

## Luke Chapter 2 – John Karmelich

1. Let me start with my lesson title: "It's the time". When a pregnant woman's water breaks it's time for a baby to be born. For most of us living in the United States, income taxes are due April 15th every year and must be paid by that date. My point is there comes certain times in life when we realize now is the time and there is no more delay. As I studied Chapter 2, that concept of it's the time kept hitting me and I figured it would make a good lesson title. With that title stated, let me talk a little about this chapter itself.
2. It always poses a unique challenge to teach a familiar passage of the bible. This chapter features one of the most famous bible stories, the birth of Jesus. I have to admit it is kind of refreshing to not teach it in December and work around all the usual Christmas distractions. So the question becomes, how I do teach a very familiar passage? Yes I can share some interesting historical facts you may not be aware of, and I do a little of that as background. However, the main purpose of a bible study is not to learn history, as it's to draw us closer to Jesus and be able to share His love to others around us. Therefore, as we read about the events surrounding Jesus' birth, try to keep in mind questions like, why did Luke include these specific details? Why didn't he mention other stories given in the other gospels? For example, the wise men visiting Jesus isn't included in this gospel account. Since "why" is my favorite question to ponder in this and any bible study I try to cover those type of questions as we study the stories told in this chapter.
3. Most of the chapter can be summed up with the idea of, "this is the time of Jesus birth". Here's the location when and where it happened. Then it gives a little background about those people who were aware of the significance of the event and gives their testimony about what they saw. The chapter then ends with a story about something Jesus did when He was about 12 years old.
  - a) At this point, let me get something out of my system that most Christians have pondered: Why does the bible say almost nothing about Jesus life from birth until the time He began His ministry? Why is the bible so quiet on Jesus' early life? Did he do any thing wrong in those years or did He do miracles in those years? I heard one preacher ask the question, "Why didn't Jesus come down from heaven for the weekend, go die on the cross, and then go back to heaven?" (John MacArthur). The answer is it indicates that Jesus lived a sinless life. That it's possible for a man to live a life with out sin. Let's be honest, one can ponder all day about what the bible doesn't say. Did He have any friends we don't know about? What was it like to live around Jesus all day long? Was it hard to raise a child who didn't make mistakes?
  - b) The answer for me is in effect he had a "normal" childhood. He worked as a wood maker for his adoptive father and lived a fairly normal Jewish life. I suspect when it came to the issue of getting married, Jesus asked his parents to not arrange anything for Him as it was not His destiny to marry any one Jewish girl, as the "bride of Christ" is the church. (See 2 Corinthians 11:2 or Revelation 22:17 on the church as the bride of Jesus.) In summary, we are left to ponder these things without answers. Since we can only know what is written, we must focus on what is written, and not what's excluded. With that said, let's focus on what Luke actually wrote here.
4. The issue for us is to focus on as we study this chapter is the question of why are the details given that are given and what does Luke want us to know about Jesus' birth. The details given support what Luke says really did occur. What I want to do is to help explain why these details are here, what we can learn from them, how we do apply them to our lives and how we can draw closer to God based on these details.
5. With that said, I'm ready to start the verse-by-verse commentary on Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. OK everyone, let's get out our Christmas decorations and let's read about His birth "out of season" as it's time for us to study those details.

6. Chapter 2, Verse 1: In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to his own town to register.
- a) I always believe it is best to start off, by reminding us where we left off. The last section of Chapter 1 ended with a discussion of the birth of John the Baptist and a brief mention of how he was raised. The latter half of Chapter 1 was what I called a "Praise Fest" as it focused on the parents of John the Baptist and Mary all at separate times praising God for what He has done, is doing and will do through bringing Jesus as the eternal king into the world. As most of us know, the chapter breaks were not added until many centuries later from when this was written. Even with that said, this is a good spot to have a break in the chapter as the subject switches from praise for Jesus birth to the time of that birth to occur.
  - b) To understand why these verses are here, remember that there were no calendars or ways of people to tell time. People marked time based on who was in power. Luke wrote this Gospel around 50 years after the birth of Jesus. Luke's doing his best to describe that time in history by stating who was in political power at that time.
  - c) With all of that said, it is best to give a brief background on the two names mentioned in these first few verses. The first is Caesar Augustus. As any history book will tell you, that is not his name, but his title. The word Caesar means leader or maybe king. Augustus is the name of a Roman god and the month of August is based on the same word. His real name was Gaius Octavian. He was the grand nephew of Julius Caesar who adopted him to be his own son. After some political battles, Octavian eventually did become one of the greatest leaders in world history. He ruled from 27BC to 14AD. Bottom line is he was the head guy of the Roman Empire at the time of the birth of Jesus.
    - i) Here is a question to ponder. If this was the head guy of the largest single empire in the history of the world, why didn't God the Father reveal Jesus' birth to him? Why have the birth in a relatively obscure part of the empire? Obviously it was to fulfill prophecy. At the same time, keep in mind who didn't know, which includes the greatest world leader of that time. I state all of this as to remind us that God often uses ordinary people like you and me who are willing to make a difference for Him in this world.
    - ii) The second name given in these verses is Quirinius. Think of him as the governor in charge of the territory that included Israel. It was discovered in about 1750 that he actually held this job twice. It's only important because history records that he also did a second census in about ten years after the birth of Jesus. However, there was another census he did about a decade earlier. That's why the text mentions it was the "first" census that Quirinius was in charge over.
  - d) All of this leads me back to my lesson title of "It's about time". Today scholars debate over the exact date of Jesus' birth. The original readers of Luke's gospel would have known it was around the time when these two people were in power and how we can best date the exact time of Jesus birth. Remember that the speed of a decree by the Roman Emperor is only given at the speed of a rider on horseback. Then it took time to organize this event and get public acceptance of it. The purpose of the decree was for taxation. It would be like saying, everybody has to travel to their hometown at their own expense just so that the Romans can see how many people live in each town and how much tax they should each pay. If one was a Jew living in Rome, one had to travel back to Israel just to be part of this registration for tax purposes.
    - i) If I had to guess, there was probably debate and argument about when this was to take place and how. Finally, in order to force the decree, a hard deadline date was probably issued. For Americans it's like when our income tax is due on April 15th. We can file extensions for filing, but the money is due that date, period. My point is Joseph and Mary had to face this "hard date" to be in Bethlehem on that date.

- e) I have to admit it is sort of amazing to me to consider that God put it in the mind of the Roman Emperor to order this decree essentially to get a young couple to travel about 75 miles from their hometown so that Jesus could be born in the town that the Old Testament predicted the Messiah would be born in. See Micah 5:2 for that prediction. All that Mary and Joseph knew was that their baby was about due, and now they were being forced by the Romans to travel a long distance away by a "hard fixed deadline" at their own expense so that the Romans could know how many people they had for taxation purposes.
    - i) From what I learned about this event, between the time this decree was given to the time of the hard deadline may have been a few years. If you recall from the introduction to this book, it was written to a man named Theophilus. Most likely he was some sort of Roman official. Therefore, he would know the rough time of this event based on when the two people mentioned in the verses were in power.
    - ii) Bottom line: Jesus was probably born around 4BC if my calculations are correct.
    - iii) Anyway, time to move the focus of the story from the Roman officials who made and enforced the decree to how it affected Joseph and Mary.
7. Verse 4: So 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. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
- a) As I study these verses, it amazes to me consider what is not said about what Joseph did and didn't do. There is no mention in Luke about whether or not Joseph should marry or divorce her. Matthew 1:24 says Joseph believed Mary's story about the angel visit after he had his own angelic vision in a dream. As Christians most of us know that fact. However a 1st Century reader of Luke may not know those factors and would just have to accept as stated here in the text that Joseph accepted Mary's story.
  - b) Bottom line is Joseph and Mary accepted God's will that they would be the parents of the Messiah, whatever that meant at that point, and they were staring at this "hard deadline" to go travel to their family's hometown because the Roman's were forcing everyone to do this. Were Joseph and Mary aware of the prediction that the Messiah had to be born in the town of Bethlehem? No idea. All they probably cared about was they had to do this or die and Mary had to travel, probably on the back of a donkey for a long and difficult journey let alone being very pregnant while doing so.
  - c) Whenever the Christmas story is told in places for the first time, one of the hardest things for other cultures to accept is "How can no family not take them in?" How is it people can be so cruel as to not find a place for an expected mother to sleep is a standard question. One has to get the idea that everyone was so focused on their own problems of traveling to their hometown for this Roman "forced deadline or death", and the fact the town was very crowded as it was, that no one paid attention to this young couple traveling there.
  - d) With all that said, I would like you to notice the word translated "firstborn" in Verse 7. In the bible, the word "firstborn" can be used as a title and sometimes it can literally mean a firstborn "something". As a famous example, in Psalm 89:27, David refers to himself as "the firstborn" as a title. David was the youngest of eight sons (See 1st Samuel 16:11). My point is simply that sometimes "Firstborn" is a title. However, there are other times where that word literally means the first to be born. My point is after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary went to have more children. (See Matthew 12:46 as an example.) I mention this as a counterargument to the idea that Mary was a "perpetual virgin" all of her life. Many years ago I got into a debate with a Greek Orthodox friend who argued that Jesus' half brothers were from a previous marriage of Joseph. I will argue that based on the use of the word "firstborn" here in Luke, that Joseph and Mary went on to have more children after Jesus.

- e) With all that said, it's time to get back to the background of the Christmas story. We read that Mary wrapped Jesus in what was called "swaddling clothes". This was common cloth used to wrap babies in a way that among other things kept them warm and prevented the baby from scratching their eyes. It was a common practice in that culture. I picture Mary packing for this trip and thinking, "I'm going to need swaddling cloth" and taking on the journey to Bethlehem.
- f) As to the manger, this is one of the most famous details in the Christmas story. Again it gets back to the idea of "I can't believe no one in that town was willing to help out a girl about to give birth to a baby". Imagine a town so crowded that one person finally says, I know, you can sleep in the barn. It's the only place that's not overly crowded right now.
- g) The one advantage of the barn is that when the shepherds heard of this event as stated in the next few verses they would know where to look for Jesus.
- h) As I studied this text, I kept thinking, why wasn't this or that person told about this? I already mentioned the Roman officials. I suspect they were kept out of the loop for the same reason Herod was out of the loop: The Romans could see this baby king as a threat to their power, so God kept them out of the loop so Jesus wouldn't be killed.
  - i) Then I thought, why didn't God make it obvious to the town folks in Bethlehem that "The Messiah" was there? After all, if the shepherds saw angels proclaiming the birth of Jesus as stated in the next few verses, why not tell the Jewish people living in that town that "THE" Messiah would be born there? After all, all of them were Jewish and they would welcome that news. For starters, remember that God is God and He gets to choose who and who does not know "It's the time". If I had to guess, it was to not alert the Roman officials when they come there to register people. Again, the Romans could have seen the baby Jesus as a coming threat to their power and have him killed. Therefore, God in His wisdom decided to keep this fact a secret from the townsfolk's living there at that time.
  - ii) Meanwhile, it's time to read of others who were told what was going to happen:
- 8. Verse 8: And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
  - a) I admit, that when I read the story of the shepherds being told about the birth of Jesus, it as if God is thinking, "This is such great news, I have to share it with somebody!" Those living in Bethlehem were kept out of the loop, my guess is so the Roman authorities won't be alerted to the situation. Still, God the Father wanted there to be other witnesses to this event. That's why we read here about angels appearing in the sky to bunch of shepherds living in the field.
  - b) OK, if the Romans required everyone to go to their hometown for this census, what were the shepherds doing in the fields? My guess is they had Bethlehem or another town close by as their home, but they still had to protect their sheep from predators. The point is the guys on "night watch" got a show they didn't expect at all.
  - c) I admit it is sort of fun to try to picture this. Here are a bunch of guys whose only light is the stars and the moon. They probably had their sheep in some sort of pen. They had to constantly look around for coyotes or other predators. All of a sudden, they look up and there is an angel talking to them. The angel states that the Messiah (eternal king) is here. The word "Christ" is the Greek word for the Messiah and no, its not Jesus' last name!
    - i) The angel says in effect, take a break from watching the sheep, travel to Bethlehem and go see the baby. You'll find him in a manger. I sort of picture nomad type of people gong to Bethlehem searching the barns until they found the baby.

- d) One more thing before I move on. The text does not mention Bethlehem, but the "town of David". Remember that King David lived a thousand years prior to this event. It must be common knowledge back then that David's hometown was Bethlehem. If one ever travels there, there is not much to Bethlehem. It is a small hillside town not far from Jerusalem. My point is simply that the shepherds knew where to travel. I don't know if they took the sheep with them, or just started running. Personally, if an angel in the sky made a grand announcement to go somewhere, the curiosity would kill me and I'd start running. Since the shepherds were Jewish and probably hated the Romans as much as anyone, I'm sure that they too were excited to see the birth of the Messiah, and the time to go was now.
  - e) OK John, and why does God want us to know all of this? To show us as much proof as possible that Jesus was born as predicted where it was predicted. In the Old Testament book of Micah (5:2), it clearly says that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem. It amazes me to consider that God ordained a Roman Census with a hard deadline (like April 15th) just to get a young pregnant couple to travel about 75 miles for this event to occur. This shows us how God goes out of His way to plan out history ultimately for His own glory. Meanwhile, back to our "off-season Christmas pageant":
9. Verse 13: Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."
- a) We last left the shepherds hearing a message from one angel. Now the shepherds see a whole bunch of angels praising God. Let's start with a quick discussion of angels:
    - i) We tend to picture angels as cute little babies flying around with wings and maybe trumpets used to make announcements. From reading all the references to angels in the bible, I get the impression that most of them look like ordinary men. There is actually very little description of what they look like. They usually just appear. The exceptions are a few references in Ezekiel and Revelation that describe them as having a whole bunch of wings (not just two) and lots of eyes and wings. That could refer to all angels, but most likely, it refers to a special group of them.
    - ii) Probably the most important thing to say about angels is that they work in ranks the same way an army works in ranks. I get the impression the purpose of angels is to be God's messengers between Him and us. They are sent from heaven to do whatever it is their "commanding officer" (God) orders them to do. I also think of demons as also having military like ranks. I believe the reason demonic angels did rebel against God is they wanted to be God's chosen and not humans. Bottom line is we have to accept that both types of angels do exist and whether we see them or not, they are part of our world.
    - iii) With all that said, we read here of a large number of angels (a multitude) of them praising God as a birth announcement. They also make this comment of "peace to men on whom his (God's) favor rests". The idea of that statement is in effect that all people who trust in Jesus get the privilege of having peace with Him. It's sort of like saying, "Praise God for what He has done, is doing and will do in the life of people who trust in Jesus".
  - b) Next question: Why did these shepherds only get this privilege? Why didn't the whole world see these angels and not just a bunch of guys keeping night watch over sheep? Part of it is the reminder that "God chooses who He chooses and we have to accept it." I guess that the other idea is so that Mary and Joseph could talk to someone else who also seen an angel (or lots of them) to verify in effect that this young couple is not crazy. Like I stated earlier the town of Bethlehem didn't see the vision, as God didn't want the Roman officers to be threatened by a new king on the scene. However, having a bunch of shepherds on night watch see this can help Mary and Joseph with their struggles of "is all of this real?"
    - i) The point for you and me in this chapter is God is setting up a bunch of various credible witnesses to what did happen that night.

10. Verse 15: When 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." <sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.
- a) Try to picture this from the perspective of the shepherds. A normal night for them is just to watch the landscape and make sure predator animals don't attack their sheep. Instead of that, a bunch of angels tell them that "The" eternal king is born. A natural reaction to this would be, "Let's go travel there and see if it's true." I assume they woke up the sheep and their families and said, "OK, everyone, let's all get moving".
  - b) I doubt there was only one barn in Bethlehem. I don't know if they asked around or just stumbled onto the place. I can picture them asking a few people, "Do you recall a woman who was very pregnant looking for a place to sleep?" Somebody probably pointed them to the right barn and found the couple just as the angel described.
  - c) The bible does not record any conversation between the shepherds and Mary, but one has to figure they said something to each other. They must have compared notes about angel visits. At the least the shepherds must have verified that this is "the one". Their visit had to be reassuring to Mary and Joseph that all of this is real.
    - i) That reminds me, when you read the story of the "wise men" visiting the baby say in Matthew's gospel, it says the wise men went to the "house" (Matthew 2:11). My point is that by the time the wise men show up, the census is probably over. This young couple found a house to stay in for a while. A Jewish requirement was for all male babies to be circumcised when they are 8 days old. Also the couple was required to make an offering to God 40 days after the birth. All of that is coming up later in the chapter. My point here is just that while they were near Jerusalem, as Bethlehem is close by, they stayed there at least until that 40-day window past.
    - ii) In the meantime, it's time to get back to the Christmas story:
11. Verse 17: When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.
- a) One has to remember that there was no news broadcasts in those days. Here is a bunch of shepherds in town and probably a lot of sheep following them. My point is rumors were now spreading about Jesus birth. Since the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, I'm sure the locals knew that passage and would be interested in any baby that could potentially be the Messiah. I'm also sure that the local Jewish people were still afraid of the Romans so I picture the story being quietly told amongst the locals.
  - b) Among the famous parts of this story is the reference to Mary "treasuring these things in her heart". I picture Mary as a quiet girl who liked to think about significant events and how it would affect her life. It's sort of like thinking, "All of this has been very interesting, now let's see how it plays out."
  - c) As to the shepherds, "show's over" and since there were no more angels doing anything, it is time for them to walk the sheep out of town and back to where there was grass to graze. The text says in Verse 20 that they left town praising God that they saw this event. At the same time, they just sort of figure, ok it's time to get back to work.
12. Verse 21: On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.
- a) Since the "show's over", it's time for Luke to focus on the next significant event around the birth of Jesus, his circumcision. This is a physical act of cutting off the foreskin on a male baby penis. It's been practiced by Jews since the day of Abraham. The symbolic idea of that painless (to the baby) ritual is to show one has been dedicated to God for His service.

- b) What I pondered is, "if Jesus was sinless", or at the least the parents were convinced that this is the Promised Messiah, why was it necessary to have Jesus circumcised? It could be as simple as this young couple believed, that's what we're supposed to do with all babies. The related idea is that since Jesus is fully human, and well fully Jewish, it shows that he and his parents still obeyed the law as it was written out.
  - c) This verse also shows that like John the Baptist's parents in the previous chapter, Joseph and Mary were obedient to the angel's instructions and named the baby what the angel did tell them to name him, Jesus (a Greek translation of the Hebrew "Joshua") that means "God is salvation". The point for you and I to get out of all of this is the idea that when we don't know what to do next, we contemplate, "What does the bible tell us to do, and make the best decisions possible based on biblical wisdom".
  - d) Speaking of making biblical based decisions, it's time to move on to the next phase of the early life of Jesus, the "dedication of Jesus".
13. Verse 22: When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord" ), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."
- a) If you've somewhat familiar with the Christmas story in Matthew gospel, you might recall that Joseph and Mary also fled to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-20) to avoid being persecuted by King Herod. They eventually returned to their home in Nazareth. My point is that the time of them "fleeing" was not the day after Jesus was born, but probably soon after the purification ritual was completed as stated in these verses. As to the wise men I suspect they came soon after this event. So why doesn't Luke bring up those other stories in his Gospel? That's because the purpose of Luke's Gospel is not to give a "blow by blow" story of Jesus' life, but just give certain details to verify that He is who He claims to be. Here the focus is on those who witnessed the events around the time of Jesus' birth, so the "wise men" and "fleeing to Egypt" are not part of this narrative.
  - b) With that said, it's time to talk about what is said, the ritual itself.
  - c) In Leviticus 12: 3-4, it states that when a male baby is born, the mother had to wait 40 days from the birth and then make an offering to God. If a female baby is born, the wait time is 80 days. Without getting into a lot of details, the idea is that the mother is to have time to bond with the baby and then go make a temple sacrifice to dedicate the baby to God.
    - i) The idea of the sacrifice was to say in effect, "This baby is born with the sin disease that all of us and by trusting God to guide our lives, that baby can be forgiven of the sins that all of us face. Leviticus goes on to describe different types of animals that could be sacrificed based on how much a couple can afford. Given that Mary and Joseph were probably a poor couple, the lowest sacrifice that can be made is a pair of doves or pigeons. This also indicates to me that the event took place before the Wise Men showed up to bring them expensive gifts.
  - d) So if Jesus was sinless, and the parents knew he is the Messiah, why go through with this ritual? The answer is to show how Jesus and his parents fulfilled what the law for His life required. The idea is to show not only that Jesus was sinless, but that he also did what the Jewish law for all Jewish males required.
14. Verse 25: Now 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 upon him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.
- a) From here, we now get the first of two stories of new witnesses to Jesus' birth. The reason these stories are here are to give further proof that Jesus is, who he claimed to be. In other words, Luke is giving us credible witnesses to testify about the validity of who Jesus did claim to be. Therefore, before we start to read about what this Simeon did with Jesus, first we read a bit about his background as a credible witness.

- b) The text says Simeon was "righteous and devout". It does not mean he was perfect. It just means, he was devoutly religious and he was a credible witness.
  - c) That leads to the part of Verse 25 that reads, "He was waiting for the consolation of Israel". Remember at time Israel was part of the Roman Empire. Therefore, what Simeon wanted was for the Messiah to come and set up God's eternal kingdom with the Messiah reigning.
    - i) With that background given, the Holy Spirit comes upon this man and somehow tells him that he won't die until he has seen the Christ (again that's the Greek word for the Hebrew "Messiah"). It's fun to contemplate an old man hanging around the Temple area and proclaiming, "I'm not going to die until I see the Messiah". I'd bet that he had the aches and pains of being old and if anyone asked him why you are still working here, he probably said, "I'm not going to die until I see The Messiah". With that thought in mind, we're now ready to read Verse 27:
15. Verse 27: Moved 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,<sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: <sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. <sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all people, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."
- a) I was trying to picture Joseph, Mary and the baby walking through this large courtyard area with the purpose of completing the Jewish ritual of offering a sacrifice after their new baby was now 40 days old. Joseph probably asked somebody, "Hey I'm a new father of a baby boy, he's now 40 days old. Here's my pair of birds, who do I talk to around here to go offer them for the baby?" I wonder if there was a line to get in for parents of babies to go make this offering? Did they have to go stand in that line?
  - b) Now all of a sudden, here is this old man named Simon, walking up to Joseph and Mary who I suspect are in line and Simon lead by the Holy Spirit probably says something like do you mind if I hold the baby for a second? As a parent, my first reaction to any stranger wanting to hold my baby is no, let alone hold who angels' have told me was The Messiah. However this exchange worked, God made it possible for this old man to hold the baby in his arm's as he (Simeon) began to prophesy over Jesus.
  - c) Before I discuss what is it Simeon said, let me explain why this passage is here: The point is the author Luke wanted to present credible witnesses to the birth of Jesus. The idea is to present someone like Simeon and a woman coming up in a few verses to say in effect, here are two devout Jewish people who trust in God and can be trusted in what they say about God. Therefore, instead of telling the story of the wise men, Luke focuses on telling the story of credible Jewish witnesses to the events of Jesus' birth. As I've stated a bunch of times by now, I believe Mary herself recounted these events to Luke for us to read.
  - d) With all of that said, let me now focus on what Simeon actually said: His first words were those of praise in effect to say, "OK God, you can kill me now as I've seen the Messiah for myself". Yes that's strange. It makes me wonder if one can ever be old enough or maybe sick enough where one thinks, OK God, I've lived out my life's purpose, I'm ready to die. Personally, I don't think Simeon committed suicide here as he probably believed when his time is up is God's business and not his. It's more about realizing God's plan for his life to be a public witness for Messiah and here was his big moment that's he's been waiting all of his life to be. Now think about that idea from our Christian perspective: God wants us to be a witness for Him in the world. We, like Simeon have been called to be a witness for Him and make a difference for Him in this world. Like Simeon here, we should look for moments when our own encounters with God can be used to praise Him.
    - i) To state the obvious, we can't hold the baby Jesus in our arms and sing praises. What we can do is praise Him say in churches or other settings. We too get the opportunity to praise God for what He has done, is doing and will do in the world. With that said, let's talk about what else Simeon says about Jesus.



- e) After Simeon makes the statement that he can now "die in peace", his next statement says "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." " (Verses 30-32).
    - i) John's loose translation: "I've seen the Messiah, which God has brought into this world for the Gentiles to worship and for us Israelites as well. Again, the obvious is that God has chosen to bring into the world "the eternal king" not with a grand entrance for say other kings and the whole world to witness, but in a humble way, in a fairly obscure corner of the world through a group of people (Israelites) that don't really focus on bringing other converts into that religion.
    - ii) So why this method? Why not a grand scale entrance? Credibility. If God wrote across the sky, "Here is my Son, worship Him", it would just scare people and then people would worship Jesus out of fear, and not a desire for Him to pay the price for our sins. My point is simply God chose the method He did for a reason and that reason is for us to study the evidence itself and see if it leads us to believe for ourselves whether or not Jesus is who He claims to be.
    - iii) With that point made, the next point made is that Jesus is to be a witness to the non-Jewish nations of the world. One has to admit that after 2,000 years there are now billions of non-Jewish people worship Jesus as God so in that sense, what he Simeon predicted here has come true.
    - iv) Finally he says it is for the "glory of your people Israel". I'd bet Simeon envisioned a Messiah that would rule the world from Israel and the Israelites would all accept Him as their promised Messiah. Know that devoutly religious Israelites were a minority then as they were today. Just as a majority of people who say they are Christians because they live in a Christian country or they believe Jesus is God just because they came from a Christian background. For most of my father's life he believed he was saved because his good deeds outweighed his bad deeds, which is the most common lie in the world about salvation. My point here is simply that Simeon had hoped this baby would drive Israelites back to God the same way it is the desire of Christians to see others around them "get it" that they don't have to work hard in order to be saved.
  - f) While all of that would be enough of a witness, Simeon is still not through speaking to the people who were given the privilege of raising Jesus. Let's read on:
16. Verse 33: The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then 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, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."
- a) Think about this whole scene from Joseph and Mary's perspective. Here was this old man who was a rabbi who wanted to hold Jesus for a second. Simeon just announced that this baby would be worshipped by multitudes of Gentiles and lead Israelites to follow Him. To state the obvious, the prophesy about the Israelites is unfulfilled to date, which is why I believe in a literal Second Coming of Jesus. To state another classic Jewish joke, when the Messiah comes, the Jewish leaders will ask, "So is this your first visit or your second?"
    - i) Anyway, Joseph and Mary were probably just shaking their heads and thinking, is this man crazy? Why is he predicting all of these things? However, before either of them had a chance to say something to Simeon, he spoke again and this time he had a personal message for Mary, which is verses 34 and 35.
  - b) With that said, let me quickly discuss Verse 34. Simeon correctly predicted that the life of Jesus will cause the fall and rising of many in Israel. It could refer to power. Think about the great change in power in the world in the centuries following the life of Jesus. The Romans conquered this area and eventually Christianity became the official religion there. My point is Jesus did cause the rise and fall of many in power there in Israel at that time.

- c) One can also read this as being about salvation. To state the obvious again, most of the Israelites rejected Jesus and this not only affected many individual salvation decisions but also affected the fall of that nation as I'm convinced was for their rejecting Jesus as their long promised Messiah.
  - d) With that said, let me talk about the last part of Verse 34 and most of Verse 35. It reads, "and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed". Think of that verse as saying 1) the life of Jesus will be spoken against as the vast majority of Jewish people as the vast majority of Christians still want to prove their worth to God and not have Jesus pay the price for their sins. 2) It says that "many hearts will be revealed" meaning it will be obvious to many around them what they think of Jesus and His desire to pay the price for their sins.
  - e) Finally Simeon says to Mary, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too". I admit that I wonder how literal to take that. Neither the bible nor history has any references to how Mary did actually die. History does record that the disciples were mostly killed as they refused to deny Jesus to the point of death. My point is we don't know how Mary was actually killed. However, like any grieving mother, I believe Simeon is making the point that she will watch Jesus die on the cross and it will "break her heart" to see this event.
    - i) When we get to the later chapters of this book, we'll read that Mary herself was at the cross when it happened. I believe that is the fulfillment of this prophecy about a sword piercing her heart.
  - f) While there is a lot more to say here, I do want to get through this chapter in one lesson. So it is time to talk about the next witness to Jesus birth, a prophetess named Anna:
17. Verse 36: There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,<sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.<sup>38</sup> Coming 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.
- a) First let me give a few background comments about who this woman was. Apparently she was an old woman who was only married seven years, and then lived as a widow and now was 84 years old. Apparently she had a gift of prophesy, and I guess the priests who worked regularly at the temple, recognized her gift and made her a home near by so that she could be of service to the priests at that time. I suspect the priests provided food and a place to sleep for her so she could spend her time working at the temple. That's how she could worship there night and day.
  - b) One more bit of trivia before I talk about what she said. She knew she was of the tribe of Asher. That was one of the "lost" 10 tribes of Israel that was taken away in captivity many centuries earlier by the Assyrians even before the Babylonian captivity. My point is that I don't believe in any "lost tribes of Israel". I believe that when the Israelites were allowed to come back to their homeland when the Persians rules that area, many Israelites from all of the tribes came back there and there were still records in the Temple where one can see what tribe one came from. For those who don't know, the Romans in 70AD destroyed the Temple and at that point, all the family records were lost. I'm stating all of this not only to show that Israelites from all tribes lived there, but that Luke was written prior to 70AD.
  - c) Unlike Simeon, this woman does not give a speech to Mary and Joseph about the future. All she does is give thanks to God for the child and she did speak to Mary and Joseph. I believe this story is here not to make us wonder what she said, but again to present to us a witness who was credible about the birth of Jesus. She did speak to Mary which is stated in Verse 38. One has to admit that if it wasn't for the angels personally visiting both Mary and Joseph at different moments (Joseph's visions are recorded in Matthew's gospel), I'm sure that this couple would think, both this Anna woman and this Simeon guy are crazy old folks who have no idea what they're talking about as they both held Jesus as a baby.

- d) Before I move on to the next story in the chapter, note that this woman Anna spoke to Mary about "redemption of Jerusalem". OK, what does that mean? Think of it as the city of Jerusalem as being the center of the world. It's about Jesus as king ruling from this city over the world. Remember that Anna spent most of her life worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem. The Old Testament makes promises that a Messiah (eternal king) would rule the world from this city. At that moment in history, Jerusalem was not a major city but just another small part of the vast Roman Empire.
    - i) It's also interesting to consider today how much those in power focus on the big question of "what do we do with Jerusalem?" Here is a city with no great natural resources or anything anyone would want. Yet it is a common topic in the halls of the United Nations to focus on the issue of Jerusalem. There is a famous story some year's back where a diplomat there complained, "Can we talk about something, anything, other than Jerusalem here? It seems like that's all we do around this place all day".
    - ii) Bottom line is Anna wanted Jesus to be the "redemption of Jerusalem" as the most important city in the world and after 2,000 years I believe He still will one day.
  - e) In the meantime, it's time to finish the story of Joseph and Mary and their time here in the capital city of Israel with Jesus as a baby:
18. Verse 39: When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.
- a) The most fascinating thing to me about these two verses is what is not said: That the wise men visited Joseph and Mary and the fact they had to flee to Egypt while King Herod did kill the other babies in Bethlehem, when he heard about the Messiah. All of that did take place around Verse 39. We know all of that from Matthew Chapter 2. So if Luke's source for his information from Mary, why didn't Luke include all of that? One possible answer is the person that this letter is written to, already knew that story from Matthew's Gospel was in circulation. My view is not that Luke wanted to deny that bit of history. It just was not relevant to Luke's presentation of the Jewish witnesses to the birth of Jesus.
  - b) With that stated, what the text does say is that Joseph and Mary did what the Jewish law required them to do in terms of circumcision and making an offering for Jesus when he was 40 days old. Remember that while both Joseph and Mary had their ancestral home in Bethlehem, which is just outside of Jerusalem, it was not where they lived. Matthew says that Jesus was raised in Nazareth as that is where an angel told Joseph to go live and that is where he was from in the first place. My point is simply that Joseph and Mary did all that angels guided them to do, they did what the law required them to do and tried to live the best life they could knowing that they were literally raising the son of God.
  - c) This verse brings up the question, how does one raise up "deity" anyway? Did Jesus eat food? Did He have boyhood friends? Matthew 13:55 says that Joseph and Mary went on to have at least three brothers and two sisters. What is assumed is Jesus was raised as a normal child figuring that one day God would guide Him to be the Messiah. I'm sure Jesus learned how to be a carpenter and helped the family. The text does not say He grew in wisdom, but that He had it. I'm guessing Jesus knew from childhood he was deity.
    - i) Let me put it this way: Jesus didn't wake up one day and realize, "I'm the Messiah, so I better go carry out that role." He had the wisdom of God since birth. One can read of child prodigies in history. Here is THE greatest child prodigy in history.
    - ii) The text also says he grew and became strong. That's just a reference to growth as any child becoming an adult would experience. To put all of this another way, I hold the view that Jesus had God's wisdom "born in Him", but as He grew up He understood what it meant and applied good wisdom not only to be helpful with being part of a family, but acting like a good Jewish boy.

19. Verse 41: Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. <sup>43</sup> After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. <sup>44</sup> Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When 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."
- a) To understand these verses a little background is helpful: First, realize that these verses are all that we know about Jesus from the time of his birth until when time He began his public ministry in his early 30's. The key question to me is not only why is the bible silent about all the years Jesus grew up, but also why include this story? As I pondered earlier in the lesson, why didn't Jesus just show upon the scene for the weekend, die for our sins and then go back to heaven, and do this the "easy way"? The best answer I can give is to show that He did live a sinless life and show that He lived all that a Jewish boy and man was supposed to do. In other words, it was to show that it's possible to live a life, as God demanded of the Jewish people to live. With that said, Luke tells us this story here about something that occurred when Jesus was 12 years old.
  - b) With that said, let me talk a little about what was the Jewish custom concerning traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover holiday. The closest comparison I can draw would be like us saying, we're traveling home for the holidays referring to Christmas and New Years. The Passover feast was the first day of an eight day feast that was required for all Jewish people to attend. People traveled in large caravans for protection. It was common for the children to travel in front, then women, then men. They would then "circle the wagons" at night, and travel again the next day. As I said in the last lesson, Jesus and Mary lived about 75 miles away. It was a three day journey to travel there.
  - c) If you read my first Luke lesson, I discussed how the Israelite priests took turns being on duty in the temple. They each worked there two weeks of the year. The exception was holidays when all of them needed to be there. The Jewish historian Josephus records one year around at this time, 250,000 lambs were killed to feed all the people traveling there for this holiday. My point is to consider how crowded Jerusalem was when Jesus traveled there as a boy with his parents and probably his siblings. I believe Jesus knew even at this point that He was going to be killed for our sins on this same holiday where multitudes of lambs were slaughtered for Israelites so they could contemplate how God had redeemed them from their sins.
  - d) This background leads me back to the question of why this story? Why now? One good reason is it was around the age of 12 or 13 when a boy was considered a man. The Jewish people developed a ceremony later called "bar mitzvah", which roughly means "Son of the Law". The idea is for parents to declare that they are no longer responsible for the sins of the child as the child is now old enough to understand God's law and be responsible for knowing how to act. What was common at that time was for fathers to take their children to the Passover feast for a few years prior to this age, so they could understand how God did pay the price for their sins and the slaughter of the lambs reminded them of the blood that was shed in Egypt so that the Israelites could be separated for God's use.
  - e) Consider that all necessary background to understand the "time". When the feast ended, the caravan with Jesus' parents started the track home. The father assumed Jesus was up front with the other boys and the mother assumed he was back with dad. At the camp at the end of day one, they figured out he was missing. Another full day was needed to go back to Jerusalem, find shelter and on day three they looked around for Jesus.

- f) I'm sure the parents were thinking, where did Jesus eat and sleep the past few days". I'm also sure it occurred to them to look in the Temple complex knowing Jesus destiny. The bottom line is Jesus was found in a conversation format sitting with a bunch of teachers. A standard way of learning was to stimulate conversation based on asking questions. If Jesus is God, why was it necessary for Him to be doing this? My speculation is that it was for Jesus to discuss the role of the Messiah amongst the religious leaders there. I'd wager that the rabbi's there were thinking, "this really is a very wise young man" and they were testing his knowledge of the bible and history in that discussion time.
  - g) All of that leads me back to the text. His parents were naturally worried as any parents would be and asked him, why are you here? The mom applied standard guilt by saying, "Don't you know we were worried about you?" My other speculation is that the rabbi's were so impressed with Jesus' knowledge, they fed him and gave him shelter during the three day time period since the parents were gone. All of that leads us to Jesus' response:
20. Verse 49: "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying to them.
- a) The joke here is that Jesus did not say a "Hail Mary" prayer to his mother. For all of the Catholic views on praying to Mary to intercede on our behalf to Jesus, here is an example of Jesus saying to his parents in effect, "I understand what is my role and destiny in life. I know you raised Me. However, I'm the Son of God, and not your responsibility to raise any more." Consider that Verse 49 is the only thing recorded that Jesus said for 30 years. What is key here is that we get the idea that Jesus understood His role as God's son.
  - b) I know I'm running long so I'll make this quick. The Hebrew word translated "son" is not always a literal "son of". As an example, Jesus referred to two of his disciples, John and James as "Son of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). Their father's name was not thunder. It is just an expression like saying they were bulls in a china shop based on how they acted. My point is that Jesus implied He is God's son is something no Jewish person would dare do. It is that concept that Jesus was claiming divinity here that was the reason He was killed.
21. Verse 51: Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
- a) The reason these verses are here is to show us that Jesus didn't stay in the temple complex say until He began His ministry. What is assumed is that for the next 20 years or so, Jesus worked in the family business as a wood maker. That meant making harnesses and other wood products. As He grew up, I suspect He still lived in His parent's house. Back then, when a boy got married, they didn't move away, they added on to the existing house and stayed there. When I visited my ancestral home in Croatia and saw the large houses that were passed on from generation to generation as bride's move in with their husbands to the same house of their parents. Am I positive of this, of course not. However, given the fact that Jesus never married, it seems logical that He was known there as the single man who stayed home and helped in the family business. We do know that Joseph died before Jesus began His ministry, so staying home helped his mother during that time period.
22. OK, enough speculation on Jesus childhood. The main point of this chapter is that a number of credible witnesses were presented to show that Jesus was born where He was, raised where He was and He grew up realizing that He was the Son of God, both as a title and a literal fact. I hope all of this gave each of us a new perspective on the "Christmas Story" to contemplate about.
23. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, we realize in life there are specific times where we do realize that "Now is the time". Just as Jesus came in the world at a specific time in history and just as certain events happened in His life on specific times and locations, help us to realize that You are aware of our time. Help us not to waste the most valuable asset You have given us, or time and help us to use that time for Your glory. Guide us so that we use that time to make a difference for You, and spread that knowledge to a lost and dying world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.