



Jesus' Birth and Boyhood Luke 2

Introduction

The story of Jesus' birth is recognized the world over, especially the baby in a stable, a young mother, a caring Joseph, an angelic host, shepherds, and wise men - these are deeply ingrained in Christian cultures. Two thousand years of celebration in art, literature, music, drama, decorations, foods, traditions, and holidays testify to the significance and enduring universal appeal of the incarnation, the miracle of the Word made flesh, and the revelation of God's love for all people. No other event has brought forth such excellence in human talent and creativity.

The virgin birth is a basic doctrine of the Christian faith, declaring that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit, thus being the Son of God and not of a human father. Belief in this supernatural event is required as a basic tenet of the Christian faith.

No other doctrine has been so attacked. Perhaps because it could never have happened in the course of human events, neither by evolution nor historical process. It was God's plan, which He generated and implemented, requiring only Mary's cooperation. God entered our world as the baby Jesus.

Why was the virgin birth necessary? God promised it to our first ancestral parents in the Garden of Eden after the fall. The Seed of the woman would destroy the seed of the serpent, the devil (Genesis 3:15). We all know that women do not produce the seed. Men produce the seed. The apostle Paul points out that the Seed promised to Abraham in Genesis 22:18 was Christ (Galatians 3:16). A few verses later he writes, *When the fullness of time had come God sent forth His Son, born of a woman* (Galatians 4:4).

When sin entered the human race, God's love had a way to rescue mankind -- through the promised Seed. *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 6:23). Both God's justice and love needed to be satisfied. Someone unaffected by sin, but being fully human, had to take the penalty of sin and crush the enemy to deliver mankind from the power of sin. God revealed the plan to Adam and Eve. The virgin birth was mandated from the beginning. It stood as the hope of the ages through the long, dismal darkness of history until Bethlehem, when the Savior was born as a human baby, but born of a virgin.

Outline of Luke 2

- I. Jesus' Birth - Luke 2:1-20
- II. Jesus Brought Up as a Jew - Luke 2:21-38
- III. Jesus' Boyhood - Luke 2:39-52

I. Jesus' Birth - Luke 2:1-20

- A. Luke's Historical Foundation - Luke 2:1-3

Luke places Jesus' birth in its historical setting with three items. He is the only gospel writer to use names and events from world history.

1. Caesar Augustus - 2:1

- a. Roman emperor

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. Caesar was the name of a Roman family that came to prominence through Julius Caesar, the great general, statesman, and writer.

- b. The Caesars

- Caesar Augustus, also known as Octavian (31 B.C.-A.D.14), was the grand-nephew of Julius Caesar. Jesus was born during his reign. It was Augustus and Mark Antony who had placed Herod on the throne of Judea in 37 B.C.
- Tiberius Caesar (A.D.14-37) was the step-son of Augustus. The ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, and Jesus' death occurred during his reign (Luke 3:1).
- Caius Caligula (A.D.37-41) is not mentioned in the New Testament.
- Claudius (A.D.41-54) reigned during the time of the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul (Acts 18:2).
- Nero (A.D.54-68) was the one to whom Paul appealed in Acts 25:11.

The imperial reign of the Caesars ended with the death of Nero, who cruelly persecuted Christians.

2. Quirinius, governor of Syria - 2:2

Palestine was in the Roman province of Syria and was governed by Quirinius from 4 B.C. to A.D. 1.

3. Census decree - 2:3

Secular history records a census in Syria and Judea at this time to register everyone in the Roman world for taxation, and for military service (from which Jews were exempt). It meant that all had to return to the ancestral city of their family.

B. Bethlehem - Luke 2:4-5

1. City of David

Joseph went from Nazareth, in the region of Galilee, south to Judea and Bethlehem, the city of David. His roots were there as a descendant of David (1 Samuel 16:1,18-19). He took Mary along because they were engaged and she was quite pregnant. A betrothal was binding, for it was a promise, a vow of marriage. The couple was considered man and wife but did not live together until after the marriage ceremony.

2. Prophesied birthplace of Messiah

This journey, required by the Roman government, meant that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, a fulfillment of prophecy. *And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting* (Micah 5:2).

C. Birth of Births - 2:6-7

1. Jesus is born

In two short sentences, Luke states the most miraculous event since the creation: the incarnation, the Word made flesh. *And so it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son* (2:6-7).

When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son (Galatians 4:4). *A body You have prepared for Me* (Hebrews 10:5). *In the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I come to do your will, O God* (Hebrews 10:7).

"How silently, how silently
the wondrous gift is given.
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of His heaven."
(“O Little Town of Bethlehem”, Phillips
Brooks)

"There's a song in the air!
There's a star in the sky.
There's a mother's deep prayer,
and a baby's low cry.
And the star rains its fire
while the beautiful sing,
for the manger of Bethlehem
cradles a King!"
(“There's a Song in the Air”. Karl
Harrington)

As John Peterson wrote, “It is A Song Unending”. As Sandi Patti sang, “The Gift Goes On”. How much literature, music, and art around the world celebrate the birth of the Christ child! Every Christmas nativity scenes appear. Pageants and presents highlight the event with wonder ever new because love came down and we celebrate Christmas.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. But the innkeeper allowed them space in the stable.

2. Announcement to the shepherds - 2:8-14

There were no baby showers, no department store registeries, no balloons and flowers, no fanfare. Heaven, however, was exploding with excitement. It was the birthday of a King.

Heaven's arches rang as the angels proclaimed the royal decree. Fittingly, God chose shepherds to receive the grand announcement. Shepherds were social outcasts, the lowest of the work order, symbolic of people for whom Jesus came.

a. One angel

One angel first appeared telling the shepherds not to be afraid. He had glad, joyous tidings for all people. We get our word “evangel” from the Greek word for “good tidings”.

b. Savior and a sign

A Savior, Christ the Lord, was born that day in David's city. The shepherds were to find a baby lying in a feeding trough and he would be wrapped in swaddling cloths. (His earthly life began in swaddling cloths and ended in linen cloths. Both identified Him to those seeking Him).

c. A multitude of the heavenly host

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host. They praised God and said, *"Glory to God in the highest."* Gloria in excelsis Deo (Latin). *"And*

on earth peace." The next phrase "*good will toward men*", is literally "to men of good will", as Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse and others have translated it from the Greek.

3. Visit of the shepherds - 2:15-16

Following the astounding news, the shepherds left their flocks (perhaps sleeping in the fields) and ran up the hill to town. They did not doubt the message and they found the baby as described. Simple acceptance of the truth is always rewarded with discovery. Are you humble enough to receive truth?

4. Witness of the shepherds - 2:17

The shepherds no doubt felt comfortable in the humble surroundings, more than they might have in a home, and were able to perceive what had happened. They simply shared the facts and spread the message they had received. This is the essence of "witnessing" to others. Do you share the facts about Jesus and tell what you know about Him?

5. Results of their witness - 2:18-20

Three things resulted from their witness:

- a. All those who heard marveled at the things told them by the shepherds.
- b. *Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*
- c. *The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen as it was told them.*

The tidings of great joy had begun to spread from the very first day. If you will spread the good news today, you too will have great joy and others will marvel.

II. Jesus Brought Up as a Jew - Luke 2:21-38

A. Obedience to the Law of Moses - Luke 2:21-24

Luke states three ways the new parents obeyed the Law of Moses.

1. Circumcision - 2:21

The baby was circumcised on the eighth day after birth, according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:3). At that time He was named Jesus, the name revealed by the angel before He was conceived (Matthew 1:21). Matthew gives Joseph's story and Luke gives Mary's. Matthew and Luke are in perfect agreement. They both present the virgin birth, so it is established by two witnesses.

God gave circumcision to Abraham as a sign of the covenant between Himself and Abraham's descendants. Ceremonially it has spiritual significance. Hygienically it has physical significance. Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple to do for Him according to the custom of the law (2:27). Jesus was brought up as a Jewish child in a devout Jewish home.

2. Mary's purification - 2:22-23 and Leviticus 12:2-6

The Law of Moses required a woman's separation for cleansing for seven days before the circumcision and thirty-three days afterward. For a girl baby the time was two weeks before presentation to the Lord and sixty-six days afterward. We do well to avoid leaping to conclusions regarding the difference. The Law of Moses was given by God:

- to a particular people, Israel;
- at a particular time, before Christ;
- for specific purposes -- to show His righteousness to the nations and to prepare them for Christ (Romans 3:19; Galatians 3:24).

Christ's death freed us from Moses' Law.

3. Offering the sacrifice for the firstborn - 2:24

Jesus was presented to the Lord as the firstborn according to the Law of Moses (Exodus 13:2,12,15). The law required the sacrifice of a lamb or two young pigeons when dedicating the firstborn child to the Lord (Leviticus 12:6,8). Mary and Joseph's financial position is evident by their offering of the two young pigeons. Since these sacrifices represented the acknowledgement of the newborn as a sinner who would need redemption, they were not necessary for Jesus. However, as He would later say at His baptism, and to Peter concerning the Temple tax, it was to *fulfill all righteousness* (Matthew 3:15; 17:27). Jesus did many things He did not have to do, but He chose to share in our human condition and set a perfect example. This is grace.

Do you do only what you have to do, or do you "go the extra mile" in order to share another's burden or set a good example?

B. Two Witnesses to His Glory - Luke 2:25

1. A man in Jerusalem named Simeon - 2:25-35

On the day Jesus was taken to the Temple, two people recognized the significance of the One being presented to the Lord. One was Simeon.

- a. Four statements about Simeon -
2:25-26

Luke tells us that Simeon was:

- Just and devout.
- Waiting for the Consolation of Israel (Messiah).
- Led by the Holy Spirit to go to the Temple.
- Told by the Holy Spirit that he would *not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ*.

- b. Simeon's blessing upon the baby Jesus
- 2:27-33

Because of the Holy Spirit's leading him to the Temple that day, Simeon had the opportunity to hold the baby Jesus in his arms. Are you close to the Lord because you observe the Holy Spirit's leading? What special opportunities have you experienced as a result?

Simeon prayed and mentioned Jesus' roles as 1) God's salvation, prepared in the sight of all people and 2) a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles. Jesus is the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for and the *light of the world* (John 8:12; 9:5). Simeon could die in peace for his eyes had seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. Luke emphasizes the Gentiles as is evident in his quoting the words of Simeon.

Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Notice Luke's care not to call Joseph His father.

- c. Simeon's blessing upon Mary and Joseph
- 2:33-35

Simeon prepared Mary for both the pain and joy of her unique position. Her Son would cause the rise and fall of many, and the revealing of many hearts. Her heart would be pierced as by a sword. There was a cross ahead, but there was also a resurrection.

2. Anna, the prophetess - 2:36-38

The other person in the Temple who recognized Jesus that day was a woman named Anna. Luke tells four things about Anna: 1) She was a prophetess, 2) the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, 3) she had been a widow for eighty-four years, and 4) she stayed in the Temple serving God, fasting and praying. Anna was at least one hundred and four. Seven years married and eighty-four widowed are ninety-one, and she could not have married before she was thirteen. When she saw the baby Jesus she thanked God and spoke about Him to everyone nearby who looked for God's redemption.

Do you think you are too old to tell anyone about Jesus? Even if you are over one hundred and four, you are not too old!

III. Jesus' boyhood - Luke 2:39-52

A. In Nazareth - Luke 2:39-40

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a little town in Galilee, in northern Israel. However, before the new family returned to Nazareth, two or three years elapsed. Matthew mentions the adoration of Jesus as a child by the Magi from the East and the flight to Egypt. These events occurred after the family left Bethlehem.

Nazareth was in Galilee of the Nations, so called because of its proximity to Lebanon and Syria and the nearby international traffic on the King's Highway (Isaiah 9:1; Matthew 4:15). There was more exposure to different cultures than in Jerusalem, and it was also removed from the stronghold of rabbinicalism, the theological bickerings of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the political tensions of the Romans and Herodians.

According to Luke, Jesus grew strong in Nazareth and was filled with wisdom and God's grace.

B. The Visit to Jerusalem - Luke 2:41-50

Every year Mary and Joseph faithfully went to Jerusalem at Passover, as required by the Law of Moses. Their visit when Jesus was twelve is the only glimpse we have of the boy Jesus. Any others are fanciful and undocumented.

Jesus comfortably discussed spiritual and theological concepts with the esteemed doctors of law in the Temple. It was His Father's house and He was about His Father's business. At twelve, He knew who He was and where His interest was, though He was a normal boy in other ways. Except, of course, He was sinless. Jesus studied the Scriptures, which prophesied of Him, and prayed, using the same resources available to us.

C. In the Home - Luke 2:51

Despite the elation of the dialogue in Jerusalem, Jesus returned to Nazareth and was subject to His parents. While he patiently awaited God's timing, He was a perfect youth, teenager, and young adult.

Applications

1. Do you obey God's laws however inconvenient they may seem?
2. Do you accept the record of God's supernatural entrance into our world in the person of Jesus Christ? If not, why not?
3. While you faithfully await God's timing in your life regarding education, career, marriage, retirement, health, or other plans, will you choose to do good and to glorify God where you are?

QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read lesson notes and references.

1. What impressed you concerning the birth of the Savior?

2. What three pieces of historical data does Luke give?

3. What do you believe about the virgin birth? Give reasons to support your answer.

DAY TWO: Read Luke 3:1-9.

4. From verses 1 and 2 list the persons named and their positions.

5. a. What “came to” John in the wilderness?

b. What message did John preach?

6. a. How is John described in verse 4?

b. Where in the Old Testament is this description found? Use references in you Bible.

7. a. Why did people come to John?

b. What did he tell people to do?

c. What warning did he give them?

DAY THREE: Read Luke 3:10-16.

8. How did John answer the questions of:
 - a. The people?

 - b. The tax collectors?

 - c. The soldiers?

9. ? (Thought Question) How do you think John would answer similar questions today?

10. How did John compare himself to Christ in:
a. Luke 3:16, Matthew 3:11, and Mark 1:7-8?

b. John 3:29-30?

11. How did John compare his baptism to Christ's?

DAY FOUR: Read Luke 3:17-22.

11. a. What will Jesus do with the wheat?

b. What will He do with the chaff?

c. Do you think he was referring to grain or to people? Give a reason for your answer.

12. Why was John later imprisoned? Give Verse.

13. What was Jesus doing while being baptized?

14. What sight and sound followed His baptism?

15. Compare Luke 3:21-27 with Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and John 1:30-34.

a. List items mentioned in each gospel that are not mentioned in the others.

b. List points common to all four.

