultimately fulfilled in the Millennium, when Christ comes back to the earth, defeats His enemies and rules the world from David's throne.

Now on to Luke 2:

Luke 2:1-2 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be registered. (2) This was the first registration taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Roman Emperors in New Testament Times

Augustus (27 b.c.—a.d. 14) Ordered the census that involved Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1)

Tiberius (a.d. 14-37) Jesus ministered and was crucified under his reign (Luke 3:1; 20:22, 25; 23:2; John 19:12, 15)

Caligula (a.d. 37-41)

Claudius (a.d. 41-54) An extensive famine occurred in his reign (Acts 11:28). He expelled Jews from Rome, including Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2).

Nero (a.d. 54-68) He persecuted Christians, including the martyrdoms of Paul and Peter. He is the Caesar to whom Paul appealed for a fair trial (Acts 25:8, 10-12, 21; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19).

Galba (a.d. 68-69)

Otho (a.d. 69)

Vitellius (a.d. 69)

Vespasian (a.d. 69-79) Crushed the Jewish revolt, and his son Titus destroyed the Jerusalem temple in a.d. 70.

- Augustus, whose real name was Octavian, was grand-nephew of Julius Caesar and was declared his son and heir when Julius was murdered in 44 b.c.
- Caesar Augustus, the first and probably greatest true emperor of Rome, consolidated power under himself and ended the days of the Roman republic, in the period from 44 b.c. (when Julius Caesar was assassinated) until 27 b.c. He died in a.d. 14.
- The taking of a census in various regions was pretty common in the Roman Empire.
- Because of the historical records we have of the time, most scholars agree that Jesus was born no later than 4 b.c.

Luke 2:3-5 So all the people went to their hometowns to be registered. (4) Joseph, too, went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was a descendant of the household and family of David. (5) He went there to be registered with Mary, who had been promised to him in marriage and was pregnant.

- Genealogical records of families in Judah were traditionally kept in their ancestral home towns.
- Fulfills the prophecy of the prophet Micah in Micah 5:2.
- Mary was betrothed to Joseph, which in Jewish custom was binding as marriage, although the marriage wasn't consummated until after the wedding.
- **Why do you think Mary went with Joseph? Why didn't she stay home to be cared for by family?**

Luke 2:6-7 While they were there, the time came for her to have her baby, (7) and she gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was not any room for them in the inn.

- Instead of appearing in great glory to the high and mighty of the world, God intentionally lowered Himself to be born as a human baby to poor parents in the most humbling of circumstances:
 - Inns were not hotels as we think of them, but, especially for poor folks like Joseph and Mary, typically open air areas maybe surrounded by a wall that people would shelter beside for the night. Their animals would be tethered close by, possibly in the middle of the yard. We would think of it more like a campground. Joseph and Mary couldn't even find room in a place like this. They most likely camped out in the open with others, where there was most like very little shelter and no privacy, not to mention the unsanitary conditions.
 - The fact that Mary gave birth to Jesus and laid him in a manger (feeding trough for animals) tells us they may have had to resort to some kind of stable in a cave. Traditionally, a manger was carved out of the wall of a cave. Around Bethlehem still today, the hillsides are dotted with caves, many of which still have mangers.
 - As we'll see, the announcement of his birth was made to the lowest class of people.
 - It was the lowliest and most humiliating way to be born into the world for the creator of the universe.
- Notice it says Mary gave birth to her first child, which implies that she had others after Jesus. We know from Matthew 13:55-56 that Jesus did have half-brothers and sisters.

Luke 2:8-12 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, watching their flock during the night. (9) An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (10) Then the angel said to them, "Stop being afraid! Listen! I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. (11) Today your Savior, Christ the Lord, was born in the city of David. (12) And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

- Like Zechariah and Mary, an angel appears to these shepherds, but it wasn't the angel that caused the glory to shine around them, but God Himself who shone His glory, straight from the throne of heaven. And of course, this caused a familiar reaction – they were terrified.
- These were probably shepherds watching flocks that were used for temple sacrifices in Jerusalem – they would have been close to the city.
- We don't actually know which day and month that Jesus was born. It may not have been in December because weather conditions could have made "living in the fields" difficult for the shepherds, and travelling in December may have been too difficult for Mary to endure. However, winters in Judea are normally fairly mild, so a December date is possible. But the December date of Christmas didn't become a tradition until the 4th century under the Emperor Constantine.
- This mighty angel might have been Michael the archangel; this event was later commemorated by the early church as Michaelmas (i.e., "Michael sent") on September 29, the same as the date of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. It would have at least been appropriate for Christ to have been born at that time, because John says in his gospel that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (i.e., literally 'tabernacled') among us" (John 1:14). This would mean, then, that His conception (and this was the real miracle of the incarnation, since His birth itself was a normal human birth) took place in late December. So, it might be that when we today celebrate Christ's birth at what we call Christmas, we are actually celebrating His miraculous conception, the time when the Father sent the Son into the world, in the virgin's womb.
- Jesus was not only born in the lowliest of circumstances, but God chose to announce it first to the lowest social class of people. In those days, shepherds were considered outcasts, the lowliest level of human being in that culture. They were seen as untrustworthy, and unclean because of their work. But you never know whom God is going to use. **Can you name some famous shepherds in the Bible? What**

is the shepherd a symbol of in the Bible?

- The angel said “your Savior, Christ the Lord”. These are familiar terms to us who have read the Christmas story for years. But what do they mean, especially in reference to Old Testament prophecy?
 - *Savior* – Probably a reference to Isaiah 53 which speaks of the Messiah suffering for the sins of others as a sacrificial lamb. And, as we saw in the Matthew passage at the beginning, the angel told Joseph that the child would “save His people from their sins”.
 - *Christ* – Basically the Greek word for “Messiah”, means “anointed one”.
 - *Lord* – See Psalm 110:1. Here David says this: “The LORD (Jehovah/Yahweh) says to my Lord (Adonai/Messiah/Anointed One): “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” Most English translations use the word “Lord” or “God” for all Hebrew names for God, and that is unfortunate, because you can’t really tell what the true meaning is. Look in the front of your Bible to see how it translates all the terms for God. But the point is, when Jesus is addressed as “Lord” in the New Testament, most present with Him would have understood that as a reference from this powerful Messianic prophecy in Psalm 110.

Luke 2:13-14 Suddenly a multitude of the Heavenly Army appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people who enjoy his favor!"

- “Multitude here would have been a huge host of angels, like an enormous heavenly army that suddenly appeared in the sky.
- The last part of verse 14 is often misinterpreted to mean that if mankind will just learn to get along with each other, then there would be peace on earth. But that’s not the meaning of the passage in the original Greek. The idea is that God brings peace to those on earth who He thinks highly of. And He thinks highly of those who accept His son as savior. This peace is not what man can bring about, but only the peace that Messiah can bring. We live in a Satan-controlled world, and there will be no true peace on earth until Jesus comes back. But those of us who trust Christ for salvation can know His peace now!

Luke 2:15-20 When the angels had left them and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what has taken place that the Lord has told us about." (16) So they went quickly and found Mary and Joseph with the baby, who was lying in the manger. (17) When they saw this, they repeated what they had been told about this child. (18) All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, (19) but Mary continued to treasure in her heart all these things and to ponder them. (20) Then the shepherds returned to their flock, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

- The shepherds went to Jerusalem and quickly found Mary and Joseph with the baby, so they must have been on the outskirts of the city. It sounds like they tried to spread the news of what they had heard and seen to all who would listen, but then, considering their social status, not many would have taken them seriously.
- Keep in mind that Mary and Joseph knew that their son was the Messiah. Mary, during her recovery, had time to ponder everything that had happened and think about what they might mean.

Luke 2:21-24 After eight days had passed, the child was circumcised and named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. (22) When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took

Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, (23) as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn son is to be designated as holy to the Lord." (24) They also offered a sacrifice according to what is specified in the law of the Lord: "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

- Remember that circumcision was a very big deal then. It identified Jesus as a descendant of Abraham and made Him a part of the covenant people of God and placed Him under the Mosaic Law (Galatians 4:4). It also connected Him with the covenant God made with Abraham.
- According to the Law of Moses, there would be a period of purification for the family, although this was mainly focused on Mary. The couple was to abstain from sexual relations during this time. Following Leviticus 12, the mother who gave birth was unclean for seven days or until the baby's circumcision, and then she could not come into the sanctuary of the temple for 33 days. So after a total of 40 days, she could come to the temple to be made pure as the Law prescribed.
- Joseph was included because, as the head of the household, he was responsible to make sure these things happened and that the required sacrifices were made at the temple.
- The family had to make the trip from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, about 14 miles, so that Jesus could be presented to the Lord, to fulfill the law of firstborn sons, mentioned here in verse 23, quoted from Exodus 13:2,12. They are seen as holy, or separated to the service of the Lord.
- Verse 24 is from Leviticus 5:11; 12:8. Joseph could not afford a burnt sacrifice of a lamb, but the birds would only cost a few pennies. One dove would serve as the burnt offering and the second would take the place of the sin offering. One was burned up in the fire, the other as a "substitute" for sin. These sacrifices were not for Jesus, who was the perfect son of God, but for the sinfulness of Joseph and Mary. As far as we know, Jesus never offered a sacrifice at the temple.

Luke 2:25-33 Now a man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. This man was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the one who would comfort Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. (26) It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. (27) Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, (28) Simeon took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, (29) "Master, now you are allowing your servant to leave in peace according to your word. (30) For my eyes have seen your salvation, (31) which you prepared for all people to see- (32) a light that will reveal salvation to the gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel." (33) Jesus' father and mother kept wondering at the things being said about him.

- You would think that God would announce the birth of the Promised One to the religious leaders in Jerusalem, but He did not. He announced it to the lowly shepherds and now we see that God has revealed it to this man named Simeon. He was just a regular guy, but righteous, led by the Holy Spirit, and looking for the coming of the Messiah.
- Notice that Luke says the Holy Spirit "rested on him". **What is the difference between that and his description of John the Baptist being "filled with the Holy Spirit"?**
- "One who would comfort Israel" – this refers to the future help, the defeat of Israel's enemies when the Messiah comes to reign on earth.
- The Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple that day, and out of all the people there revealed to him Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. He knew immediately that God was fulfilling His promise to Him, that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah.
- Notice what he says about Jesus. **Why were Mary and Joseph amazed at what Simeon said about Jesus?**

Luke 2:34-35 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall or rise. He will be a sign that will be disputed, (35) so that the inner thoughts of many people might be revealed. Indeed, a sword will pierce your own soul, too."

- Simeon continued to prophesy. Unlike what many people think, Jesus did not come to unite all mankind. He came to divide people. Some would receive Him, but many more would reject Him.
- "Inner thoughts of many people might be revealed" – many people who professed love and obedience to God would be shown that they didn't really trust God at all.
- **What did Simeon mean about Mary, that a sword would pierce her own soul, too? (John 19:26)**

Luke 2:36-38 Now Anna, a prophetess, was also there. She was a descendant of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, (37) and then as a widow for eighty-four years. She never left the temple, but continued to worship there night and day with times of fasting and prayer. (38) Just then she came forward and began to thank God and to speak about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

- Anna was another person that God revealed the truth about Jesus to, so that she would use her gift to witness of this to others. And like Simeon, this seemed to be a reward from God for her constant faithfulness over her lifetime.
- The title Luke gives her of "prophetess" doesn't mean she went around telling the future. A prophetess was a woman who the gift of speaking truth about God.
- **After reading this brief but detailed description of Anna, what do you find most fascinating about her?**

Luke 2:39-40 After doing everything required by the law of the Lord, Joseph and Mary returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. (40) Meanwhile, the child continued to grow and to become strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was with him.

- Luke wants us to know that Jesus' parents did everything according to the Law during His early years.
- We see that Jesus didn't grow to be a weakling. He became strong and was filled with wisdom.
- Luke leaves out the story of the wise men. In fact, all of the events of Matthew chapter 2 are not given to us in Luke. This would be a good place to read that chapter, to get the rest of the story. Luke probably left it out so he could get to the more important events sooner. Here's Matt. 2:

Matthew 2:1-11 After Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem (2) and asked, "Where is the one who was born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." (3) When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, as was all of Jerusalem. (4) He called together all the high priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. (5) They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, because that is what was written by the prophet: (6) 'O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, because from you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" (7) Then Herod secretly called together the wise men, found out from them the time the star had appeared, (8) and sent them to Bethlehem. He told them, "As you go, search carefully for the child. When you find him, tell me so

that I, too, may go and worship him." (9) After listening to the king, they set out, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. (10) When they saw the star, they were ecstatic with joy. (11) After they went into the house and saw the child with his mother Mary, they fell down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure sacks and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- I have to point out here that the typical manger scene is not quite right. We don't know exactly when these wise men came to see Jesus, but we can be sure that it was long after the night of his birth, probably weeks or even months later. They were living in Bethlehem, but they were in a house by now (vs.10).
- We also don't know how many wise men there were, but there were probably more than three.
- These "Magi" were students of astrology, probably from Babylon – they studied the stars. They were not kings, even though they brought rich gifts to Jesus.
- The gifts were very appropriate – gold for His deity and majesty, frankincense for the fragrance of His life, and myrrh for His sacrifice and death.

Matthew 2:12-15 Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they left for their own country by a different road. (13) After they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and kill him." (14) So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left at night for Egypt. (15) He stayed there until Herod's death in order to fulfill what was declared by the Lord through the prophet when he said, "Out of Egypt I called my Son."

Matthew 2:16-18 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he flew into a rage and ordered the execution of all the male children in Bethlehem and all its neighboring regions who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had determined from the wise men. (17) Then what was declared by the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled when he said, (18) "A voice was heard in Ramah: wailing and great mourning. Rachel was crying for her children. She refused to be comforted, because they no longer existed."

Matthew 2:19-23 But after Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt (20) and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead." (21) So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went into the land of Israel. (22) But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. After having been warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee (23) and came and settled in a town called Nazareth in order to fulfill what was said by the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Now back to the account in Luke:

Luke 2:41-45 Every year Jesus' parents would go to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. (42) When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival as usual. (43) When the days of the festival were over, they left for home. The young man Jesus stayed behind in

Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. (44) They thought that he was in the group of travelers. After traveling for a day, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends. (45) When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching desperately for him.

- Every Jewish male was expected to go up to Jerusalem annually for Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17, 34:23; Deut. 16:16). Women were not required to go, but Mary went each year with Joseph.
- Passover was a joyful period of rest and celebration following the spring harvest. **What event in Israel's history does the feast of Passover commemorate?**
- In Jewish culture, a boy of twelve was thought of coming into manhood and would be seen as a responsible "son of the law" who would begin the process of learning to observe all the demands of the Law.
- **Why do you think Mary and Joseph didn't know that Jesus had stayed behind?**

Luke 2:46-52 Three days later they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. (47) All who heard him were amazed at his intelligence and his answers. (48) When his parents saw him, they were shocked. His mother asked him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been worried sick looking for you!" (49) He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" (50) But they did not understand what he said to them. (51) Then he went down with them and returned to Nazareth; and he remained in submission to them. His mother continued to treasure all these things in her heart. (52) Meanwhile, Jesus kept on growing in wisdom and maturity, and in favor with God and his fellow man.

- This doesn't mean it took Mary and Joseph three days to find Jesus once they got back. It took them a day of travel to realize he was missing, then it would have taken a day to get back, and they found him on the next day back in Jerusalem.
- Mary, even though she knows Jesus is the Messiah, shows a very typical mother's reaction to something like this, doesn't she? **Why was she shocked and what was her main concern?**
- Notice that Jesus already knows who His real Father is, and Mary and Joseph didn't seem to understand this, which implies that Jesus had never spoken like this before.
- Luke is showing us that Jesus was not your ordinary 12-year old boy. A normal boy at that age wouldn't have even been allowed to sit among the teachers. But these old men were amazed at how much Jesus knew and how intelligent He was. This doesn't mean he ran around wearing a halo, like you seem him depicted in some paintings and medieval legends. In most respects he was a normal, healthy boy.
- Even though he seems to have an awareness of His own deity already, Jesus obeys His parents and goes home with them and remains "in submission" to them.
- **Since Jesus is God, what did Luke mean when he said that Jesus "kept on growing in wisdom and maturity"? (Phil. 2:7)**