

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Luke

SB_LK2_Chapter 2:1-20

Jesus' Birth

Jesus Christ is Born of Mary (2:1-7)

Augustus was the Roman emperor from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14. The name Caesar was given to all Roman emperors after Julius Caesar and became a title, like Pharaoh.¹ Quirinius was the governor or administrator over a major census organized for the purpose of collecting taxes.²

The registration for the census followed Jewish custom and occurred at the home of the ancestors of the person registering. Joseph was a descendent of David, who was born in Bethlehem (1 Sam 16:1, 4). The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 90 miles which was at least a three day journey. Mary accompanied Joseph for several reasons:

- Mary and Joseph knew that Mary would have the baby while Joseph would have been away and they did not want to be separated during that time.
- Both of them knew that the child was the long promised Messiah.
- They both knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)

Tradition indicates that Mary and Joseph stayed in a cave near an inn and Jesus was placed in a manger or feeding trough, not a stall as is commonly depicted. (Think of a child being born into such circumstances. Today, it would be equivalent to a child being born to parents who were away from their home town and temporarily residing at a KOA campground or in their station wagon). No doubt, such humble circumstances surrounding one's birth would make the world suspicious of claims to be of royal descent. The swaddling cloths were wrapped in such a fashion so as to keep the baby's arms and legs straight as was the custom among Jews.³

Gloria In Excelsis Deo (Luke 2:8-20)

Shepherds were very prevalent in Israel. Why? Think of the number of lambs that had to be sacrificed during the course of a year in Israel. The angel's message was one of comfort to

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 190.

² There has been considerable debate concerning the date of this census. Ancient documents apart from the Scriptures have testified to the fact that Quirinius presided over a census in A.D. 6 only. This is too late to be the census referred to in this passage. Various explanations have been offered to explain the discrepancy. A couple of explanations are most frequently posited. Either Quirinius ruled during two different periods with a gap in between (i.e. 4 B.C. to A.D. 1 and A.D. 6-10) or the census spanned a period that began with the birth of Christ under a different ruler (i.e. Varus) and was finished under Quirinius' reign. The former argument is based upon the word "first" in verse 2. Does the word "first" refer to an earlier census by Quirinius? The latter argument is based upon the fact that the census sometimes took the name of the ruler under whom it was completed, not when it began. Another possibility is that the word "first" should be translated "before" as it is in John 15:18, thus Luke 2:2 would read "this was the census that took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria" (i.e. prior to A.D. 6). See John A. Martin, "Luke" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1985), 207. This view is consistent with the fact that Luke does not say that the taxation was collected at this time, but that people were registered for the tax. I prefer this latter interpretation.

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1981), 60.

not only a Jew, but also to the Gentile. Note the angel's message – "I bring to you good tidings of great joy which will be to **all** people." This message was a message of joy to ALL people, not just Israel. The message was that a Savior, the deliverer had been born. Any Jew (and many Gentiles) were very aware of the prophecies concerning a Messiah/Deliverer and the fact that blessings to all nations and peoples would come at the time of the establishment of His kingdom.

The NIV has the best translation of verse 14 – "on earth, peace to men on whom His favor rests" instead of the KJV – "and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." There have been many men of goodwill throughout history who God did not favor because their "goodwill" was human good not divine good consistent with His righteousness and justice. This is consistent with the principle found in Isaiah 55:8-9; 64:6 and Revelation 20:12-15. God is not a Santa Claus who dispenses His favor to all regardless of whether they have adjusted to His righteous standards or not. God is interested in men adjusting to His righteousness so that He may be glorified in their lives. The result is blessing upon the life so adjusted – "peace to men on whom His favor rests."

Question: Do you have peace in your soul today regardless of your set of adverse circumstances (Gal 5:22; Phil 4:11-13)? If not, perhaps you are a Christian who has not made the proper adjustments in your soul to God's righteous standards in your application of Truth. You are positionally seated at the right hand of the Father with Christ; however, your daily walk with the Lord in the application of Truth to experience (experiential righteousness) is non-existent or lacking. As a result, you have no joy, no peace, no comfort in adversity, and no hope (confident assurance) in life. Your circumstances dictate your mood and your actions. As a result of your lack of adjustment to God's righteousness in your experience of life, God's favor does not rest on you. It can't and you can't experience the blessing of joyful fellowship with Christ in time. The solution – repent of your lack of humility to submit to God's discipline via self-induced misery and your human viewpoint to life and begin to apply Truth from His word (1 Pe 5:6-7). Otherwise, you may be a person of goodwill [good intentions], but God's favor will never rest on you.

Note the shepherd's attitude. They, like Mary after hearing the message of Elizabeth, believed the message and wanted to confirm it for themselves. Such was the response of the "wise men" (Magi) of Matthew 2:1-2. This is quite a contrast to the response of the religious leaders who knew where the Baby was to be born, but did not take the time or the effort to confirm it for themselves (Matt 2:5). The shepherds were the first messengers to proclaim the arrival of the Messiah and those who heard were amazed.

The Law is Kept by Jesus' Parents (2:21-24)

Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day (v. 21) according to the requirements of the Law (Lev 12:3). Jesus is presented before the Lord after Mary was considered ceremonially clean (Lev 12:6) at a public ceremony that took place 40 days after the birth. At the ceremony, the mother could offer a lamb or two pigeons (Lev 12:6-8) depending upon their personal resources.

Simeon Sees God's Salvation (2:25-35)

Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. He was a righteous and devout man like Zacharias, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Mary. Note the number of righteous men and women at the beginning of Luke's Gospel in contrast to Matthew's emphasis upon the Jewish religious leaders. Note also the prominence of the Holy Spirit in Luke's Gospel and the appearance of angels to people who were looking for the Messiah. God responds to positive volition regardless of the dispensation or age of human history. In Luke, those who had been looking for the Messiah and who were the recipients of special revelation from God responded in praise. In all three of the hymns of thanksgiving and praise lie the deep significance of the births of John and Jesus for the salvation of Israel and the world (1:46-55, 68-79; 2:29-32). Simeon warned Mary that her Son would be opposed and that she would suffer pain. Many would fall and many would rise as a result of their response to His gospel of the kingdom ("But many who are first will be last and the last first" – Matt 19:30). The "thoughts of

many hearts” would be revealed in that Jesus serves as a test for individuals in the sense that they decide to place their trust in God’s provision through His Son, Jesus or they decide to trust in their own plan and system of self-righteousness when they stand before a Holy God (e.g. Re 20:11-15). Jesus is a judge Who exposes the thoughts of all people (Acts 10:42, 43; 17:30, 31).

Anna Bears Witness to the Messiah (2:36-38)

Anna was one of many prophetesses in the Bible (e.g. Miriam – Ex 15:20; Deborah – Judg 4:4; Huldah – 2 Ki 22:14; Philip’s daughters – Acts 21:9). It is not clear whether Anna had been a widow for eighty-four years or whether she was eighty-four years old. She also gave thanks to God when Jesus was brought to the temple to be presented. While it is not specifically stated in this passage, no doubt she, like Simeon, spoke as a result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to her regarding the Messiah.

Principle from this study: God takes great delight in manifesting Himself to those who seek Him and who manifest that positive volition by submitting humbly to His plan. Every person mentioned thus far in our study of Luke has been a person who humbly lived their life before the Lord in faithful submission to His plan, not their own. Compare the statements regarding the lives and the responses of Zacharias, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary, Simeon, and Anna to such passages as John 14:21, 26 and Proverbs 2.