

LUKE 2 THE BIRTH OF THE LONG-AWAITED MESSIAH!

The historical narrative of the birth of Jesus which is recorded by Luke is presented with a very different emphasis than that which is related by Matthew. Matthew depicted Jesus as a King. At His birth, the reigning Herod trembled on his throne; and the wise men from the East adored Him and offered Him regal gifts. But Luke, as we recall from chapter 1, represents Jesus as the ideal Man; and hence his account of the Savior's birth is full of details that are of interest to the common person. It describes two obscure peasants journeying from their northern home in Nazareth, down to the village of Bethlehem; but they are obliged to sleep in a stable, as they are unable to find lodgings in any inn. There the Virgin-mother placed her newborn Babe in a manger, for lack of any better cradle. And the first persons to visit them are humble shepherds from the neighboring plains. Human interests, however, are not always merely earthly; for here the narrative is also vocal with heavenly melodies, and it is interwoven with messages of Divine meaning and grace.

We do not rely upon archaeology and scientific studies to prove to us that the Biblical record is true, for we are already assured that it is indeed what it claims to be – namely, the reliable, authoritative, and infallible Word of God Himself. However, there are external sources that have come to light over the years, which vindicate the historical accuracy of Luke in connecting the event of Jesus' birth with the decree of Augustus, during the time when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. These facts which are mentioned by Luke help explain how Jesus' birth occurred in Bethlehem, when the home of His parents was in Nazareth. Only a legal necessity would have made them willing to take such a journey at such a time; but after all, it turned out that the emperor of the world was unknowingly fulfilling Scriptural prophecies concerning the Savior of the world. According to the imperial decree, Joseph left Nazareth with Mary; and they journeyed together to Bethlehem, five miles south of Jerusalem, to be taxed and enumerated in the census-rolls of his ancestral city. And while they were there, Mary's promised Son entered this world as the Son of God, born in human flesh as the long-awaited Seed of the Woman (Gen. 3:15). But because of the multitudes of people who were also in Bethlehem at that time because of the census, Mary and Joseph found themselves excluded from the inns; and this was suggestive of the state of obscurity and poverty into which Jesus was born.

After the Savior's birth, heavenly angelic messengers appeared to a group of shepherds who were "abiding in the field, and keeping watch by night over

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jesus is born in Bethlehem of Judea, in fulfillment of prophecy – verses 1-7
- ❖ The angels announce the birth of the Messiah to the shepherds – verses 8-20
- ❖ Jesus is presented in the Temple and is seen by Simeon and Anna – verses 21-40
- ❖ Christ is found with the learned men in the Temple at age 12 – verses 41-52

their flock.” Out of a blaze of heavenly glory came the tidings of great joy: “There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord!” When the good news had been given, there suddenly swelled forth an angel-chorus – uttering forth those words of praise which are sometimes referred to as the *Gloria in Excelsis*. In God’s gift of a Savior, He manifests His excellence in heaven; and on earth, He reveals His grace to men, who are the recipients of His favor. And the result of this is declared to be “peace”; for in Christ alone, peace can be secured – peace with God, peace for the human heart, peace between men, and peace for the world.

The astonished shepherds hastened to verify the good news; and in a very real sense, they became the first witnesses for Christ – for “they made known concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this child.” It is not strange that all who heard these things were amazed, nor that Mary treasured in her heart the heavenly messages, nor that the shepherds returned to their tasks with gratitude and praise; for in all their memories, there lingered a song which expresses still the hope of all mankind!

The incidents of the infancy of Jesus which are recorded by Luke not only add human interest to the story, but they also foreshadowed the future ministry and the saving work of our Lord. On the eighth day after His birth, He was named *Jesus*; and although this was a name that was often given to Jewish boys in those days, He was destined to fulfill all that the name implies – for indeed, He was to be the “salvation of the Lord.” Then, five weeks later, He was presented in the Temple; and on that occasion, His mother offered for herself a sacrifice which indicated lack of worldly wealth. But the real significance of the scene was set forth in the prophetic utterances of the saintly Simeon and Anna. The first of these utterances was the song of Simeon, which sometimes takes its name – the *Nunc Dimittis* – from the Latin form of its opening words. To this devout soul, it had been revealed that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah – “the Lord’s Christ.” By the Holy Spirit’s influence, Simeon went to the Temple while the parents of Jesus were there presenting their Son before the Lord. And when he saw the Baby, He took Him in his arms and sang the sweetest and most solemn song of the nativity; and unlike the *Magnificat* or the *Benedictus*, his song not only promises redemption to Israel, but also to all the world! The redemption which the Messiah brings is for all people; it is a light to reveal the way of salvation to the Gentiles, just as it is to be the true glory of the favored people of Israel.

But alas! Although this salvation is provided for all, it will not be accepted by all. To the wondering mother, Simeon uttered a dark word of prophecy; the ministry of Jesus would be the occasion for the fall and the rise of many. Their attitude toward Him would be a revelation of their character. Some will reject Him and thus condemn themselves; and some will speak against Him, even though He is the very token and instrument of Divine salvation. This opposition

reached its climax at the cross, when bitter anguish would pierce the soul of Mary like a sword. Jesus is to be the touchstone of human character; for whether people accept Him or reject Him, they are disclosing their true nature.

While Mary and Joseph were still wondering at Simeon's sublime words, there appeared an aged prophetess, whose long years of widowhood had been spent in continual worship of the Lord. She, too, praised God for the salvation which was to be accomplished by the Child of Mary, and she went forth to speak of Him to all who were like herself – "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

Mary and Joseph returned to their home in Nazareth; and there Jesus was to spend His infancy and early childhood. During those years of obscurity, His physical development was normal; yet it was unique in its symmetry and its perfection. He "grew, and waxed strong" in body; but there was just as much of a growth in mind and spirit. He was "filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him"; for the Savior of the world was to be the ideal Man!

It has been said that the boyhood of Jesus is like a walled garden from which we have been given only a single flower, but this blossom is so fragrant that it fills our hearts with a longing to enter within the secret enclosure! We have only a single incident recorded of His boyhood days, and it is recorded for us only by Luke: a visit to Jerusalem when He was 12 years old. Jesus was unintentionally left behind by His parents as they started on their return journey to Nazareth. At the end of the first day, they failed to find Him in the long caravan which was moving northward toward Galilee. The day following, Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem; and on the third day, they discovered Jesus in the Temple, in the midst of the teachers who were surprised at His knowledge of the sacred Scriptures. "How is it that ye sought me?" Jesus asked when Mary and Joseph had found Him. "Knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" These are the first recorded words of Jesus, and they are an index and an explanation of His entire ministry; and in order that they might be preserved for us, this account was recorded by Luke.

Although these words contained a mild rebuke, they were certainly conveyed in accents of reverence and affection; and was there not a delicate compliment included in them also? Jesus did not reprove His parents for seeking Him, but for not seeking Him in the Temple first of all; and does He not seem to imply that His parents had taught Him to love the house of God and to delight



in the Law of God? He was essentially saying: “Why did you thus seek me? Why did you not remember that the Temple is the very place where I should be found?” And so these words are a revelation of the life in their home at Nazareth. It was because of the training which Jesus had received from His Godly parents that He was a master of the Scriptures at age 12. That is how He had learned to reverence and adore everything that was obedient to them and to the worship of God. Is it not possible for parents today – by the Lord’s grace – to awaken in the hearts of their children a love for the house of God, the Word of God, and the will of God?

But these words were also a revelation of Christ’s consciousness of His Divine Sonship. He already realized that God, in a unique sense, was His own Father and the true Source of His being. He instantly corrected the words of Mary – “thy father,” which referred to Joseph – with His own words, “my Father,” which referred to God. Luke depicts Jesus as the ideal Man, but always as One Who was conscious that He was the Son of God. Our children should also learn to regard God as their Father – not in the unique sense that is applicable only to Jesus as the eternal Son, nor in the sense which can apply to all created beings; but rather, in the sense that denotes that very close relationship with the Lord, which is made possible for believers through Jesus Christ.

Most importantly of all, these words are the revelation of a firm resolution, and of a great life-shaping purpose. Jesus perceived that it was His duty to be in the house of His Father – not merely in the physical Temple, but also in the sphere of spiritual life and activity of which the Temple was the great symbol. In other words, He had determined to devote all His thoughts and energies and powers to the definite service of God. Let us pray for our children, that they may recognize – far before they even reach the age of 12 – that the supreme and comprehensive duty of life lies in the service of the Lord!

With this definite ideal in mind, Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph; and He continued to live in submission to them. He labored for 18 years as a carpenter in the quiet seclusion of an obscure village, but there He received a training for His public ministry which would have been impossible amidst the formalism and distractions of Jerusalem. His development was as natural as it was perfect; he “advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” For those whose lives are yielded to the will of the Lord, the best of life’s lessons may indeed be learned in the humblest sphere.

Lord, help us to lift up our voices with Simeon and Anna, and praise the name of Jesus that our eyes have seen His salvation; for He has made us acquainted with His unspeakable mercy, and manifested Himself to us in a manner that is different than that in which He shows Himself to the world! Amen.