

The Birth and Childhood of Jesus Christ

Lesson Scope: [Luke 2](#)

References in brackets are to Luke 2 unless otherwise noted

Lesson Focus

The birth of Christ was a long-anticipated event. A redeemer of the seed of the woman was promised just after the Fall. Isaiah prophesied of the birth of a child who would establish an eternal kingdom upon the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). And Micah revealed that this great event would take place at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). God worked through the decree of Caesar Augustus "that all the world should be taxed" to fulfill the details of His plan.

Luke records most of the few details God chose to reveal to us about the childhood years of Christ. By birth He was placed into the home of Joseph and Mary where he prospered both physically and spiritually. This favorable increase continued as He by choice remained subject to His parents after the age of twelve.

To the saints who believed the Scriptures and were living in faith, the birth of Christ began the fulfillment of their highest hopes. While animal sacrifices and ceremonial washings were God's provision for cleansing for sin under the Old Covenant, they pointed forward to fulfillment in Christ.

Throughout the Old Testament, God had been foreshadowing His plan of redemption. In the fullness of time, He sent His Son into the world as God incarnate.

Let us all seek inspiration from the simplicity of Christ's birth. All the fanfare of worldly celebrations so common around us detracts from a clear understanding of God's purposes, in bringing Christ into the world. The shepherds heard the heavenly announcement and went to find the baby. When they had seen it, their souls were satisfied. We could spend a lot of time with this lesson in interesting conjecture. But do not fail to see Christ. Luke's Gospel presents Jesus as the Son of Man and the story of His birth is characteristic of this emphasis. His parents were humble countrymen. The baby's first visitors were shepherds rather than wise men. Christ grew up as a normal child in a godly home. Yet the angelic announcement of His birth and the prophetic blessings of Simeon and Anna give the halo of heaven to this account. Christ Himself was conscious of His heavenly Fa-

ther. Be amazed again that the Lord of heaven and earth would humble Himself to come to the world as a baby and grow to maturity in Nazareth. Our response must be that of worship and commitment to Him.

Lesson Aim: To present significant details related to Jesus' birth and early life.

Theme Verses: [Luke 2:10-11](#). And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Lesson Text

"Unto You Is Born ... a Saviour"

[Luke 2:8-16](#) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. ¹⁵ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. ¹⁶ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

"The Grace of God Was Upon Him"

[Luke 2:25](#) And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

[Luke 2:28-35](#) Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, ²⁹ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: ³⁰ For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, ³¹ Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; ³² A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. ³³ And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those

things which were spoken of him.³⁴ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;³⁵ (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Luke 2:40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

"All That Heard Him Were Astonished"

Luke 2:41-52 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.⁴³ And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not *of it*.⁴⁴ But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among *their* kinsfolk and acquaintance.⁴⁵ And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.⁴⁶ And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.⁴⁷ And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.⁴⁸ And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.⁴⁹ And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?⁵⁰ And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.⁵¹ And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Questions for Study

"Unto You Is Born ... a Saviour"

1. Why did the shepherds have no cause for fear?
2. How did the birth of Christ bring glory to God?
3. How did the birth of Christ bring peace and goodwill to men?

"The Grace of God Was Upon Him"

4. What characteristics of Simeon prepared him to see God's salvation?
5. What aspects of the Messiah's work and kingdom are included in Simeon's prophecy?

"All That Heard Him Were Astonished"

6. What do we learn of Jesus' relationship to His parents?
7. What do we learn of Jesus' relationship to His heavenly Father?
8. How can we develop Christlike qualities in our innocent children?

Analyzing the Passage

The angel introduced the plan of God by the names he announced for this newborn child. "A Saviour" (deliverer) spoke of His work in saving men from sin. The name "Christ" (the anointed One) communicated to the shepherds that this was the Messiah that all Israel was looking for. "The Lord" (the supreme authority) reminded men that to this One "every knee should bow."

Simeon (and also Anna) represents the faithful of his day who were looking for the promised Messiah. What he knew about the Messiah blessing both Jews and Gentiles (2:32), we do not know for sure. Joseph and Mary marveled at these sayings. Likely they were struggling to grasp the full import of this prophecy.

Jesus' parents took Him along to the Feast of the Passover, one of the three feasts to which all Jewish males of twelve years and older were required to appear (Exodus 34:23). It seems as though Joseph and Mary could trust Jesus to be where they expected Him to be. The three days (2:46) were one day's journey away from Jerusalem and one day back, in which case they may not have begun their serious searching until the third day. At any rate, Mary's mother heart was pained. Yet her rebuke bore the tenderness of a mother to her child.

Jesus' answer to her (2:49) is the first recorded words of His life. We could wish some of His discourse with the doctors had been recorded as well, but it is veiled. Surely His words were more like a teacher's questions to instruct his scholars than of one who needed to be instructed. Yet His "Father's business" called Him home to be subject to His parents.

Principles and Applications

"Unto You Is Born ... a Saviour"

1. Christ was first revealed to the lowly shepherds (2:8-9). And why not? Christ had come to be the Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd. Though He came to save all men regardless of wealth or rank, His humble birth was first revealed to humble men. Would we, as the shepherds, have gone to see the great work of God and then "made known abroad the saying ... concerning this child"?
2. God gave Christ to bring joy and peace to mankind (2:10, 14). Peace

with God is man's greatest need. Through Adam's fall, all men are estranged from God. Now the angels announced the restoration of peace by the good will of God toward men. Certainly these were joyful tidings. Glory to God and worship to the newborn Saviour were proper responses.

3. Christ came to earth in the humblest manner (2:12). Though a king, He came as a baby. Bethlehem, the town of His birth, was "little among the thousands of Judah" (Micah 5:2). The manger was His bed in the stable adjoining the inn. His father was a carpenter, and His first visitors were shepherds. But He was still the Creator of the universe. Though His birth was lowly, His power can take the lowest of men and make them sons of God.

4. Christ's birth glorified God (2:14). His was the plan from before the Creation. Now finally, after four thousand years, He unveiled this marvelous gift. "Heaven with alleluias rang" as the angels praised God. God receives glory when earth echoes with the theme that thrills the heavens. But the story is not yet all told. In the ages to come, He will "shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

"The Grace of God Was Upon Him"

5. The Holy Spirit faithfully leads sincere seekers to Christ (2:25). It was no mere coincidence that Simeon was in the temple when Joseph and Mary brought the child in. Nor can we know how many of the people we meet each day "came by the Spirit." Most of them will not prophesy as readily as Simeon did, but as we keep our eyes open for opportunities to show Christ to the world, others will be blessed to know Him.

6. Christ came to save and enlighten both Jew and Gentile (2:30-32). Under the old covenant, a Gentile who wanted God's blessing needed to become a Jewish proselyte. Though Christ came to the Jews, He came for all people, as the prophet Hosea had foretold: "I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God" (Hosea 2:23).

7. Many in Israel would stumble at Christ, who came to be the Rock of their salvation (2:34). God's lofty plan of salvation far superseded anything the Jews had hoped for in the promised Messiah. The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies seems so clear to us, yet it was so far different from what anyone anticipated that many failed to see their King. Some fell, then rose again when the apostles began preaching after Pentecost. Others remained enemies of their only hope. How will we relate to the prophetic fulfillments of our time?

"All That Heard Him Were Astonished"

8. God the Father blessed the childhood years of Jesus (2:40). He was a child of physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. In the shelter of a godly home, Christ grew and prepared for the mission He was to perform. Those who knew Him appreciated the heavenly graces that blessed His life.

9. Jesus always prioritized His Father's business (2:49). Likely Mary even spoke to Him of His Father in heaven. Yet in the home setting, Jesus related to Joseph as His father. But at the temple Jesus felt a touch with His heavenly Father that Mary did not sense. He preferred to be involved in the spiritual exercises of the temple rather than to return to carpentry at Nazareth. This was His Father's business!

10. Jesus obeyed and respected His parents (2:51). Despite the pull of the temple, Jesus returned with His parents to Nazareth and was subject to them. He continued to increase in wisdom in His home environment just as well as He could have by remaining at the temple.

Answers to Questions

1. Why did the shepherds have no cause for fear?

The suddenness with which the glory of the Lord illuminated the night was quite unexpected. But it heralded the love and mercy of God in sending a Saviour to fallen men. This first coming of Christ brought good tidings for all men. When He comes again, the unprepared will respond in fear, and rightly so.

2. How did the birth of Christ bring glory to God?

The birth of Christ revealed God's plan to save fallen man by sending His Son. "Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan! / Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!" The theme of salvation has invoked the praises of men and angels alike and will be the song of the redeemed in eternity.

3. How did the birth of Christ bring peace and goodwill to men?

The coming of Christ was the greatest display of God's good will toward sinful mankind. Men had been estranged from God by the Fall, but now in Christ those who were once afar off can be made nigh. Sin would no longer be covered by the blood of animal sacrifices, but forgiven through the blood of Christ.

4. What characteristics of Simeon prepared him to see God's salvation?

Simeon was a righteous man who took his responsibilities to God seriously. He was familiar with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah and by faith believed them. He was accustomed to communicating with God and was regularly involved in temple worship.

5. What aspects of the Messiah's work and kingdom are included in Simeon's prophecy?

Christ came to save. All men would have the opportunity to find salvation. This plan included both Jew and Gentile. The work of Christ would bring men to a point of decision for or against Him. Christ's work would involve His death.

6. What do we learn of Jesus' relationship to His parents?

Jesus' parents met His physical needs and provided a home where He could flourish spiritually. His parents expected Him to be in the crowd traveling home from Jerusalem, suggesting that He was a trustworthy son. He willingly left the temple and was subject to them. This relationship with His earthly parents was such that His heavenly Father could bless Him with wisdom and favor.

7. What do we learn of Jesus' relationship to His heavenly Father? The grace of God was upon Him all of His growing-up years. His love of the temple shows us how great was His longing to be "about [His] Father's business." Yet at home in subjection to Joseph and Mary, His wisdom could increase, and God's favor on Him increased as well.

8. How can we develop Christlike qualities in our innocent children?

Innocent children are often a reflection of their parents. Where you find godly parents and a disciplined home atmosphere, Christlikeness will be reflected. These strong homes will include their children in supporting church activities, but will never allow the activity to detract from the children's subjection to their parents.

Important Teachings

1. Christ was first revealed to the lowly shepherds (2:8, 9).

2. God gave Christ to bring joy and peace to mankind (2:10, 14).

3. Christ came to earth in the humblest manner (2:12).

4. Christ's birth glorified God (2:14).

5. The Holy Spirit faithfully leads sincere seekers to Christ (2:25).

6. Christ came to save and enlighten both Jew and Gentile (2:30-32).

7. Many in Israel would stumble at Christ, who came to be the Rock of their salvation (2:34).

8. God the Father blessed the childhood years of Jesus (2:40).

9. Jesus always prioritized His Father's business (2:49).

10. Jesus obeyed and respected His parents (2:51).

Additional Teaching

Christ was born in Bethlehem according to the Scriptures (2:11).

Summarizing the Lesson

Jesus Came for Me

Not as a sage did He send Him, not as a King with a crown,
But as a small, helpless baby, God sent Jesus down.
Not to the monarch the message, not to the hurrying throng,
But on a lonely hillside, angels sang their song.
Not to the proud and the haughty,
Only the humble and lowly, saw with discerning eyes.
How can it be He loved me, walking that pathway for me,
From Bethlehem's hostile manger to cruel Calvary.
Born a babe in a manger, never a lowlier birth!
Born afar as a stranger, Jesus came down to earth.
Though He was King of Creation, Lord of Eternity,
Stooping low as a man could stoop, Jesus came for me!
—Margaret Penner Toews

Research Guide

1. Halley's Bible Handbook on page 421 gives a list of Old Testament prophetic references to Christ along with the reference of their fulfillment.
2. Use the bound volumes of the Eastern Mennonite Testimony or Christian Contender to research articles on Christ's birth.
3. Read hymns related to Christ's birth.