

3. The Birth and Teen Years of Jesus

Luke 2:

Luke; A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Luke gives us the political backdrop against which our Savior comes on the scene. Jesus was to be born amidst a struggle for power. The seen and unseen powers of heaven and earth were poised, waiting for this Prince of Peace to be born. Even though Rome did not realize it, the quiet birth of Jesus would change history in a way that surpassed any legacy of any known ruler in the world at that time or any time since. Let's follow the journey of the Holy family as they were led and protected by God's hand.

The Birth of Christ

¹In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them (Luke 2:1-7).

When Julius Caesar was stabbed to death in a conspiracy by a number of Roman Senators in 44 BC, all that he owned, his lands, his property, his wealth and his titles passed to his heir, Gaius Octavius, at just nineteen years of age. Over the next twenty years, he gained supreme rule over Rome and added to his title as Caesar the name *Pontifex Maximus*, high priest of Rome. Eventually, he took the title Caesar Augustus, meaning "supreme ruler." When Halley's comet was seen in the heavens in 12 BC, he claimed that it was the spirit of his father, Julius Caesar, that was entering into heaven and becoming a god! From that point on, Augustus, sought also to be worshiped as a god due to being the son of a god. He was now the most powerful man on the face of the earth.

Augustus Caesar was worried about the decline in Roman civilization at that time, evident by the decline in the belief of the Roman gods, and in Roman family virtues. It was the Jubilee year of Augustus in 2 BC, celebrating twenty-five-years of his reign. He hoped to use the Jubilee year to renew the belief in the Roman gods and to confirm the legitimacy of his throne.

He began to exert control over the empire that he ruled. He put out a decree for a census. There were usually two reasons for a census. The first was to provide an accurate account of the size of military strength and, secondly, to update the record for taxation purposes. The first tax was known as a loyalty tax. It demanded a loyalty oath. The citizens had to swear by the gods that neither they nor their offspring would usurp the Roman throne. Think of the headiness of power that Caesar Augustus now had, i.e. total power over all the world. All he had to do was to speak the words, and hundreds of miles away, people had to return to their ancestral town to be registered. He may have thought he had total power, but behind the scenes was the Lord putting

His plan into operation. The Lord had spoken through prophecy more than six hundred years earlier that the Messiah would be born seven miles south of Jerusalem in the little town of Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2).

The One who descended from heaven did not have His first existence from Mary. He has ever existed, and from ancient times, He has been watching over His Word to perform it (Jeremiah 1:12). Caesar Augustus was thinking that he was working out his plans, but behind the scenes, he was just a puppet working out God's plans for the birth of Jesus into the world at the very location of which God had spoken hundreds of years previously.

Can you look back at a time in your life when you thought you were doing your will, but now you see that God was orchestrating events to bring you to Christ?

It is an interesting side note that Jesus was to be born into a town that is called House of Bread—*Beit Lechem* in Hebrew. The Bread of Life was to be born in Bethlehem and no other town.

³²Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴"Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." ³⁵Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:32-35).

So, Joseph and Mary set out for the eighty-mile journey to Bethlehem from Nazareth in Galilee. We like to think that she rode on a donkey, but we have no evidence at all that she rode to Bethlehem. Regardless of the way they traveled, it would have been a dangerous and difficult task for the young couple. Think of what it would have been like for this young teenage girl to carry her baby eighty miles, knowing that she was approaching the baby's birth and that she would be away from her mother, her friends and even a midwife. Yes, it seems likely that the couple were completely alone when Jesus was born. When she found out that there were no rooms to be had in Bethlehem, what would have been her thoughts toward God? Surely, she would have been puzzled that there was no provision for them. Why didn't the Lord arrange for a warm room for His Son to be born into the world?

In the plan of God, there should be no voices that could say to God that He did not know what it is like to live in such poor surroundings in the world: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He has explored the depth of poverty and can come alongside any of us and feel what we feel. The One to be born of Mary was not like Caesar, a man making himself out to be a god, but rather, He was the One who created all things (John 1:3), the true God, putting on a robe of flesh and becoming a man! How wonderful!

We like to think that, as Mary went into labor on that holy night, she had a warm stable, but I'm

sorry to disappoint you. The Bible does not say anything about a stable. The couple laid their child down in a *phatné*, translated in this passage as a manger or feeding trough. However, in Luke 13:15, this same Greek word is translated as an animal stall, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall [phatné] and lead it out to give it water?" (Luke 13:15). With the amount of people in Bethlehem that night, if there had been a nice cave, people would have already been in there. It is likely that Jesus was born in a courtyard where the animals were tied up and fed with not even a roof overhead. Because the innkeeper was very busy with more people than he could handle, they were forced to go to the barnyard.

I think it's very likely that there were animal droppings and a stench of animal urine in the place. Of course, we don't like to think like that, but we miss the whole point if we don't. It was a wretched place to have a baby. Mary more than likely had to lay down and have Jesus on a cold stone floor with barely any straw under her while Joseph had to try and make it as clean as possible. Imagine how it must have felt for Joseph. Any husband knows that his wife is thinking months ahead of time as to how to prepare for the birth of their baby. How could it be, Joseph must have wondered, that the God of heaven would plan for His Son to be born among the stench of animal urine and excrement, and shut out from the world of people?

I'm sure that Joseph felt shame at not being able to provide for his wife to bring Jesus into the world in relative comfort, rather than a stinking barnyard. As we have no record of a midwife being there with warm water and helping her through the birth, it is likely that Joseph and Mary had to trust that God knew what He was doing. Joseph had to grasp God's Son with his cold hands while watching Christ coming into the world by the light of the star of Bethlehem overhead (Matthew 2:9).

[What other downsides would there be to the place and the way Mary had her baby?](#)

⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. ²¹On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived (Luke 2:8-21).

It was customary for musicians to gather at the birth of a baby, but in an animal stable that was just not going to happen. When a boy was born, the musicians broke into song, and there was great rejoicing. In this case, there were no musicians around, but heaven could not contain itself. God sent angelic musicians to welcome His Son into the world, and He sent them to the lowliest of people, the shepherds in the fields. Shepherds were despised by the religious Israelites of the day. They were unable to keep to the meticulous hand-washing and cleanliness demands of the law because of their jobs. The shepherds of Bethlehem were charged with watching over and taking care of the sheep for the temple. Sheep were sacrificed morning and evening on the altar of the temple.

Isn't it interesting that they were the first ones called to watch over the Lamb of God, the sacrifice that would take away the sin of the world? They were told that they would see a sign. They would find the baby wrapped with cloths and lying in an animal feeding trough—a manger or an animal stall. The sign of which the shepherds were to take note was that this King, the Son of David, would not have the luxuries that normal kings would have. He would be wrapped in rags and lying in an animal feeding trough. After they had seen where the baby lay, we are told in verse eighteen that the testimony of the shepherds had people amazed. This was definitely not a place where a normal king would be born. Why does the Living God do things differently to the way of this world? *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!”* (Romans 11:33).

Jesus Presented in the Temple

²²When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” ²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” ³³The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

We are introduced now to a man named Simeon (Simeon means to hear), upon whom was the Spirit of God. Before God, this man was righteous and devout (v.25), and he was waiting for “the consolation of Israel.” Anyone who lived in that time could see that many things were going on that were not right before God. Their longing was for the Messiah to come and set things right—the consolation of Israel. It had been revealed by the Spirit of God to Simeon that he would not die before He had seen the Messiah with his own eyes. According to Leviticus 12, the

mother of a male baby had to go through a period of purification that lasted forty days—this was a good time of rest for a mother. At the end of that period of time, she had to bring a lamb as a sacrifice, and if she could not afford a lamb, the offering of a pigeon or a turtledove was okay.

Mary was poor, so we are told that she offered the birds. It was at that time that the Spirit prompted Simeon as to which couple and child he should approach. Simeon prophesied that there would come a time when this child would cause a division in Israel, i.e. some who were filled with their pride would fall, and those that were humble would be lifted up (Matthew 23:12). Mary, I'm sure, did not like the last thought that Simeon spoke—a sword would pierce Mary's heart. This was not to be a literal sword, but worse still, for she would endure the agony of seeing her beloved Son being crucified in front of her eyes.

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

After Simeon had prophesied, an aged woman of God came up to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. She was a woman by the name of Anna, the Grecian name for Hanna, a name meaning grace. After losing her husband, she had set her life apart in pursuit of God, fasting and praying, never leaving the Temple precincts, but serving God through worship and interceding that God would send the Messiah to those who were looking for Him. Notice that the revelation of the Messiah, was only given to those who were waiting in expectation of Messiah's coming.

The Boy Jesus at the Temple

⁴¹Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. ⁴³After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." ⁴⁹"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁵¹Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:41-52).

Luke gives us another snippet of the early life of Jesus. This time he tells us about an event, more than likely told to Luke by Mary, of the time when Jesus was just twelve years old. Verse forty-one says that Jesus and His parents went up to Jerusalem every year for the Feast of Passover. This was a celebration of deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. It lasted a week and was commonly called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first day of the feast was called Passover.

Many in a town would travel together in a caravan, camping for the evening in various places on the way. Because the journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem was around seventy-three miles, it would take several days with the ladies and children leaving first. The men would catch them up at the first night's campsite. After the feast had finished, Joseph caught up to Mary at the prearranged campsite only to find that Jesus was not with either of them. Can you imagine how upset they would have been? I'm sure that they both blamed one another—don't you think? Have you ever misplaced a child or been misplaced?

As many of you know, every now and then, I lead and teach a tour of Israel going over many of the holy sites in that beautiful land. On the last tour, there were twenty-six of us, so of course, one really needs to be watchful over one's flock to keep them together as we travel. It is so easy for a person to wander off to take a photo and be separated from the group among thousands of other tourists. On our last trip to Israel, I was able to take my son, Simeon, who was twenty-one years of age at the time.

While in the Old City of Jerusalem, we were just preparing to go through the tunnels along the western side of the Temple Mount itself. While we were getting the tickets for the group, without my knowledge, my son had quickly departed to put a written prayer into the cracks of the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, a place sacred to Jewish people, for they believe that the divine presence of God resides at the Wall. He told one of the members of our group what he was doing, but she did not relay the message to me. Consequently, only twenty-five of us went into the tunnels to explore the ruins that go back to the time of King Herod and Jesus. It was single file all the way as we walked the narrow tunnel along the wall. When we got to the North West corner of the Temple Mount, the wall opens up into a bigger area where we looked at an ancient cistern. It was then that the person at the end of the line came through, and I discovered that my son was missing.

To lose my son in a foreign city with a different language and culture is a very scary experience. Thankfully, I had spoken to all those with us, that if they ever found themselves lost in the bustling crowds, they were to stop and wait at the place they realized they were separated so that I could come and find them. I told the others that I knew where they were going (I have a close friend that is a registered tour guide who was leading us) and that I would meet them at the next place. I dashed back through the network of tunnels in search of my son. Ten minutes later, I found him waiting at the entrance to the tunnel network. He was really upset with himself that he had wandered away from his father and upset that he caused concern for the group. It was a precious time as we hugged and thanked God that we had found one another. I can't think of anything more horrifying for a parent than losing a child.

[Have you ever had one of your children wander off and you couldn't find him or her? Did you ever get lost as a child? Share your feelings about it.](#)

What do you think Christ understood about Himself as He grew up? How do you think the revelation of Who He was came to Him?

What would it be like to lose God? Mary and Joseph were given the heavy responsibility to take care of the Son of God as He grew up, and their greatest fear happened—they lost God’s Son!

Have You Ever Felt that God was Hidden from You?

³If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! (Job 23:3).

Of course, if you are a Christian, the Scripture is clear that He is always with us, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:28). What we are talking about here is the intimate presence of God or the anointing of the Spirit. Many of us who are Christians have experienced times when the presence of God has not chosen to go with us on our journey. Sometimes, we lose His presence due to a wrong turning in our lives. We thought the Lord was with us in our turning, but He had other things in mind. When we moved, He stayed behind. When that happens, it is good to stop and reflect on where you were when you last enjoyed walking with Him. What was it that caused you to lose the sense of His presence?

Of course, it is not always a result of sin that causes us to sense this distance from the Lord. At times, it can be a lesson that the Lord is teaching us. When I came to Christ, my joy overflowed at the closeness of the Holy Spirit. As time passed, though, the feelings dissipated. Evidently, all of my plans were not the Holy Spirit’s plans. When you sign up to be a follower of the Lord Jesus, guess what? You are no longer the director of your life. The Lord is the Shepherd, and it is we who are the sheep. We are to follow Him, and He will lead us into good pastures. We don’t invite Him to walk along with us. The fullness of life that He offers us comes as we walk in His footsteps.

During the year prior to the age of thirteen and his Bar Mitzvah, when a boy becomes a Son of the Law, a father was required to acquaint his son with the duties and regulations, which he was soon to assume. Jesus was beginning to learn from His Father before His coming of age.

Joseph and Mary took another day’s journey to get back to Jerusalem. Where would they look for Him? They spent the third day looking wherever they thought He might be. Finally, they found Him in the Temple precincts with the intellectuals or teachers of Israel. He was amazing them by asking them questions and providing answers that provoked new thoughts on Scripture in the minds of the Elders of Israel. Questions are powerful to bring light and change old habits and thought patterns. It seems that Israel’s best teachers were amazed at the insight Jesus had due to the questions He posed to them. A carefully thought-out question can often make a person think differently about long-standing beliefs. They were obviously amazed at His biblical understanding. Remember that this was just a twelve-year-old boy.

When Mary says to Him, “Behold your father and I have been anxiously looking for you,” He was surprised that they were looking for Him. Jesus very gently reminds His mother that He is no ordinary young man, and He takes the name *father* from Joseph and gives it to God. Mary

needed to be reminded whose child He was and that His real Father was with Him the whole time, preparing Him to become the epitome of *Bar Mitzvah*.

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