

Luke 2

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Title: Why the Christmas story matters when it's not Christmas time!

If you think about it, Jesus could have been born to royalty or miraculously appeared in the Temple. It is part of our Christian culture to know the story of Jesus' birth! Yes, I'll discuss some theories about a few of the facts that Luke gives. The underlying question is why does Luke give us these details? Why does God want us to know this stuff and it's not just to share it with children every Christmas! We read in Chapter 2 of Jesus as an infant and a young boy in the last few verses! Notice how God goes "out of His way" to show how humble and irrelevant people, became famous for being around Jesus. That is a reminder that God works with whoever He chooses to show His power over the world despite a lack of the people He picks to be famous. The point is we should humbly (key word) be willing to use our life to make a difference for Him, not to gain fame, but to honor Him even if we're being ignored by people around us. In short, "Jesus is God, deal with it!"

Before you read further, realize I am going to kill the myth that Jesus was born on Christmas in year 0! First, there was no "year" 0. If you didn't know, the terms "BC" and "AD" come from Latin words that mark time since His birth. Luke did not know the exact date of His birth, but Luke does his best to give us the rough time! It is a start of saying Jesus was a real human who was really born! Jesus being both fully man and fully God and it should be no harder to accept than the creation of Adam and Eve!

As we go through all the chapter details, please don't think "I already know or did not know this or that particular fact!" The more important question is why does God want us to think about this or that story in the chapter and how it affects our lives? Obviously, it shows the circumstances around His birth, but the important thing is what it teaches us how to live as God desires. Pay attention in this chapter to the people using their lives to honor Jesus even as a baby or little boy despite their insignificance or things they did wrong (i.e., when his parents left Jesus as a boy behind as a mistake). God forgave both Mary and Joseph for that, plus they took the time and trouble to act on their mistake of forgetting Jesus!

The other thing I caught as I read this passage a few times, is all the testimonies given about Jesus. The one thing people can't argue with is our testimony over how Jesus has impacted our lives. Yes, we hear the standard response of "good for you". As we know, people don't get saved until the Holy Spirit leads them to Jesus. Still God wants to work through people to show them Jesus is God. One way is to share what He has or will do in our lives and that's what we see a handful of times in this chapter!

OK as I love to say, time for details: The first seven verses focus on dating Jesus' birth. Remember the calendar method was different in those days, and Luke probably wrote this about 60AD. I want to state a few things about Jesus' birth date: He was born when Herod ruled Israel, (the one who killed children under 2, when he found out about Jesus! That story is omitted in Luke). History records Herod died in 4BC, so Jesus was probably born shortly before Herod died. As most of us know Jesus was born when the Roman Empire had an empire wide census. We know Jesus wasn't born on December 25th, as they wouldn't do a census in the middle of winter as many roads were closed. Luke emphasizes that Jesus is the son of Mary even before she was married to Joseph. After that, they got married (the text states He was her firstborn son) and they went on to have a big family after that. From where they lived, it was a good 80-90 miles to Bethlehem. Since both were descendants of David, that's where they had to go for that census. Of course, that's where Jesus was born. It always amazed me God orchestrated a census of the Roman Empire so Jesus could be born where the prophet Micah declared about 700 years earlier!

By Verse 8, it's time for our first testimonial of the chapter. It is the famous scene of shepherds near to where Jesus was, seeing a "ton" of angels in the sky and saying in effect the Messiah is born not too far from them. The shepherds did what anyone would do if they saw and heard that, they went to check it out! I always figured Mary was Luke's source, as Mary's husband Joseph most likely died before Jesus started His ministry. (Jesus was a little over 30 when He started.) The angels were told how and where to find Jesus and the rest is well-known history! Once the shepherds saw Jesus, they figured, "Ok, that is that; time to go deal with the sheep again!" Once we finish what God wants us to do at that moment, we go about our business until the next time God wants to use us!

The next thing Luke brings up is Jesus' circumcision. It showed Joseph and Mary knew who Jesus was meant to be and they were obedient to the Jewish laws. If you don't know, the word Jesus is essentially the Greek translation of the word Joshua, which means God is salvation! Speaking of the Joseph doing the requirements of Jewish laws which include when a male baby is 40 days old to do a sacrifice! (See Leviticus 12:6). Luke includes this as it is an opportunity for people none of us would ever know of, to give a testimony about Jesus' future.

Notice the focus of the last half of the chapter is mainly on testimonies. The first was a "senior" named Simon. All we know about him is that he was a "good Jew" who happened to be at the Temple as Jesus was there with mom and dad to fulfill the Jewish requirement of a sacrifice when a baby boy turned 40 days old! He grabbed baby Jesus as Simon was filled with the Holy Spirit! (I always wondered how the parents felt at that moment!) Simon thanked God that He kept His promise that his life will not end till he got to see the Messiah. Makes me wonder if Simon prayed for that! He predicted how Jesus will be a light to all nations and to Israel's glory (future ruling). Luke states the obvious that Jesus' mother and stepfather were amazed by this. (By the way, Joseph is Jesus' legal father based on Jewish and Roman adoption rules states anything that belonged to the mother, now legally belongs to the father!) Simon's brief testimony also includes the fact he said Jesus will pierce His mother's soul, obviously referring to the crucifixion. In short, he explained His fame to the world, His rejection and His rule over the world one day in the future!

One thing I've always learned is a good testimony is contagious. Lots of people are afraid to speak out, but once that starts, it spreads. Next is an elderly widow named Anna, who apparently dedicated most of her life to praying at the Temple. My guess is some of the head people there noticed her, so she was able to live off their support. Bottom line, she saw baby Jesus and the Holy Spirit inspired her to state a few words about how Jesus will redeem the nation of Israel (again a Second Coming prediction). That makes me wonder what the temple "regulars" thought of her. My guess is they thought she is old, so it was no big deal. Consider that both of these testimonials would be long-lost "nobodies", if Luke didn't record these accounts. Again, I suspect Mary told Luke these stories.

The only other story about Jesus we get from his birth to the time he was in his early 30's is when Jesus got left behind in Jerusalem when He was 12. I pondered, why include this? If Luke interviewed Mary why did Luke want to pick out this story? Nothing about Jesus' home life, or carpentry, or why He did not get married like other Jewish boys? I suspect the reason is for Jesus to give His own testimony that He came to earth to do His father's business. In effect, Jesus gave His own testimony here. It is easy to picture arguments between Mary and Joseph when they realized they left Jesus in Jerusalem! I suspect when they got back, they first checked where they stayed and then the Temple area. That's where Jesus was asking questions of the teachers. Jesus told Mary, He had to be doing His Father's business.

The conclusion for you and me is, are we using our lives as a testimony of how Jesus is working in our lives? The most valuable thing we own is our time and God wants us to use it to glorify Him!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on the link for the detailed study. It's still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for everyone who reads this.