

These study lessons are for individual or group Bible study and may be freely copied or distributed for class purposes. Please do not modify the material or distribute partially. Under no circumstances are these lessons to be sold.

Comments are welcomed and may be emailed to Curtis.D.Byers@gmail.com.

***The Birth
And Childhood
Of Jesus***

*Curtis Byers
2003*

FOREWORD

The New Testament opens with the birth and childhood of Jesus. It is the beginning event of the gospel. It marks the time and the manner that God chose to bring about the redemption of mankind.

The greatness of this event is reflected in the Gospel birth narratives. God's hand is clearly at work in the unfolding events. Eight times the text records an expression of 'rejoicing', 'joy', or 'glad tidings' about the current (or upcoming) events and on four occasions God is thanked, praised, or blessed. Angels are employed by God to personally and directly deliver the "good news".

Although the Jews anticipated the Messiah and had given much thought as to who he would be, no one fully expected all that God had planned and was about to accomplish. What man would have dreamed that God would become flesh! That deity would take on humanness! That God would love us so much that He would send His only Son that we might become sons of God! *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Galatians 4:4-5

As important as it was that Jesus would be the Son of David, it was equally important that Jesus be the 'seed of woman.' We see the scheme of redemption as God's plan to save mankind from his sin and to establish his kingdom on earth. But there is a larger war between God and Satan. Although Satan won the first battle in succeeding to tempt Adam and Eve to sin, God now will fulfill his word that the 'seed of woman' would "bruise" the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). As Paul stated, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive... Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:22, 24-26). God's strategy to defeat Satan was through a child in a manger!

This class will focus upon the Gospel accounts of Jesus birth and childhood. We will try to give careful attention to the message that the Gospel writers bring to us. We will notice the following in our study:

- The narratives are full of images of first century life in Palestine.
- Multiple quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament are made.
- Women play a prominent role in the narratives.
- A wide variety of Christological statements are made concerning Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior of man.

May God bless our study.

THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS
Class Schedule

<u>Lesson</u>	<u>Topic</u>
	Pre-Test
1	Introduction / Overview
2	Genealogies <i>Son of David</i>
3	John's and Jesus' Birth Foretold <i>The Priestly Courses</i> <i>Nazarites</i>
4	Mary and Elizabeth / Mary's Visit to Elizabeth / Mary's Song <i>Jewish Marriage Customs</i>
5	Birth and Circumcision of John / Zacharias' Prophecy <i>Circumcision</i>
6	Birth of Jesus <i>Dreams</i> <i>Isaiah 7: 14</i> <i>Firstborn</i>
7	Shepherds / Wise Men <i>Bethlehem</i>
8	Circumcision of Jesus / Birth Offering / Simeon and Anna <i>Leviticus 12</i>
9	Flight into Egypt / Herod's Massacre / Return to Nazareth <i>A New Moses</i>
10	Date of Jesus' Birth
11	Childhood of Jesus <i>Nazareth</i> <i>Excerpts from <u>The Infancy Story of Thomas</u></i>
12	Religious Traditions and the Birth of Jesus
13	Review

OVERVIEW OF THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

(Chapter references shown in parenthesis)

Matthew	Luke
1. Genealogy of Jesus (1)	Genealogy of Jesus (3)
2.	John's Birth Foretold to Zacharias (1)
3.	Christ's Birth Foretold to Mary (1)
4.	Mary Visits Elizabeth (1)
5.	Song of Mary (1)
6.	Birth of John the Baptist (1)
7.	Circumcision of John the Baptist (1)
8.	Zacharias' Prophecy (1)
9. Birth of Jesus (1)	Birth of Jesus (2)
10.	Shepherds (2)
11. Wise Men from the East (2)	
12.	Circumcision of Jesus (2)
13.	Birth Offering (2)
14.	Simeon's and Anna's Prophecies (2)
15. The Flight into Egypt (2)	
16. Herod's Massacre of the Innocents (2)	
17. The Return to Nazareth (2)	
18.	Childhood of Jesus (2)

CLASS PRE-TEST

This quarter our study will be concerning the birth and childhood of Jesus. Before starting our study, this pre-test will give some indication of your familiarity with the Gospels' account of Jesus' birth and childhood. First, without using your Bible, answer the following questions. Then, using your Bible, grade yourself.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

- _____ 1. The genealogy of Jesus is recorded in which gospel(s)?
a. Matthew only
b. Matthew and Mark
c. Mark and Luke
d. Matthew and Luke
- _____ 2. Which of the following did an angel not appear to?
a. Zacharias
b. Elizabeth
c. Joseph
d. Mary

TRUE or FALSE

- _____ 3. John (the Baptist) was four months older than Jesus.
_____ 4. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
_____ 5. Josiah is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus.
_____ 6. Jesus was born during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
_____ 7. Zacharias prophesied concerning Jesus.
_____ 8. The Old Testament foretold that Jesus would be raised in Nazareth.
_____ 9. The angel told Mary that Jesus would be called "Immanuel".
_____ 10. The shepherds gave gifts to Jesus.
_____ 11. Simeon was told he would not die until he saw the Messiah.

WHICH GOSPEL TELLS OF THE FOLLOWING EVENTS?

- _____ 12. The census taken at the time of Jesus' birth.
_____ 13. The birth of John the Baptist.
_____ 14. Jesus' birth in a manger.
_____ 15. Herod's massacre of the male children.
_____ 16. The Shepherds who visited Jesus.
_____ 17. Joseph's desire to put Mary away secretly.
_____ 18. Jesus' visit to Jerusalem at the age of 12.
_____ 19. The prophecy of Anna.
_____ 20. The wise men's visit to Jesus.

How did you do? 10 or less correct? *You definitely need this class.*
11 to 15 correct? *Not bad, you remember well your classes as a child.*
16 to 18 correct? *Very good, you probably have taught this material in children's class.*
19 to 20 correct? *You ought to be teaching this class.*

THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS (NKJV)

1. Genealogy of Jesus

Matthew 1

- ¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:
- ² Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.
- ³ Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram.
- ⁴ Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon.
- ⁵ Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse,
- ⁶ and Jesse begot David the king.
- David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife* of Uriah.
- ⁷ Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa.
- ⁸ Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah.
- ⁹ Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah.
- ¹⁰ Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah.
- ¹¹ Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.
- ¹² And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel.
- ¹³ Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor.
- ¹⁴ Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud.

[Reverse Order]

Abraham
Isaac
Jacob
Judah

Perez
Hezron
Ram
Amminadab
Nahshon
Salmon
Boaz
Obed
Jesse
David
Nathan
Mattathah
Menan
Melea
Eliakim
Jonan
Joseph
Judah
Simeon
Levi
Matthat
Jorim
Eliezer
Jose
Er
Elmodam
Cosam
Addi
Melchi
Neri

Shealtiel
Zerubbabel
Rhesa
Joannas
Judah
Joseph
Semei
Mattathiah
Maath

Luke 3

- ²³ Now Jesus Himself began *His ministry* at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) *the son* of Joseph, *the son* of Heli,
- ²⁴ *the son* of Matthat, *the son* of Levi, *the son* of Melchi, *the son* of Janna, *the son* of Joseph,
- ²⁵ *the son* of Mattathiah, *the son* of Amos, *the son* of Nahum, *the son* of Esli, *the son* of Naggai,
- ²⁶ *the son* of Maath, *the son* of Mattathiah, *the son* of Semei, *the son* of Joseph, *the son* of Judah,
- ²⁷ *the son* of Joannas, *the son* of Rhesa, *the son* of Zerubbabel, *the son* of Shealtiel, *the son* of Neri,
- ²⁸ *the son* of Melchi, *the son* of Addi, *the son* of Cosam, *the son* of Elmodam, *the son* of Er,
- ²⁹ *the son* of Jose, *the son* of Eliezer, *the son* of Jorim, *the son* of Matthat, *the son* of Levi,
- ³⁰ *the son* of Simeon, *the son* of Judah, *the son* of Joseph, *the son* of Jonan, *the son* of Eliakim,
- ³¹ *the son* of Melea, *the son* of Menan, *the son* of Mattathah, *the son* of Nathan, *the son* of David,

¹⁵ Eliud begot Eleazar,
Eleazar begot Matthan,
and Matthan begot Jacob.

¹⁶ And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of
Mary,
of whom was born Jesus who is called
Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to
David *are* fourteen generations,

from David until the captivity in
Babylon *are* fourteen generations, and

from the captivity in Babylon until the
Christ *are* fourteen generations.

Naggai
Esli
Nahum
Amos
Mattathiah
Joseph
Janna
Melchi
Eli
Matthat
Heli
Joseph

Jesus

³² *the son* of Jesse,
the son of Obed,
the son of Boaz,
the son of Salmon,
the son of Nahshon,
³³ *the son* of Amminadab,
the son of Ram,
the son of Hezron,
the son of Perez,
the son of Judah,
³⁴ *the son* of Jacob,
the son of Isaac,
the son of Abraham,
the son of Terah,
the son of Nahor,
³⁵ *the son* of Serug,
the son of Reu,
the son of Peleg,
the son of Eber,
the son of Shelah,
³⁶ *the son* of Cainan,
the son of Arphaxad,
the son of Shem,
the son of Noah,
the son of Lamech,
³⁷ *the son* of Methuselah,
the son of Enoch,
the son of Jared,
the son of Mahalalel,
the son of Cainan,
³⁸ *the son* of Enosh,
the son of Seth,
the son of Adam,
the son of God.

2. John's Birth Foretold to Zacharias (Luke 1)

⁵There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elizabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

⁸So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, ⁹according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,'* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

¹⁹And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. ²⁰But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

²¹And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. ²²But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

²³So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. ²⁴Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, ²⁵"Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people."

3. Christ's Birth Foretold to Mary (Luke 1)

²⁶Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name *was* Mary. ²⁸And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!"

²⁹But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

³⁵And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.* ³⁶Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son

in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷For with God nothing will be impossible."

³⁸Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

4. Mary Visits Elizabeth (Luke 1)

³⁹Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! ⁴³But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed *is* she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

5. Song of Mary (Luke 1)

⁴⁶And Mary said:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.
⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy *is* His name.
⁵⁰ And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him
From generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts.
⁵² He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones,
And exalted *the* lowly.
⁵³ He has filled *the* hungry with good things,
And *the* rich He has sent away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel,
In remembrance of *His* mercy,
⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and to his seed forever."

⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

6. Birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1)

⁵⁷Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.
⁵⁸When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.

7. Circumcision of John the Baptist (Luke 1)

⁵⁹So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. ⁶⁰His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John."

⁶¹But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." ⁶²So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called.

⁶³And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. ⁶⁴Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he spoke, praising God. ⁶⁵Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶And all those who heard *them* kept *them* in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

8. Zacharias' Prophecy (Luke 1)

⁶⁷Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

⁶⁸ "Blessed *is* the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,
⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,
⁷⁰ As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who *have been* since the world began,
⁷¹ That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,
⁷² To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
⁷³ The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:
⁷⁴ To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.
⁷⁶ "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;
For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,
⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation to His people
By the remission of their sins,
⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;
⁷⁹ To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace."

⁸⁰So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

9. Birth of Jesus

Matthew 1

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows:

After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

²²So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³*"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,"* which is translated, "God with us."

²⁴Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵and did not know her

till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Luke 2

¹And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

⁷And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

10. Shepherds (Luke 2)

⁸Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

¹³And 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, goodwill toward men!"

¹⁵So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. ²⁰Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

11. Wise Men from the East (Matthew 2)

¹Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

³When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

⁵So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

⁶ *'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.'*"

⁷Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

⁹When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹²Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

12. Circumcision of Jesus (Luke 2)

²¹And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

13. Birth Offering (Luke 2)

²²Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "*Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD*"), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "*A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*"

14. Simeon's and Anna's Prophecies (Luke 2)

²⁵And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

²⁹ "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation
³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
³² A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel."

³³And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

³⁶Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷and this woman *was* a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

³⁹So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their *own* city, Nazareth.

15. The Flight into Egypt (Matthew 2)

¹³Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

¹⁴When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, ¹⁵and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, *"Out of Egypt I called My Son."*

16. Herod's Massacre of the Innocents (Matthew 2)

¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

¹⁸ *"A voice was heard in Ramah,
Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children,
Refusing to be comforted,
Because they are no more."*

17. The Return to Nazareth (Matthew 2)

¹⁹Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." ²¹Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. ²³And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

18. Childhood of Jesus (Luke 2)

⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

⁴¹His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. ⁴³When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know *it*; ⁴⁴but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. ⁴⁶Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. ⁴⁸So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."

⁴⁹And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" ⁵⁰But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

⁵¹Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

SOURCES The account of the birth and childhood of Jesus is preserved for us in two of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew and Luke. Mark and John forego telling us anything about the youth of Jesus and begin their gospels with the preaching of John the Baptist. Each gospel writer in their own way and for their particular audience tells the story of Jesus, so part of our task will be to learn why Matthew and Luke needed to tell of Jesus' birth and childhood.

The traditional teaching of Christians in the 2nd to 4th century was that Matthew wrote his Gospel for Jewish converts. For example, Eusebius quoting Origen (c. AD 200, Egypt) wrote "The first gospel was written by Matthew, who was once a tax-collector, but who was afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew tongue." Every aspect of that statement has been challenged by some modern scholar, but Eusebius was in a better position to evaluate the statement's integrity than scholars 2000 years later. Matthew's Gospel is full of material that seems especially suited to a Jewish audience (whether converts or potential converts).

Luke, according to early traditions, was a companion of the apostle Paul and wrote his Gospel with Paul's direction. Consequently, as Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, so the Gospel of Luke was said to be written for Gentiles. Again, Eusebius quoting Origen "And the third by Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, and composed for Gentile converts." This seems natural enough (Luke was a Gentile) and also seems to be substantiated by the form and focus of Luke's writings.

The date that the Synoptic Gospels were written is unknown. Conservative scholars generally believe that the Synoptic Gospels were either written in the 60's or the 80's. Which decade they select depends in large part upon their view of the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In either case, the Synoptic Gospels were written later than most of the other New Testament writings.

Question Besides Matthew's and Luke's account, are there any other New Testament statements concerning the birth or childhood of Jesus?

DISSIMILARITY OF MATTHEW AND LUKE Matthew and Luke (along with Mark) are called Synoptic Gospels because of their similar scope. Many of the same events in the life of Jesus are included in all three Synoptic Gospels and insight into the purposes of each writer can possibly be gained by comparing the variations in these accounts.

A striking feature of the birth and childhood narratives recorded in Matthew and Luke is their *dissimilarity*. Review the Overview provided for these narratives. The accounts are subdivided into 18 sections. Of these, only two have parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke – the Genealogy of Jesus and the Birth of Jesus. As we will see, even these parallel accounts are dissimilar. The remaining 16 events are only told in one of the Gospels.

Question It has been suggested by many students of the Gospels that Matthew's birth narratives are given from the perspective of Joseph and Luke's from the perspective of Mary. Does a quick review of the events recorded by each Gospel writer agree with this view?

THE BEGINNING Each Gospel writer starts their Gospel with a focus upon the "beginning".

Matthew 1:1 "The book (Gk. *biblos*) of the genealogy (Gk. *geneseos*, form of *genesis*) of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." The Greek *biblos* can be translated "book" or "record" and the Greek *genesis* can be translated by "origin" (Genesis is used in the Greek Bible (LXX) to translate the first book of the Old Testament which in Hebrew is Bereshith = "In the beginning") to denote one's source, by "birth" as in 1:18 to denote the actual point in time of one's origin, by "genealogy" or "ancestry" to give those from whom he originated, or by "generation" (which is more correctly a translation of the related Greek noun *genea* occurring in 1:17). This Greek expression *biblos geneseos* is the same expression used in the Greek translation (LXX) of Genesis 2:4 and 5:1 (6:7 and 10:1, similar). Note the following translations:

"book of the genealogy" RSV, NASB, NKJV, ESV,
"book of the generation" KJV, ASV
"record of the genealogy" NASB Update, NIV or "account of the genealogy" NRSV
"record of the lineage" Barclay or "record of the family history" NET
"table of the descent" NEB
"list of the ancestors" GNB

Some translations combine *biblos* and *genesis* into a single term:

"ancestry" Goodspeed or "genealogy" JB, REB
"family record" NAB
"birth-roll" Moffatt
"birth record" Brown
"record" Beck, Knox

Mark 1:1 "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark then proceeds with telling of John's preparation for Jesus.

Luke 1:1-2 "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which are surely believed among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us..." Luke follows his preamble with the birth narrative of Jesus.

John 1:1-2 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." By starting with "In the beginning", John makes a direct reference to the title (and the opening words) of the first book in the Hebrew Bible.

The "beginning" point under consideration is different for each writer. It is (1) the creation of the world (John), (2) the time as which Jesus was born (Matthew and Luke), or (3) the time Jesus began to preach (Mark). But regardless of the reference point, it is clear that the Gospel writers want to give a clear, coherent account of Jesus' life and to do so they must start at the beginning.

LESSON 2

GENEALOGIES

Although the Gospels do not have the same form as modern biographies, they do have many of the same characteristics of ancient biographies.¹ Ancient biographies featured both *chronological* elements that included “matters such as birth, parents, ancestors, and prenatal prophecies” (Aune, p.32) and *topical* elements that focused upon the individual’s virtues as reflected in his deeds. Thus, it would not have been unusual for an ancient biography to begin with a genealogy.

PURPOSE OF THE GENEALOGIES Matthew begins his Gospel with the genealogy of Jesus while Luke places the genealogy outside the birth narrative – between the baptism of Jesus and the temptation of Jesus.

Matthew The opening verse of Matthew’s Gospel reads: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” Three affirmations are made: *Jesus is the Messiah* (= Christ), *Jesus is the Son of David*, and *Jesus is the Son of Abraham*. All three are related. The title Son of David (see Excursus below) was a common Jewish title for the expected Messiah. To further state that Jesus was the Son of Abraham simply emphasizes the solidarity of Jesus with the larger community of God’s people. It brings to mind the covenant that God made with Abraham. Matthew’s genealogy, therefore, documents that Jesus is of the lineage of Abraham and David.

- Questions**
1. What noteworthy aspect about David is recorded by Matthew? (1:6)
 2. What is noteworthy about the descendants of David that Matthew lists?
 3. Given the above, what is the main point that Matthew is making about Jesus? (cf. 1:16)
 4. To what group of people would this be especially relevant? Is this consistent with the statement that the Gospel of Matthew is the ‘Gospel for the Jews’?

Luke Following his prologue, Luke begins his Gospel with the announcements of John’s and Jesus’ birth. It is only after the baptism of Jesus (about 30 years later!) that Luke gives Jesus’ genealogy. Why the delay? There are two other formal differences between Luke’s and Matthew’s list.

First, whereas Matthew uses the form of Old Testament genealogies by beginning with Abraham and descending to Jesus, Luke uses the form of Greco-Roman genealogies by beginning with Jesus and ascending to his ancestors (Keener, *Background*, p.197).

¹ This has not always been recognized. One well-informed introduction to the New Testament states “Though they record many events of the ‘life of Jesus,’ the four Gospels are in no sense biographies. What kind of biography is it that tells us nothing of Jesus’ home life or of how he spent his youth, nothing of his personality traits or physical appearance, nothing of his inner thoughts and feelings?” (Barker, et.al., p.64). Most modern scholars would agree with Barnett “Whatever else they are..., the gospels are biographical” (Barnett, p.154).

Second, Luke does not conclude Jesus' ancestral list with Abraham, but continues to "Adam, the son of God."

- Questions**
5. Luke's apparent point is to identify Jesus as the "son of God" (cf. Mark 1:1). Note the following about the context:
 - a. Luke's genealogy follows the record of Jesus' baptism. What is the concluding statement in that record? (3:22)
 - b. Luke's genealogy precedes the record of Jesus' temptation. What is the point of Satan's opening temptation? (4:3)

 6. How is Luke's use of the genealogy consistent with the statement that the Gospel of Luke is the 'Gospel for the Gentiles'?

MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY Matthew intentionally divides his genealogy into three distinct sections (1:17): (1) Abraham to the David, (2) David to Jeconiah, and (3) Jeconiah to Jesus. The divisions are linked to the rise (Abraham to David), fall (David to Jeconiah), and restoration (Jeconiah to Jesus) of David's kingdom. This arrangement shows Matthew's emphasis upon Jesus being the kingly heir of David.

- Questions**
6. In the first section from Abraham to David, compare Matthew's genealogy with two genealogies given in the Old Testament. How similar are they?
 - a. Ruth 4:18-22
 - b. 1 Chronicles 2:1-15

 7. Matthew states that there are 14 generations in each section. Count them. Is Matthew consistent in his counting? That is, does he count the generations within each section the same way?

 8. The genealogies as given by Matthew are not complete.
 - a. Who is missing between Joram (= Jehoram) and Uzziah? (cf. 2 Chronicles 22:1; 24:1; 25:1)
 - b. Who is missing between Josiah and Jeconiah? (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:1)
 - c. In the third section, note that Luke's genealogy contains 9 more names than Matthew's to cover the period of nearly 600 years.

Because of the missing generations, we must conclude that Matthew uses the term "begot" (Gk. *egennesen*, a verb form of *genesis*) to simply denote a descendent and not necessarily a son. Similarly, Matthew's 14 generations are not to be taken literally. This suggests that there must have been some purpose to Matthew's choice of using 14 generations. Two proposals are often made. First, by grouping the generations into a regular sequence, it would aid in memorizing the lists. However, this would be the case with any number

chosen. Second, to point to the reason the particular number 14 was chosen, it has been noted that the numerical value of David's name is 14² (and, it could be noted, David is the 14th name in the list).

Question 9. Besides Mary, what four other women are mentioned in Matthew's genealogy?

Why these women are included, and not other notable women such as Sarah, have been much debated. Consider the following proposals:

- 1) Jerome thought they were all included because they were "sinners" and thus, presumably, illustrated Jesus' purpose in coming to save the lost. In response, although we might classify Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba as "sinners", they are not condemn in Scripture (Tamar and Rahab are actually commended) or in Jewish writings, and this classification does not fit Ruth. Besides, there are more than enough men "sinners" listed to make this point!
- 2) Many have noted that all four women are Gentiles, and that their inclusion points to the blessing that Gentiles were to receive through Jesus, the seed of Abraham.
- 3) Others, who think that these women must in some way prefigure Mary, suggest that the marital arrangements of these women were 'irregular' (perhaps 'scandalous') and that they are included to defend Mary against scandalous charges. However, pointing out women who had 'irregular' marriages only helps to justify or soften one's view of another woman who is also guilty of an irregular marriage. That is not the case with Mary; she was not guilty of any irregularity!
- 4) More recently, it has been suggested that it is the virtues of these women that merits their inclusion. Either they displayed more faith than their husbands, or it was their initiative that allowed the lineage of Jesus to go through them.

Question 10. Agree with any of the above views, or perhaps have another view?

LUKE'S GENEALOGY COMPARED TO MATTHEW'S Noted already, Luke extends Jesus' ancestry further back than Matthew's to fit his purpose. From Adam to Shem, Luke's genealogy agrees very closely to that given in Genesis 5:1-32 and 1 Chronicles 1:1-4 (compare). From Abraham to David, Luke's genealogy agrees with Matthew's (except for the inclusion of Admin and Arni in lieu of Ram; compare translations). From David to Jesus, Luke's list is totally different than Matthew's except for the inclusion of Shealtiel, Zerrubbabel, and Joseph. The two major proposals to explain this difference are:

- 1) Luther argued that Matthew gives Joseph's ancestry and Luke gives Mary's. If Mary was brother-less, then Joseph would rightly be the heir of Mary's father Heli. (A few scholars, following Tertullian, argue just the opposite: Matthew gives Mary's ancestry and Luke's Joseph's.) It should be noted that there is no necessity that Mary's ancestry be given. Jesus was the legal son of Joseph which is all that matter in Jewish ancestry.

² The ancients did not have a separate set of symbols (i.e. numerals) to denote numbers. They simply used their alphabetic characters, e.g. "A" = 1, "B" = 2, etc. For the Hebrew name *DAWID*, "D" = 4, "W" = 6, thus "DWD" = 4 + 6 + 4 = 14 (recall that Hebrew writing does not contain the vowels). This type of calculation of converting words into their numerical value is called *Gematria*.

- 2) Jacob and Heli were uterine brothers (i.e. same mother, different fathers). Upon Jacob's death, Heli fathered Joseph by means of a levirate marriage to Joseph's mother. Eusebius records that Julius Africanus (c.225) learned of this from the descendants of James. Thus, Matthew gives legal lineage through Heli, and Luke the natural lineage through Jacob. (Or, as many today argue, it could be the other way around.) If Jacob and Heli were full brothers with the same father (Matthan = Matthat), this approach could still work, but one has to explain why Matthew and Luke give different names for the father of Matthan/Matthat.

Question 11. Even though both trace Jesus' genealogy through Joseph, how do Matthew and Luke demonstrate that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary?

Son of David

"It might well be said that of all the titles which are applied to Jesus Son of David is most Jewish, most deeply rooted in the history, the tradition, and the expectation of the Jewish people" (Barclay, *Jesus*, p. 38). David was the supreme king in the Jewish mind. It was to David that the LORD said through Nathan "Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:15). Trace the theme that the Messiah would be the Son of David.

Old Testament Prophets Note the following Davidic references in the prophets:

Isaiah 9:7	Ezekiel 34:23, 24
Isaiah 11:1	Ezekiel 37:24
Jeremiah 23:5	Hosea 3:5
Jeremiah 30:9	Amos 9:11
Jeremiah 33:17	Zechariah 12:8

Gospels Besides the emphasis given in the birth narratives, it is clear that the Jews of Jesus day understood that the Messiah would be the Son of David. Note the following:

Matthew 9:27	Matthew 12:23
Matthew 15:22	Matthew 21: 9, 15
Matthew 20:30f // Mark 10:47f // Luke 18:38	
Matthew 22:41-45 // Mark 2:35-37 // Luke 20:41-44	
John 7:42	

Question As reflected in the list above, which Gospel contains the most references to the Son of David? Surprised?

Acts and New Testament Letters Although it may not be as frequent a theme as one might suspect, there are several references to Jesus being the Son of David in the early preaching and teaching of the apostles. Note the following:

Acts 2:30	Hebrews 7:14
Acts 13:23	Revelation 5:5
Romans 1:3	Revelation 22:16
2 Timothy 2:8	

of Jeremiah which he had read. Although these are difficult passages, in both instances Gabriel points Daniel to what time? (8:17; 9:24-25)

JOHN'S BIRTH FORETOLD TO ZACHARIAS (Luke 1:5-25)

5. Zacharias and Elizabeth were childless. In Jewish society, the blame for childlessness was assigned to the woman. At the very least it was a great family misfortune, but often it was considered a divine punishment for sin. Consequently, a barren woman suffered great shame (cf. 1:25; Gen. 30:23) and was subject to being divorced by her husband.

- a. In what way does Luke let us know that Elizabeth's barrenness was not due to her sin?
- b. What other Old Testament women were barren? (Gen.11:30; 25:21; 29:31; Judges 13:2f; 1 Sam.2:5)
- c. What is the significance of the mothers of the Hebrew race (Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel) being barren? Does Elizabeth's barrenness have the same significance?

6. Zacharias was praying while offering the incense. This "perpetual" incense was burned every morning and evening (Ex.30:7-8) and was made of four ingredients specified by God (Ex.30:34-38). According to Jewish practice, the priest was to place the incense upon the heated altar and then prostrate himself in prayer. The offering of incense became symbolic of prayer (Psalm 141:2; 5:8; 8:3) (Marshall, p.54-55). So what was the content of the prayer that God heard and now was going to answer? (Think about it!)

7. Gabriel states that Zacharias and Elizabeth would have a son. What does Gabriel reveal about this son?

The Priestly Courses

The priests were divided into 24 courses or orders during the time of David (1 Chr. 24:1-19); Abijah was the 8th course. Each course consisted of 4 to 9 priestly families and would serve two one-week periods each year.

Due to the large number of priests within each course, a selection by lot was made each morning to determine which priests would participate in that day's priestly duties. It is estimated that about 50 priests were selected each day (Jeremais, p.203).

Consequently, it is very possible that a priest might never be selected to offer the incense. Some Jewish sources suggest that a priest was permitted only once in their lifetime to offer the incense. It, therefore, was a very special day for Zechariah when he was selected to offer the incense.

Nazarites Since John was to drink neither "wine nor strong drink" many have suggested that John was to be a Nazarite. A Nazarite could be one from birth, such as Samson (Judges 13:2f) and, possibly, Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11). More commonly, one voluntarily took the Nazarite vow for a period of time. Yet, since other things were required of a Nazarite (see Num. 6:1-8) that are not mentioned with regard to John, it cannot be established with certainty that he was a Nazarite.

8. Like others who were given a promise by God (Abraham, Gen.15:8; Gideon, Judg.6:36f; Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20:8), Zacharias asked for a sign as confirmation of the promise. Unlike those, the sign to Zacharias would be a punishment.
 - a. What was the punishment? (1:20; cf. 1:62)
 - b. Why was Zacharias punished for his request? (Note that Abraham, Gideon, and Hezekiah were not punished.)

JESUS' BIRTH FORETOLD TO MARY (Luke 1:26-38)

Only twice in the Old Testament does an angel appear to a woman (individually and alone) and both times it involved a birth announcement: Hagar (Genesis 16) and Samson's mother (Judges 13) (Bauckham, p.53).

9. Gabriel's appearance to Mary invokes a response in her similar to Zacharias'. What does Gabriel reveal about her promised son?

10. Mary is understandably confused at the promise of a son since she was a virgin. Thus, she questions Gabriel as to how she will have a son.
 - a. Is this question a request for a sign?
 - b. Why is she not punished for questioning Gabriel?
 - c. How does Gabriel answer her question?

Are the statements "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" and "the power of the Highest will overshadow you" two distinct statements, or simply two ways of saying the same thing?

- d. What is the sign Gabriel gives Mary?

11. Although both John and Jesus are to be "great", in what ways is Jesus shown to be superior to John?

Elizabeth “hid” herself for five months (Lk.1:24)

Two Questions: (1) What does it mean that Elizabeth “hid” herself, and (2) Why did she hide herself for five months during her pregnancy?

- (1) **What is the meaning of the term “hid”?** *perikrupto* signifies to hide by placing something around, to conceal entirely, to keep hidden (*peri*, around,...); *krupto* to cover, conceal, keep secret” (Vines, p.218). “Hid (*periekruben*). Only here in the N.T., but in late Koine writers... The preposition *peri* makes it mean completely (on all sides) hid” (Robertson, p.12).

How have the translators translated this term? Many leave the term in its broadest sense: “hid, hidden” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NKJV, ESV, Barclay). Some give the sense that she may have simply kept her condition a secret (Moffatt: “and for five months she concealed herself”). Others though take it to mean that she “did not show herself in public” (NET, Beck). Most modern versions state that she “secluded” herself (NASB, NIV, JB sim., NAB, NRSV, REB, Goodspeed, Phillips) which connotes an even greater separation from those around her.

- (2) **Why did Elizabeth hide herself?** Obviously, it depends on how one understands the term “hid” and, based on Elizabeth’s following statement, it had something to do with her previous “disgrace” of being barren.

Could it be some custom among the Jews? Not to our knowledge; “we know of no custom that would have required Elizabeth to do this” (Stein, p.78).

What do commentators think?

- Most think she intentionally remained in her home, out of the public. The reason most often stated is that since her pregnancy would not be visibly obvious during this time, she did not want to make her condition known and subject herself to the disparaging comments of disbelieving relatives and neighbors (Stein, Bovon, Morris).
- But she didn’t have to remain secluded to avoid these comments. She could have continue to go out in public, but simply keep her condition a secret which is what at least one commentator suggests (“ ‘hid herself’ i.e. concealed her pregnancy. The neighbors could only guess at the joyful secret that put new light in her eyes and a lilt in her voice.” Ellis, p.68).
- Others believe that she secluded herself for other reason: for contemplation and rejoicing (Summers); out of a sense of privacy (Nolland); out of her contentment to be in fellowship with God alone (Edersheim); “for purposes of modesty and constant devotion” and out of her knowledge that the child would be a Nazarite she voluntarily kept herself with Nazarite limits (Boles); for the purpose of deciding how best she could train the child (Spense).
- Still others connect her seclusion with Mary (Evans). Either so that Mary would be the first to hear of, and share in, Elizabeth’s pregnancy (Bovon) or that with Elizabeth’s pregnancy unknown it would increase the value of it as a sign to Mary (Brown). Both of these commentators come from the viewpoint that Luke may have exercised great freedom in composing his gospel and thus Elizabeth’s hiding may not be historically accurate.

My Opinion? The simplest explanations are the safest. Thus, Elizabeth simply kept her condition a secret to avoid the questioning or attention she would receive; she was content in her thankfulness toward God.

LESSON 4 MARY AND ELIZABETH / MARY'S VISIT TO ELIZABETH / MARY'S SONG

MARY AND ELIZABETH Consider additional information on Mary and Elizabeth.

1. Elizabeth is said to be a “daughter of Aaron” (Luke 1:5). Obviously, Zacharias, as a priest, was also a descendent of Aaron.
 - a. Was it necessary that priests marry women within the family of Aaron? (Leviticus 21:7,13-14)
 - b. What restrictions were placed upon priests as to who they could marry?
2. The scriptures do not explicitly tell us the tribe of Mary, although many have argued that she was of the tribe of Judah. Two arguments put forward are:
 - 1) Since Joseph was of David’s family, then he would have married someone also of David’s family. This could be the case, but there was no requirement that he do so.
 - 2) The expression “of the house of David” in Luke 1:27 is taken by some (e.g. Origen) to refer to Mary, or to both Joseph and Mary (e.g. John Chrysostom). However, the majority of translators believe it refers only to Joseph, who is also said by Matthew to be of the house of David (Matthew 1:20).

There is a strand of early tradition that Mary was of the house of David, which is of course necessary if Luke (or Matthew) traces Jesus’ lineage through Mary. But she is also said to be a “relative” (Luke 1:36; not necessarily a ‘cousin’) of Elizabeth. This could suggest she was a member or what tribe?

Jewish Marriage Customs

“The marriage was a contract between families. It was effected in two stages: the betrothal (or ‘acquisition’ of the bride) and the wedding proper (taking the bride into the husband’s home). The betrothal had the legal force of marriage and could be broken only by divorce (cf. Matt.1:18-19). It was accomplished by the bridegroom paying the bride-price (or a part of it) or delivering a deed. The customary written contract (*ketubah*) included the husband’s duties to his wife and the sum due her in the event of a divorce or his death. The bridegroom moving into his father-in-law’s house to live with the bride without further ceremony was also recognized but discouraged in rabbinic writings. The wedding ceremony was held under a canopy (*huppah*). The bride was prepared by bathing, anointing, and clothing with special adornments. She was then escorted from her father’s house to the accompaniment of song, dance, musical instruments, and (since usually in the evening) torchlight. The essential element of the marriage was the introduction of the bride into the groom’s house, where the *huppah* was set up. Seven blessings were pronounced on the couple and the marriage contract was read, followed by seven days of festivity....Girls were normally married young, in their early teens; ...Jewish men, however, were expected to marry at eighteen” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, p.55).

“Two witnesses, mutual consent (normally) and the groom’s declaration were necessary to establish Jewish betrothals (in Roman betrothals consent alone sufficed). Although rings were used in the Roman world, it is not clear whether Palestinian Jews used them in this early period” (Keener, *Backgrounds*, p.47).

3. Mary was “betrothed” to Joseph (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27). Read the note above about Jewish marriage customs during the first century.

MARY'S VISIT TO ELIZABETH

4. Luke tells us that following the angel’s announcement to Mary that she went to visit Elizabeth.
 - a. Her journey was “with haste” (1:39). Why?
 - b. Zacharias and Elizabeth lived in the “hill country...of Judah”. It was not unusual for priests to live outside Jerusalem. Although the scriptures do not tell the name of the “city” (NRSV “town”), one traditional site since the 7th century has been Ain Karim, which is located 5 miles west of Jerusalem (Finegan, p.3). If this is the city (or another one close by), approximately how far did Mary travel?
5. The traditional Jewish greeting given by a visitor was a blessing of peace upon the house of their host. In this case, Mary’s blessing was reciprocated by the blessing given by Elizabeth.
 - a. Elizabeth actually pronounces two blessings. What are they?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - b. Since the narrative is clear that Elizabeth gives her blessing immediately upon Mary’s arrival, how did Elizabeth know of Mary’s selection by God to be the mother of the Messiah?
 - c. Why is Mary to be blessed? (Two reasons? Compare NKJV translation of Luke 1:45 with NRSV, ESV “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”)
6. Consider the following timeline:
 - *Announcement to Zacharias: Wife will bear you a son.*
 - *“After those days” Elizabeth conceives.*
 - *Elizabeth ‘hides’ herself 5 months.*
 - *“In the sixth month” announcement to Mary: You will conceive and bear a son.*
 - *“In those days”, Mary went “with haste” to visit Elizabeth.*
 - *Mary remains with Elizabeth for “about three months” and returns home.*
 - a. Any indication as to the time elapsed between the announcement to Zacharias and Elizabeth’s conception?

- b. The announcement is made to Mary in the "sixth month". The sixth month of what? (cf. Luke 1:36)
- c. Any indication as to the time elapsed between the announcement made to Mary and the time of her conception?

It is often suggested that John the Baptist was 6 months older than Jesus. Is this necessarily the case?

- d. Did Mary remain with Elizabeth until the birth of John?

MARY'S SONG Mary's song is often entitled the *Magnificat* which is taken from the first word of the song in the Latin Vulgate.

- 7. The Old Testament records songs by Miriam (Ex.15:21), Deborah (Judges 21), and Hannah (1 Samuel 2:10). Hannah's song is the most similar to that of Mary's.

- a. Read 1 Samuel 1 to recall Hannah's plight and vow.

- b. Compare Hannah's and Mary's song; a parallel printing of the two songs are on the next page. What are some similar themes?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 8. In verse 46, a few ancient Latin versions ascribe the song to Elizabeth instead of Mary and some scholars even today believe that Elizabeth is the intended author of the song. However, the large majority of scholars contend that Mary is the intended author because the textual evidence is so much in favor of the Mary reading (every Greek manuscript we have reads "Mary") (Farris, p.108f). Any indication from the song itself as to whether Mary or Elizabeth was its author?

- 9. There seems to be two major parts to this song. In verses 46-49, Mary speaks of the things the Lord has done for her; in verses 50-55, she speaks of the broader acts of the Lord for Israel.

- a. What has the Lord done for both Mary and Israel?

- b. In particular, how has the Lord "helped his servant Israel"? (1:54)

Hannah's Song: 1 Samuel 2

1 And Hannah prayed and said:
"My heart rejoices in the LORD;
My horn is exalted in the LORD.
I smile at my enemies,
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.
2 "No one is holy like the LORD,
For *there is* none besides You,
Nor *is there* any rock like our God.
3 "Talk no more so very proudly;
Let no arrogance come from your mouth,
For the LORD *is* the God of knowledge;
And by Him actions are weighed.
4 "The bows of the mighty men *are* broken,
And those who stumbled are girded with
strength.
5 *Those who were* full have hired
themselves out for bread,
And the hungry have ceased *to hunger*.
Even the barren has borne seven,
And she who has many children has
become feeble.
6 "The LORD kills and makes alive;
He brings down to the grave and brings
up.
7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and lifts up.
8 He raises the poor from the dust
And lifts the beggar from the ash heap,
To set *them* among princes
And make them inherit the throne of
glory.
"For the pillars of the earth *are* the
LORD'S,
And He has set the world upon them.
9 He will guard the feet of His saints,
But the wicked shall be silent in darkness.
"For by strength no man shall prevail.
10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be
broken in pieces;
From heaven He will thunder against
them.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth.
"He will give strength to His king,
And exalt the horn of His anointed."

Mary's Song: Luke 1

46 And Mary said:
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 And my spirit has rejoiced^a in God my
Savior.
48 For He has regarded^b the lowly state of
His maidservant^c;
For behold, henceforth all generations
will call me blessed.
49 For He who is mighty has done great
things for me,
And holy *is* His name.
50 And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him
From generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered *the* proud in the
imagination^d of their hearts.
52 He has put down the mighty from *their*
thrones,
And exalted *the* lowly.
53 He has filled *the* hungry with good
things,
And *the* rich He has sent away empty.
54 He has helped His servant Israel,
In remembrance of *His* mercy,
55 As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and to his seed forever."

a NRSV "rejoices"

b NRSV "looked with favor on"

c NRSV "servant"

d NRSV "thoughts"

LESSON 5 **BIRTH AND CIRCUMCISION OF JOHN / ZACHARIAS' PROPHECY**

BIRTH AND CIRCUMCISION OF JOHN (Luke 1:57-63)

1. The birth of a male child was a joyous occasion in ancient Judaism. A son was essential in order to continue the family line.
 - a. Gabriel had said that "many would rejoice at (John's) birth" (1.14). Is the rejoicing of the relatives and neighbors a fulfillment of that prophecy? Or, do you think Gabriel intended something else?
 - b. Verse 58 suggests to some that Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives did not know of her pregnancy until the time of John's birth (e.g. Brown, p.368). What can be said In favor of this? Could this be possible? Can this verse be understood differently? How?

2. A circumcision was a joyous event for the community. Jewish tradition says that guests would assemble in the home of the newborn each night between his birth and circumcision (Keener, *Background*, p.191). Neighbors and relatives would then join in the ceremony. Typically, the father would circumcise the child, but occasionally the mother would perform the task.

3. In later Judaism, it became commonplace to name a son at his circumcision, but there are no documented cases prior to the birth of John. There are a few cases of a child being named after his father, but there are more known cases of being named after a grandfather. Naming after a father was especially appropriate when the father was elderly or infirmed, both of which apply to Zacharias (Bovon, p.70).

- a. What was even more unusual than naming a son after his father?
- b. Who had the final say in the naming of a child?

Circumcision

The origin of the practice of circumcision among the Israelites is recorded in Genesis 17 where it is given by God to be the sign (seal) of the covenant between Him and Abraham and his descendents. God required that every male child (including the servant's male children) be circumcised on the 8th day (17: 12; Leviticus 12: 13; Philippians 3:5). Besides the Israelites (Hebrews), other West Semites (Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites) practiced circumcision as did Egypt and many ancient societies (6. Jeremiah 9:25-26). Among the Canaanites, the Philistines were unusual in that they never practiced circumcision and thus were especially held in contempt by the Israelites (Judges 14:3; 15:18; 1 Samuel 14:6; 17:26).

The Israelites (and possibly their related peoples) were unique in circumcising infants. More commonly, "circumcision was a rite performed either at puberty or in preparation for marriage" (ISBE (revised), "Circumcision", Vol. I, p.700).

Prior to the first century, Antiochus Epiphanes forbade circumcision (1 Maccabees 1 :48, 60) along with his other restrictions to Jewish worship. In the second century AD, the emperor Hadrian forbade circumcision which also gave rise to a Jewish revolt.

4. What three things combined to produce "fear" among those present?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Why would these things be considered worthy to be "discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea"?

ZACHARIAS' PROPHECY (Luke 1:67-80)

5. Like Elizabeth and John had been, Zacharias was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v.67). The song of Zacharias has two major divisions.

- a. What is the theme of the first division (1:68-75)?
- b. What is the theme of the second division (1 :76-79)?

6. Why is God blessed by Zacharias?

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel" are the opening words of Zacharias' song. Consequently, the song is often called the **Benedictus** (= Blessed) which is the first word of the song in the Latin Vulgate. This is the same Latin word from which we get our word **benediction**. A benediction is a closing prayer or blessing and is appropriately named since many of the Psalms (41, 72, and 106) close with the words **"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel."**

7. Luke, more than the other gospel writers, focuses upon the salvation that the Messiah brings. The expression "horn of salvation" suggests a 'mighty Savior'; the horn of an animal represented its strength.

- a. Of what does salvation consist? (v.77)
- b. Was the offering of salvation by God a surprise?

8. In speaking of his son John, Zacharias says he will be "called the prophet of the Highest" (1 :76).

- a. Why is it appropriate to call John a "prophet" of Jesus? (see 1 :76b- 79).
- b. In announcing the birth of John, Gabriel had said that John would "go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the

- Lord" (1: 16-17). Gabriel's statement is based on Malachi 4:5-6 (the last two verses of the English Old Testament) which foretold the return of Elijah.
- 1) Although it is a question debated by modern scholars, what was the apparent belief of the first-century Jews regarding the relative appearance of Elijah and the Messiah? (cf. Matthew 17:10-13 // Mark 9:11-13).
 - 2) On what two occasions does Jesus say that John was the "Elijah to come"? (cf. occasion above; Matthew 11:1-19 // Luke 7:18-35- both quoting Malachi 3:1)
 - 3) Why, then, did John deny being Elijah? (John 1:21)
9. What are some similar thoughts that are found both in the song of Mary (1 :46-55) and the song of Zacharias?
10. Only one verse is given to the life of John between his birth and his public ministry (1:80). What is suggested by each of the following?
- a. "became strong in spirit"
 - b. "was in the deserts" (ESV, "wilderness")
 - c. "till the day of his manifestation to Israel" (ESV, "day of his public appearance to Israel")
11. All four of the gospels tell of the ministry of John prior to the ministry of Jesus (Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:6-13,19-34).
- a. In what ways do they state or imply the lesser role that John plays as compared to the greater role of Jesus?
 - b. All four also quote Isaiah 40:3: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.'" What is the metaphor being used? (see also Isaiah 40:4-5).

BIRTH OF JESUS ACCORDING TO MATTHEW (Matthew 1:18-25)

Immediately after giving Jesus' genealogy, Matthew quickly presents the birth of Jesus from the perspective of Joseph. He tells nothing about the angel's appearance to Mary or of her visit with Elizabeth, nor anything about John's recent birth. Thus, the reader can feel Joseph's perplexity when his betrothed wife is "found with child".

1. "In contrast to most of modern Western culture, Joseph lived in a society where he had no option of giving Mary a second chance, even if he wanted to Jewish, Greek, and Roman law all demanded that a man divorce his wife if she were guilty of adultery" (Keener, *Matthew*, p. 91). The KJV and NKJV translation "was minded to put her away" is somewhat ambiguous as to whether Joseph had already decided or was still considering the matter. Most recent translations render the aorist tense of the verb as Joseph already having decided (e.g. ESV "resolved to divorce her", NRSV, NASB, etc.)

- a. Thus, when Matthew records that Joseph "not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away (i.e. divorce) secretly" (1:19) what two options had he considered.

1)

2)

Note A divorce only required two witnesses and the giving of a simple document, the bill of divorcement (Deut. 24:1; Morris, p.28).

- b. If Joseph took Mary to public court to divorce her, he probably would have been awarded the dowry he was promised by her father and he would have been refunded any bride-price he had paid. If he refused to publicly charge her by divorcing her "secretly", he would not have received the dowry and may not have had the bride-price returned. So why wasn't Joseph willing to put her away publicly?

2. The betrothal period was typically a year long, so it was during this time that Mary was "found with child of the Holy Spirit." (1:18)

- a. What does Matthew mean by saying Mary was "with child of the Holy Spirit"? (cf. Luke 1:35)

- b. Some argue that when Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy he also learned then that her child was "of the Holy Spirit" and it was that knowledge which prompted him to want to divorce her secretly. Others argue that Matthew is simply telling his readers that Mary's child was of the Holy Spirit and that all Joseph knew was that Mary was pregnant, presumably by another man. What do you think?

3. It was while Joseph was trying to decide what to do with Mary that an angel appeared to him. (Any guesses as to what angel this is?)

a. What is different about the angel's appearance to Joseph than Gabriel's appearance to Zacharias and Mary?

b. What four facts does the angel tell Joseph in a dream?

1)

2)

3)

4)

c. Just as Gabriel told Mary to name her son Jesus, this angel also instructs Joseph. "By giving the name Joseph officially accepted the child...; this gave the child the status of a descendent of David" (Morris, p.29). But, unlike Gabriel's revelation to Mary, the angel gives the reason why Jesus is to be so named. Why was Joseph to name the child Jesus?

4. Matthew says that the selection of Mary, a virgin, was to fulfill that "which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (1:22). (We will notice, and study further, that Matthew incorporates a prophecy in each of the five stories or events that he tells of Jesus' birth.)

a. As an incidental point, when a prophet spoke who was really speaking?

b. What prophet and which prophecy is Matthew referring to?

c. So why wasn't Jesus named Immanuel?

d. Is the virgin birth of Jesus used by any of the New Testament writers as an apologetic for Jesus being the Son of God?

Dreams People throughout the ancient world believed that dreams conveyed divine messages (cf. Job 33:14-18). There was especially so when the dream was received by a king or in a sacred place such as a temple (cf. Gen. 28:12; 1 Samuel 3; 1 Kings 3:4-15). In the Old Testament, dreams are particularly associated with Joseph (Gen. 37:5-11; Gen. 40-41) and Daniel (Dan. 2:19ff). There were false dreamers (Jeremiah 23:32; 27:9; Zechariah 10:2) thus making it necessary for people to discern truth from lies. Old men dreaming dreams was part of Joel's prophecy of the Spirit's future work (Joel 2:28-32; cf. Acts 2). In the New Testament, dreams as vehicles of divine messages are limited to Matthew's gospel (in the birth narratives and Pilate's wife, 27:19) and, possibly, to Paul (Acts 16:9; 18:9).

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 7:14 was hotly debated in the early struggles with modernists and is still discussed by all Bible students. There are two related questions.

First, did Isaiah say that a *virgin* or a *young woman* would have a son? The Hebrew word *almah* translated *virgin* in some translations (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NIV, NAB, ESV, Beck) is translated *young woman* by others (RSV, NEB, NRSV, REB, Moffatt). The precise meaning of the term is uncertain and good students of the scriptures arrive at differing views (a written discussion of this word between Dan King and Melvin Curry occurred in the *Guardian of Truth*, Vol.26, No. 25, Nov.4, 1982).

The second question is: Was Isaiah speaking of a *virgin* or *young woman* of his day, or of Mary the mother of Jesus? Some of those who believe that *young woman* is the appropriate translation do so because they answer this second question by saying that the mother in view was the prophetess in Isaiah 8 who clearly was not a virgin, thus Isaiah 7:14 must be translated *young woman*. Of course, this view is also contested by those who believe that only Mary is in view. Another possibility is that Isaiah's remarks refer both the prophetess of Isaiah 8 and to Mary; a dual fulfillment. If this is the case, then *young woman* may be the best translation since it would be inclusive of both women. A study of these questions more appropriately falls within a study of Isaiah.

Perhaps significantly, the Jews never interpreted Isaiah 7:14 as Messianic. That is, they did not look for a Messiah born of a virgin.

BIRTH OF JESUS ACCORDING TO LUKE (Luke 2:1-7)

5. Luke is very careful to document the time period in which Jesus was born (which we will study in a later lesson). It occurred during a period that the Jews were required to register in their "own city". Thus, Joseph, a son of David, returned to the "city of David", Bethlehem.
 - a. Isn't Jerusalem the city of David? (cf. 2 Samuel 5:6-7) Why is Bethlehem called the "city of David"?
 - b. Luke had already told us that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth (1:26). Does Matthew give any indication that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth prior to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem?
 - c. Scholars appear to agree that normally in a Roman census one registered in the city of their residence, not in their ancestral city. Thus, if Joseph lived in Nazareth, it is unclear why he went to Bethlehem. Two explanations have been suggested. Either (1) Joseph lived in Nazareth but had property in Bethlehem, thus requiring his presence there, or (2) Joseph actually lived in Bethlehem, and only visited Nazareth to be with Mary. Is either of these suggestions consistent with scripture? What do you think? [Alternately, Jewish practice could have been to return to one ancestral home and the Romans may have permitted them to do that.]

6. Chronology! Matthew records that Joseph, after seeing the angel in his dream, took Mary as his wife. Luke says that Joseph went to Bethlehem to be registered with "Mary, his betrothed (2:7)." (KJV/NKJV says "betrothed wife", but "wife" is omitted in the better manuscripts).
- a. So, did Joseph marry Mary prior to his trip to Bethlehem, or after? Likewise, did he marry her before or after Jesus' birth?
 - b. Does the fact that Mary is accompany Joseph help in answering the above question? It appears that most scholars agree that she was not required to accompany Joseph.

7. Luke calls Jesus Mary's "firstborn Son" (According to the KJV and NKJV, Matthew also uses the expression "her firstborn Son" (1:25), but "her firstborn" is omitted in the better manuscripts.)

- a. The term "firstborn" is certainly consistent with the fact that Mary had other sons; a fact that Matthew no doubt knew. Is this the reason Matthew tells us that Jesus is her firstborn son? Can one argue this from the context?
- b. What other significance could there be in calling Jesus Mary's "firstborn Son"?

8. Additional Notes:

- 1) The "inn" of that day could be anything from a private home, to a room in a house, or to a common shelter where travelers slept on cots or a raised floor (Brown, p.400).
- 2) Most agree that a manger is an animal-feeding trough, but although a manger might be expected to be in a constructed stable, there is an early tradition associating the place of Jesus birth with a cave. We do know that caves were used as animal shelters. In fact, Constantine built a basilica over the cave believed to be Jesus' birth-place. Later, the Church of the Nativity was built over the remains of this basilica (Finegan, p. 20).
- 3) The "swaddling cloths" were "strips of cloths like bandages, wrapped around young infants to keep their limbs straight (Ezk. 16:4...)" Marshall, p.106.

Firstborn Among the Hebrews, the firstborn had special privileges. Because the Lord spared the firstborn of Israel when he killed the firstborn of the Egyptians, the Lord said that the firstborn "of man and animal" were to be consecrated to Him (Exodus 13:2). This special relationship was then assigned by the Lord to the Levites (Numbers 3:12-13).

The firstborn son had the authority in the household in the absence of the father (cf. Genesis 37:20-22), could expect to receive the father's blessing (cf. Genesis 27), and was given a double portion of inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). The firstborn son of a king was assumed to be the successor to the throne.

In the New Testament, Jesus is said to be the "firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29), the "firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15), the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5), and the "firstborn (brought) into the world" (Hebrews 1:6).

LESSON 7

SHEPHERDS / WISE MEN

SHEPHERDS (Luke 2:8-20)

Following his brief account of Joseph's and Mary's journey to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus, Luke records the visit of the shepherds.

1. Again we have an appearance by an angel who makes an announcement, this time to shepherds.
 - a. The angel is described as an "angel of the Lord". What physical manifestation accompanied the angel's appearance that show the angel was from the Lord?
 - b. As we have come to expect, what was the reaction of the Shepherds and the angel's reply?
 - c. What were the two major parts of the angel's announcement?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - d. What are the three titles the angel assigns to Jesus?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - e. Like previous angelic announcements, this one is also accompanied by a sign. What is it?
2. What are the two parts of the praise given to God by the heavenly host?
 - 1)
 - 2)

The KJV/NKJV expression "on earth peace, goodwill toward men" is generally considered to be based on a late text. The earlier, better attested text can either be translated "on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased" (NASB, ASV, RSV, ESV) or "on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (NIV, NRSV, REB). What is the difference?

3. Upon seeing the child, the shepherds "made widely known the saying which was told them concerning the Child."
 - a. What was the reaction of the people who heard the shepherds?

- b. What was the reaction of Mary?
- c. Notice any parallel to the events surrounding the birth of John?

Bethlehem "(...Heb. *beth lehem*, "house of bread"...). About five miles south of Jerusalem, ...perched 2,460 feet above sea level on the north-south ridge road along the central highlands, it looks westward to the fertile cultivated slopes...and eastward to the desolate wilderness of Judah. Close outside to the north is the traditional site of the tomb of Rachel (Gen.35:19; 48:7), profoundly sacred to the Jewish people...

"Bethlehem was first mentioned in one of the Amarna letters (letters written to Egyptian pharaohs by local kings of Palestine and Syria prior to ca. 1250 B.C.) in the fourteenth century B.C....Bethlehem figures prominently also in the story of Ruth, the great-grandmother of David (Ruth 1; 2:4; 4:11). Its greatest importance in the OT, however, is its relation to King David. It was his family home (1 Sam.16:1; 17:12) and the place of his appointment as king (1 Sam.16:4-13)....

"The great importance of Bethlehem for Christians throughout the centuries is that the Gospels record the birth of Jesus as having taken place there, in fulfillment of a prophecy of Micah (Mic.5:2; Matt.2; Luke 2; John 7:42). The traditional site of the manger in which the infant Jesus was laid (Luke 2:7) is a cave under the great Church of the Nativity, the place of the manger being marked by a star with the Latin inscription..."Here Jesus Christ Was Born of the Virgin Mary." A bitter dispute between the Orthodox and Roman Catholics about this star (1847-53) was one of the causes of the Crimean War (1853-56). The tombs of Jerome (d.420) and his friends ... are in the neighboring grottoes.

"Bethlehem was destroyed by the emperor Hadrian in the second century A.D., but in about 325, after the empire had become Christian, Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine, promoted the building of the great church. Badly damaged during the Samaritan revolt of 521-528, the church was rebuilt in the sixth century in very much its present form by the emperor Justinian. It was spared during the savage invasion of 614 because the soldiers saw the mosaic portrayal of the three Magi in Persian costume." (Denis Baly, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 1996, p. 117-118.)

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST (Matthew 2:1-12)

Following his brief account of Jesus' birth, Matthew tells us the two facts that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea (to perhaps distinguish it from the Bethlehem of Galilee) and that the birth took place during the days of Herod, king of Judah. It is the latter fact that is particularly important to Matthew since he focuses only upon those events of Jesus' birth that are associated with Herod.

- 4. Read a dictionary or encyclopedia article on Herod. Find the following concerning him:
 - a. What were the years of his reign?
 - b. What was his ethnic origin?
 - c. Who was his wife?
 - d. How many of his sons did he have killed?
 - e. Which sons inherited his kingdom?

5. The "wise men" (Gk. *magi*) were "pagan astrologers whose divinatory skills were widely respected in the Greco-Roman world; astrology had become popular through the 'science' of the East, and everyone agreed that the best astrologers lived in the East. The Old Testament explicitly forbade such prognostication from signs (Deut.18:11; cf. Is.2:6; 47:11-15), prescribing true prophecy instead (Deut.18:15)" (Keener, *Background*, p. 48).
 - a. Thus, what event caused the Magi to seek Jesus? What did they learn, and what could they not learn, from this event?
 - b. Why did the Magi go to Jerusalem to seek Jesus?
 - c. Did Herod and "all Jerusalem" believe the Magi were credible? Why were they "troubled"?
 - d. Is it surprising that God would reveal truths to pagan astrologers? What significance may be attached to the Magi worshipping Jesus?
6. Herod's concern prompted him to find out for himself where this child would be born.
 - a. What prophecy did the chief priests and scribes refer to in answer to Herod's question regarding the birth place of the Messiah?
 - b. Compare Matthew's quotation with the text in Micah. Note the differences.
 - c. Why did Herod "secretly" call the Magi and why was he interested in knowing the "exact time" (ASV sim., NASB, NIV, etc.) the star appeared?
7. Chronology Again.
 - a. Any indication as to how long it was after Jesus' birth that the Magi visited him?
 - b. Was Jesus visited first by the shepherds or by the Magi?

LESSON 8 CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS / BIRTH OFFERING / SIMEON AND ANNA

CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS (Luke 2:21)

1. Like John, Jesus was named at the time of his circumcision. Matthew specifically notes that Joseph was the one to name Jesus (1:25) (in Matthew's gospel only the angel appearing to Joseph is recorded), whereas Luke's account leaves it unstated. Luke does mention that the name Jesus was given by the angel. Which angelic appearance is Luke referring to?

BIRTH OFFERING (Luke 2:22-24)

2. Luke records that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus travel to Jerusalem "when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed." The Mosaic regulations regarding childbirth are given in Leviticus 12.

- a. How long did a mother remain impure following the birth of a son?

Note: The KJV/NKJV speaks of "her" purification in verse 22, but other translations reflect the preferred manuscripts by reading "their" purification. This is hard to explain since only the mother (and not the husband or child) was considered unclean.

- b. What was a mother forbidden to do during the time of her impurity?
- c. What offering was required to be given to the priest for the birth of a child?
- d. What is suggested by the fact that in this passage the offering identified was a "pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons"?

Leviticus 12: The Ritual After Childbirth

¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. ³And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. ⁴She shall then continue in the blood of *her* purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled.

⁵But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of *her* purification sixty-six days.

⁶When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ⁷Then he shall offer it before the LORD, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This *is* the law for her who has borne a male or a female.

⁸And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean."

3. Note the similar structure of verses 21 and 22. In each verse where is Luke placing the emphasis?

v.21

v.22

4. What are the two purposes in Joseph, Mary, and Jesus going to Jerusalem?
- 1)
 - 2)

Note: Neither purpose required the presence of Jesus.

5. Firstborn children were consecrated to the Lord (Ex.13:2,12). This special requirement was satisfied when the Lord took the Levites as his (Num.3:12-13). Nevertheless, the firstborn still had to be redeemed (Ex.13:13; Num.18:15-16); the redemption price for a son was 5 shekels.
- a. It is clear that Luke intends his readers to associate the "presentation" of Jesus with the redemption of the firstborn by the scripture he quotes. What scripture(s) does Luke quote?
 - b. Some have suggested that since no mention is made of the redemption price being paid for Jesus Luke implies that Jesus is "offered" to the Lord, reminiscent of Samuel (see Question 12 below). Could this be? Or, is it possible that Luke just doesn't tell us every detail?

SIMEON AND ANNA (Luke 2:25-39)

6. What five descriptions are given of Simeon?
- 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
 - 5)

Nothing else is known about Simeon.

7. On whom does Simeon pronounce blessings?
- 1)
 - 2)

The Birth and Childhood of Jesus

8. Simeon was waiting "for the Consolation of Israel" and in his blessing of God he speaks of seeing "Your salvation".
 - a. Is God's salvation which comes through Jesus the consolation he was waiting for?
 - b. What three things are said of this salvation?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)

9. In blessing Joseph and Mary, what two predictions does Simeon make concerning Jesus?
 - 1)
 - 2)

10. What seven descriptions are given of Anna?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
 - 5)
 - 6)
 - 7)

11. Anna prophesied of Jesus that he would be the object of those who looked for the redemption in Jerusalem. Simeon was apparently one of those people. Can you think of others?

12. Many have seen a parallel between Jesus and Samuel. Note the following:

Samuel (1 Samuel 1-2)

Hannah's God-given conception (1:11,19).

Samuel taken to sanctuary at Shiloh and offered to the service of the Lord (1:28).

Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah (2:20).

"The child Samuel grew before the Lord...and the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men." (2:21, 26)

Jesus (Luke 1-2)

Mary's miraculous conception (1:31-35).

Jesus presented at the temple (2:22).

Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary (2:34).

"The Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." (2:40)

LESSON 9 FLIGHT INTO EGYPT / HEROD'S MASSACRE / RETURN TO NAZARETH

Matthew only tells of five separate events regarding the birth of Jesus. Previously, we studied his record of the birth itself, including Joseph being told of Mary's miraculous conception, and of the Magi visiting Jesus. In this lesson we will study the three remaining events that Matthew records.

FLIGHT INTO EGYPT (Matthew 2:13-14)

1. Joseph, like the Magi, is divinely warned regarding Herod.
 - a. Why was Egypt a good choice as a place of refuge for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus?

 - b. Was it important that Joseph act quickly?

2. Like each of the five events that Matthew tells regarding the birth of Jesus, this one includes an Old Testament prophecy.
 - a. Where is the prophecy found in the Old Testament?

 - b. Of whom is the prophet speaking as understood by the original readers of Hosea?

 - c. Hosea's passage speaks of Israel's *deliverance from Egypt*. However, before Israel exited Egypt, they first had to be taken there. Why did Israel go to Egypt in the first place?

Any parallel to Joseph taking Jesus to Egypt?

Note About Narratives In verse 15 we read of Herod's death, but in verse 16 we read of Herod (in the present tense) deciding to execute the young boys in Bethlehem. Obviously, Matthew's account is not strictly chronological, but that is the nature of narrative story telling. Once Matthew started telling us about Joseph being warned of God, he continues to tell that story through the death of Herod when Joseph and his family were able to return. Having completed that story, he backs up in time to tell us of the details of Herod's barbaric act. Similarly, it is possible that other events we have studied within the birth narratives are not strictly chronological, but rather that we told the unfolding events in a thematic way. Can you think of any possible candidates?

HEROD'S MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS (Matthew 2:16-18)

3. The text says that Herod was "exceedingly angry" when the wise men did not return to Jerusalem to tell him of Jesus' location.

a. Based on what we know about Herod, is it believable that Herod would order the despicable act of having young boys murdered?

Note: France estimates that Bethlehem's population was only about 1000, thus his corresponding estimate is that there were only about 20 boys under 2 years of age (*Matthew*, p.86). Others estimate Bethlehem's population to be only 300 with only about 6 male infants (*Anchor Bible*, Vol.26, p.19).

b. On what basis did Herod make the age of two years old the upper limit of those to be killed?

Could this mean that Jesus was nearly two years old when the Magi visited Jesus?

Must it mean that?

4. Where is the prophecy found in the Old Testament that Matthew states was fulfilled by the barbarous act of Herod?

Ramah, a city of Benjamin, is the traditional burial site of Rachel. It was on the road from Bethel to Bethlehem (Gen.35:19) and generally identified with Er-Ram located 5 miles north of Jerusalem; see also 1 Samuel 10:2. [There was a later tradition that Rachel was buried in Bethlehem.] In the context of Jeremiah, the prophecy probably refers to the northern tribes (Ephraim = Rachel's 'child') taken captive by Assyria. So what is the point of significance about this quotation in Matthew's account?

What is the larger point Jeremiah is making in Jeremiah 31? Any significance to the story of Jesus?

A New Moses

First-century Jewish readers of Matthew's gospel would readily see a parallel between Jesus and Moses. "Josephus (*Ant.* ii. 205ff) records a tradition that a 'sacred scribe' (= astrologer?) foretold to Pharaoh the birth of a deliverer of Israel; Pharaoh in alarm ordered the destruction of all young male children; Moses' father, however, was told in a dream that it was his son who was destined to deliver Israel, and so rescued him from the massacre" (France, *Matthew*, p.85). Even if the tradition recorded by Josephus is baseless, Herod's massacre of the children and Matthew's quotation of Hosea ('Out of Egypt...') is sufficient for the reader to make that parallel. Also, after Moses killed the Egyptian, we read of Pharaoh seeking to kill Moses (Ex. 2:15) in much the same language of Herod seeking the young Jesus (Mt.2:13). Similarly, just as Moses was later able to return to Egypt from Midian, Jesus is able to return to Israel from Egypt.

Would these parallels be important to Jews who were expecting a prophet "like Moses" (Deut. 18:15,18)?

5. Many critics of the Bible deny the historicity of Herod killing the young boys. For example, one historian says that "there is little in the story that carries historical conviction. The differences between Matthew's and Luke's birth accounts, together with the incident's absence from Josephus's account of the excesses of Herod's final years, work against the account's accuracy" (Richardson, *Herod*, p. 297). He doesn't disagree that such an event is plausible; he simply isn't willing to accept Matthew as being accurate.

Edersheim observations seem an appropriate rebuttal to the critics: "Nor do we wonder, that it remained unrecorded by Josephus, since on other occasions also he omitted events which to us seem important. The murder of a few infants in an insignificant village might appear scarcely worth notice in a reign stained by so much bloodshed. Besides, he had, perhaps, a special motive for this silence. Josephus always carefully suppresses, so far as possible, all that refers to the Christ – probably not only in accordance with his own religious views, but because mention of a Christ might have been dangerous, certainly would have been inconvenient, in a work written by an intense self-seeker, mainly for readers in Rome" (*Life and Times*, Book 2, p.214-215).

RETURN TO NAZARETH (Matthew 2:19-23)

6. Every move Joseph makes in Matthew account is the result of an angelic appearance.
 - a. How many times does an angel appear to Joseph?
 - b. In what manner is the appearance always made?
 - c. Why must Joseph be told every move?
7. Who is Archelaus? How long did he rule? (Refer to a Bible dictionary)
8. Jesus is taken to Nazareth shortly after Herod's death. In what year did Herod die?
9. The prophecy referred to by Matthew does not occur anywhere in the Old Testament. Perhaps it is intended to be representative of Old Testament prophecy (note that Matthew uses the plural prophets). Most think that Matthew uses a word-play, but there is disagreement as to which word a play is being made on. Some think 'Nazarite' (Heb. *nezir*), but it is difficult to see the relevance to Jesus; he was not a Nazarite. Many point to the word 'branch' in Isaiah 11:1 (Heb. *neser*). The branch of the root of Jesse was commonly understood to refer to the Messiah. [There are several branch prophecies besides Isaiah 11:1, but a different Hebrew word is used in them.] In any case, the point is that Jesus will be associated with the city of Nazareth. If one only had Matthew's account, is there any indication that Joseph or Mary had formerly lived in Nazareth?

LESSON 10

DATE OF JESUS' BIRTH

Matthew and Luke both provide direct and indirect evidence regarding the date of Jesus' birth even though neither tells us exactly. This lesson will examine the available evidence for both the year and the day of Jesus' birth.

THE RECKONING OF TIME

Ancient societies use various means of reckoning time. The calendar itself was quite different between the various cultures as to its length, starting point, etc. Many people, including the Jews, based their calendar upon lunar cycles. Julius Caesar standardized the 365-day year (thus called the Julian calendar) based on a similar calendar used in Egypt for about 3000 years. The common calendar of today is a variation of the Julian calendar that incorporates modifications proposed by Pope Gregory XIII (hence, called the Gregorian calendar).

Each society marked their years with respect to some significant event. Like many people, it is not uncommon to read in the Old Testament that an event among the Israelites occurred in a certain year of the current king's reign. The Greeks used the beginning of the Olympics to mark time with each four-year period called an Olympiad. Romans used the founding of the city of Rome as their starting point. Thus, for example, Julius Caesar died on March 15, 710 AUC (*anno urbis conditae* "in the year of the founded city").

The universal system used today was devised by the Dionysius, a monk, mathematician, and astronomer. He was asked by Pope John I to devise a standard calendar reckoned from the birthday of Christ. During his time, the day of Jesus' birth was already being observed on December 25th and based on the information available to him he believed the birth of Christ occurred on December 25, 753 AUC. Thus, he set January 1, 754 AUC to correspond to January 1, 1 AD (*anno Domini* "in the year of our Lord"). [Actually, Dionysius used the phrase *ab incarnatione Domini* "from the incarnation of our Lord"; later the term AD became standard.] It was not until the 17th century that BC (before Christ) was used for events prior to Christ's birth (Boorstin, p.598). Using this "Christian" calendar, Dionysius devised this system in 525 AD. As will be seen from our study, Dionysius miscalculated.

In many academic writings in recent years, BC and AD have been replaced with BCE (before Common Era) and CE (Common Era). The starting point is the same, so AD 2003 = 2003 CE. Apparently the point is to remove Christ from the calendar.

THE YEAR OF JESUS' BIRTH

1. *The Reign of Augustus* Luke 2:1 says that the registration that took place at the time of Jesus' birth resulted from the decree of Caesar Augustus. It is widely accepted that Augustus ruled from 44 BC to AD 14 and thus provides the outer bounds of the birth of Jesus. The text says "that all the world should be registered." We do not have any record of a single, world-wide registration. What we do have knowledge of is that Caesar registered his entire empire in stages. Although some critics have pointed to this as an inaccuracy in Luke's gospel, it is not necessary to understand the text as saying that there was a single, world-wide registration.

Incidentally, what does "all the world" refer to? Any lessons to be learned?

2. *The Reign of Herod the Great* Matthew 2:1 states that Jesus was born "in the days of Herod the king." The date of Herod's death has been debated, but it seems that it is now widely accepted that Herod died in 4 BC. More particularly, Josephus mentions a lunar eclipse occurred shortly before his death and that the Passover was celebrated shortly

after. An eclipse occurred on March 12/13 of 4 BC and the first day of Passover that year was April 11th. Thus, Jesus must have been born before April, 4 BC.

3. *Herod's Massacre of the Children* Matthew records Herod's edit to kill all the male children two years old and younger. He set the age at two based on the information he received from the Magi (2:16). What is unknown is whether this means that the Magi told Herod that Jesus was approaching two years old (which is not impossible) or that simply Herod did not want to take a chance and miss Jesus thus setting the age at an higher than required limit.

The length of time between Jesus' birth and the death of Herod is also unknown. Matthew records that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus lived in Egypt during this period to avoid Herod's wrath.

4. *The Reign of Tiberius Caesar* Luke records (1) that Jesus sought John's baptism in the 15th year of Tiberius' reign (Lk.3:1), and (2) that Jesus "began *His ministry* about thirty years of age" (Lk.3:23). If one assumes that these two events coincide, some chronological conclusions can be made.

Depending on the assumptions made regarding the years of Tiberius' reign, his 15th year was between AD 26 and AD 30. So if Jesus was precisely 30 years of age, his birth would be between 5 BC and 1 BC. Since the text of Luke says that Jesus was *about* 30 years of age, we can at least add (or subtract) 2 years from the above dates to give a range of 7 BC to AD 2. Combining this with the death of Herod in 4 BC, this gives a range of (at least) 7 BC to 4 BC. Of course, one might think that Jesus was 33 or 34 and that Luke could still say that he was about 30 years of age; this would lengthen the range back to 9 BC. It is hard to imagine Luke using the term "about 30 years of age" if Jesus was 35 or older.

Incidentally, why do you think that Luke is content to tell us that Jesus is "about" thirty years of age at the start of his ministry? Why did he not tell us Jesus exact age?

5. *The Census of Quirinius* Luke records that the decree of Augustus and the corresponding census "first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria" (Lk.2:2). The relevance of mentioning Quirinius is that Syria was the imperial province of Rome that included Judea until AD 70. Whereas this appears to be the type of chronological data needed to pinpoint the birth of Christ, it has in fact created many problems. The basic problem is that we only know of Quirinius governing in Syria during the years he served as legate in AD 6-9 and that he did perform a census in AD 6 (it is that census that appears to be referenced in Acts 5:37). If this is the case, it would appear that the gospel accounts contradict because it would be impossible for Jesus to be born both before the death of Herod and at the time of the census by Quirinius. Obviously, Bible critics showcase this as an example of Biblical fallibility. Yet, Bible believers have not capitulated to the critics and have offered several ways of reconciling the Bible accounts. We will consider several attempts.

- 1) It may be that Quirinius was a ruler in Syria twice with the first one occurring while Herod was still living. This may be suggested by the use of the term "first" in Lk.2:2, i.e., first of two enrollments. Since we have records of the legates who served in Syria during the latter years of Herod, Quirinius may have held some other position such as proconsul, imperial procurator, or other specially assigned role for the census. Two inscriptions have been found which many point to as evidence of this position; of course, just as many deny that these inscriptions demand this interpretation.

- 2) It has been suggested that census/enrollment may have taken several years to complete and that it could have begun under one legate prior to Herod's death and not completed until Quirinius served as legate.
 - 3) It has been suggested that the Greek instead of being translated "This census *first* took place while Quirinius was governor..." should be translated "This census took place *before* Quirinius was governor..." If this is correct, then there is no conflict between Matthew and Luke to be solved!
6. *The Star of the Magi* Matthew records that the Magi saw a star "in the east" (2:2; KJV) or "at its rising" (NRSV) which they identified with the newly born King of the Jews. Some think this star was uniquely created by God for this special event and thus not subject to investigation. Others believe that the star could be some regular, naturally occurring event used by God and therefore it may be possible to determine the nature of this star. If that be the case, then our knowledge of astronomy could help determine possible dates when such events occurred and thus provide information as to when Christ was born. The following three types of natural events that have been investigated:
- 1) *Supernovas*. A supernova is explosion of a star during which time its brightness greatly increases. The Chinese observed a supernova for 70 days in 5/4 BC. This is the only explanation involving a natural star that has been suggested.
 - 2) *Comets*. Comets, although not stars, give the appearance of a star (i.e. 'shooting stars'). Comets become visible to us on some regular period. The most famous comet, Halley's comet, appears every 77 years and there are records of this comet's appearance dating back to 240 BC. Halley's comet would have appeared in 12/11 BC and therefore some have suggested that it was Halley's comet that the Magi saw. Possible, but 12/11 BC is much earlier than most would accept for the birth of Christ. Of course, it could have been some other unknown comet that the Magi saw.
 - 3) *Conjunctions of Planets*. The planets that are visible from earth might be mistaken for a star and when two or more planets are in conjunction (i.e. when their paths cross so that they share the same celestial longitude) their combined appearance is brighter. Even among modern astrologers events occurring at times of conjoining planets are deemed significant. There was a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter (which happens every 20 years) in 7 BC. Even more interestingly, in December of that same year there was a triple conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars – an event that only happens every 805 years.

Unfortunately, there will always remain uncertainty in the identification of any natural event with the "star" seen by the Magi. However, there is no good reason to deny that it was some such natural event that God used to convey his will.

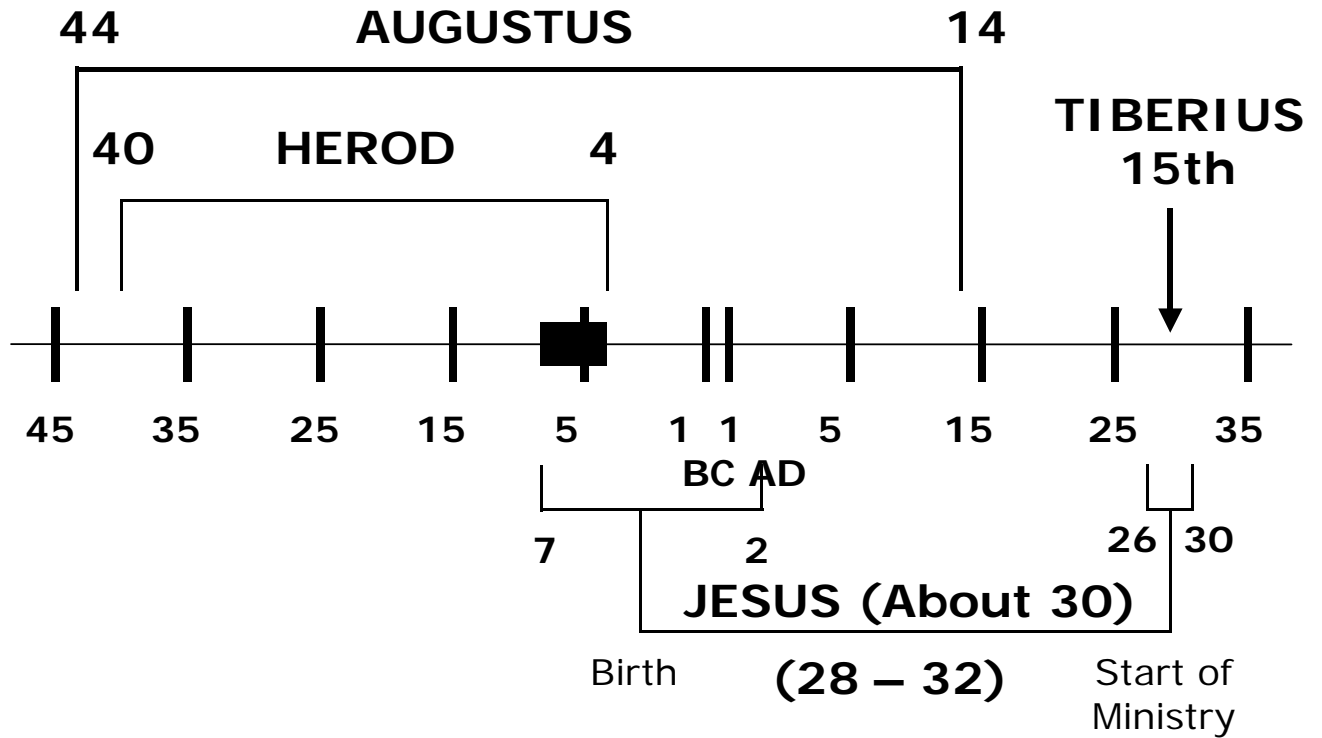
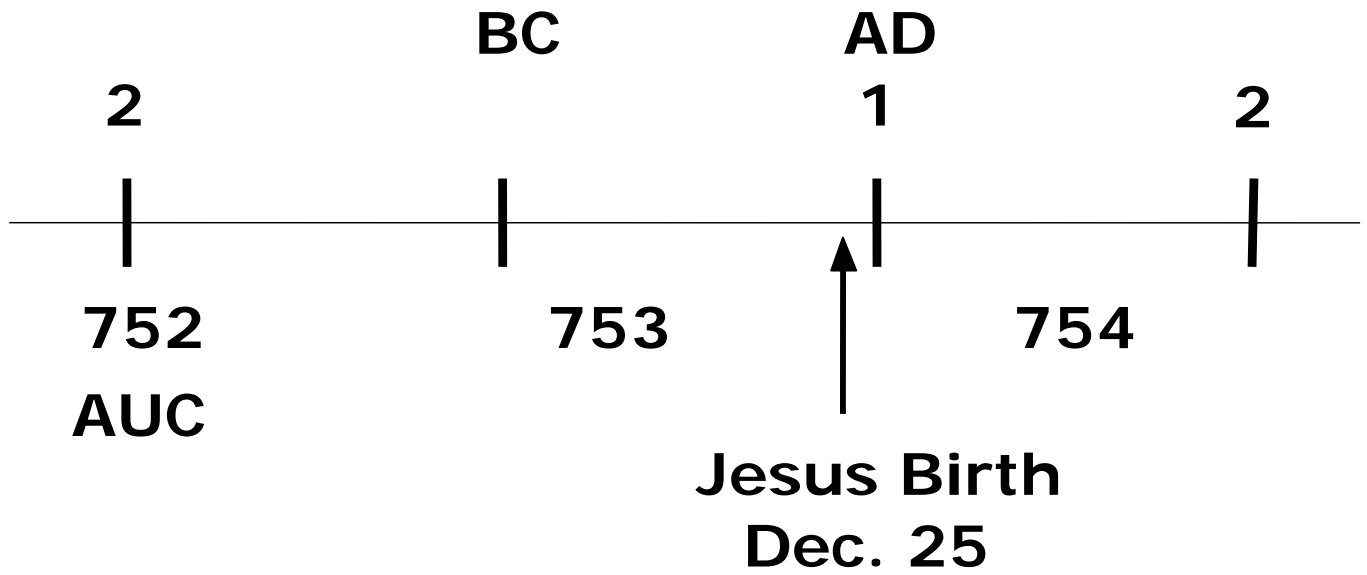
Conclusion Most scholars accept a date between 7 BC and 4 BC for the year of Christ's birth.

THE DAY OF JESUS' BIRTH

Matthew or Luke provides no information regarding the day, or even the time of the year, that Jesus was born. Some have suggested that since the shepherds were out at night with their flocks that a time between March and November would be favored, but there are Jewish writings which speak of flocks around Bethlehem that were outside throughout the winter months.

The traditional date of December 25th goes back to at least Hippolytus (c.AD 165-235). Initially, the Eastern Orthodox Catholic church accepted January 6th, but since the time of Chrysostom (AD 345-407) it also has accepted the December 25th date. The Armenian church still accepts January 6th. The exact reason December 25th was accepted is unknown, but it was then believed that December 25th was the time for the winter solstice. Thus, "it was appropriate that the time the light of the natural sun began to increase was also the time that the 'sun of righteousness' came into the world" (Finegan, *Chronology*, p. 258).

Yet many other dates were suggested in early Christianity. Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 200) knew of those who accepted either April 19th (or 20th) or May 20th as the day of Christ's birth while he accepted November 18th. From then up to modern times, probably every month of the year has been suggested.



LESSON 11

CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

Only Luke provides us with any narrative information between the events surrounding the birth of Jesus and the beginning of his ministry at about the age of 30.

CHILDHOOD OF JESUS (Luke 2:40-51)

1. Both Matthew and Luke tell of Joseph, Mary and Jesus dwelling in Nazareth (Mt.2:23; Lk.2:39). This is consistent with the all the references throughout the Gospels and Acts (Mt.4:13; 21:11; 26:71; Mk.1:9, 24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Lk.4:16, 34; 18:37; 24:19; Jn.1:45, 46; 18:5, 7; 19:9; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9).
 - a. Did the Jews expect the Messiah to come from Nazareth? (John 1:45; 7:40-43, 52)
 - b. Why would Nazareth of Galilee be an especially surprising place as the home of the Messiah? (Read the excursus on Nazareth)
2. Luke opens this episode with the statement that Jesus "grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (2:40). He also closes the episode with a similar statement: "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (2:52)

Nazareth

Located in Lower Galilee, Nazareth is on a hill (cf. Lk.4:29) just north of the great plain Esdraelon at an elevation of 1,150 feet with Mt. Carmel to the west, Mt. Tabor to the east, and Mt. Hermon to the north.

Nazareth is not mention in any Old Testament scriptures, Jewish writings (even though the Talmud refers to 63 Galilean towns), or by Josephus (despite the fact that he gives the names of 45 towns in Galilee and his headquarters was within 3 miles of Nazareth). Consequently, earlier critics doubted it existence. However, excavations in En-Nasira (modern Nazareth), though limited, have confirmed the existence of Nazareth centuries before the time of Jesus. The earliest inscription that mentions Nazareth was found in Caesarea in 1962.

Nazareth had several natural advantages. It was located only 3 miles south of Sepphoris, the leading city of Galilee, and conveniently located near the major trade routes. Thus it was not totally secluded. Its location in the hills secured for it adequate rainfall and protection from climate extremes. Its main disadvantage was that it only had one main spring to supply water; called Mary's Well since AD 1100.

It is still debated how significant Nazareth was at the time of Christ. Estimates of its population has been between 200 (*Dictionary of Jesus*, p.36) and 2000 (*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, p.742). Most understand Nathanael's comment (John 1:47) as typical of Jewish disdain for Nazareth, although his statement could simply reflect his belief that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. It has also been suggested that Nazareth, like all of Galilee, had a strong Gentile presence that would have drawn contempt from southern Jews.

Other traditional sites in modern Nazareth besides Mary's Well include the Church of the Annunciation that is supposedly built over the cave where Mary encountered Gabriel and a Greek church presumably built at the site of the synagogue although no confirmatory finds have been made. Many believe they have identified the hill from which the residents of Nazareth tried to murder Jesus as the Mons Saltus Domini. Modern Nazareth has the highest population of Arab Christians in Israel and has a total population of about 30,000.

The Birth and Childhood of Jesus

- a. Compare this to what was said of John (Luke 1:66, 80).
 - b. Apparently the expression "in spirit" in Luke 2:40 is not in the better manuscripts and thus not included in modern translations. If so, any guess as to why it was added.
 - c. Is this description of childhood growth reminiscent of any other Biblical character? (1 Samuel 2:21, 26; 3:19).
3. The law required Jewish males to attend the three great annual feasts in Jerusalem: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17). According to the Mishnah, women and boys under 13 were not required to attend the feasts. Also, during New Testament times, Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire which made it impossible for some to travel to Jerusalem for any or all of the feasts.
- a. Based on Luke's statement, what was the practice of Joseph and Mary?
 - b. Do you think Jesus had been to Jerusalem for the Passover previously?
4. After they had "finished the days" (i.e. the seven day feast of the Passover), Joseph and Mary returned home with the caravan they were traveling with, but unaware that Jesus was still in Jerusalem.
- a. They found Jesus "after three days"? Three days from when?
 - b. Jesus was found "sitting in the midst of teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions." But since the teachers "were astonished at His understanding and answers", what else must he have been doing?
 - c. His parents were also amazed at him. What was the reason for their amazement?
 - d. What did Jesus mean in saying "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (NKJV, 2:49).
 - e. Other translations say "Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?" (NRSV). Which translation seems preferable to the context?
5. Luke summarizes this episode of Jesus' life with the simple statement that Jesus "was subject to them, but Mary kept all these things in her heart" (2:51)
- a. What else had Mary kept and pondered in her heart?
 - b. What is the point of Luke telling us that Jesus was subject to his parents?

6. When Jesus later taught in the synagogue at Nazareth, the people of the city rejected the claims of Jesus and even tried to kill him (Mt.13:53-58 //Mk.6;1-6//Lk.4:16-30). In part, their rejection was based on their prior knowledge of him as the son of Joseph, the carpenter. The exact type of work described by the term “carpenter” (Gk. *tekton*) is unknown. It could have included anything from being a skilled worker in wood, a maker of plows and yokes, an ironworker, an architect/builder, a shipbuilder, or a traveling master craftsman (Brown, p.539, n.21).
 - a. Did Joseph die prior to the ministry of Jesus? (cf. Mark 6:3)
 - b. If so, what impact would that had have on Jesus?

APOCRYPHAL INFANCY GOSPELS In the second century and later, there existed many writings purporting to record episodes and sayings of Jesus while on earth. Most of these had to do with the period of his ministry. Collectively, these writings are known as the New Testament Apocrypha (to distinguish them from the Jewish writings called the Old Testament Apocrypha). These writings were never generally accepted as canonical, although some were held in esteem for a time in various locations.

There were a few of these writings that tell of Jesus’ life before his ministry. The two main works are *The Protevangelium of James*, supposedly written by the brother of Jesus, and the *Gospel of Thomas* (or the *Infancy Story of Thomas*), supposedly written by the apostle, but not to confused with the *Gospel of Thomas* found in Gnostic library at Nag Hammadi that contains only sayings of Jesus.

Although *The Proevangelium of James* records in greater detail the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, it primarily relates the miraculous birth of Mary who is said to be the daughter of the wealthy Joachim and his wife Anne. It also records how Herod tried to kill John at the same time as the slaughter of the male children in Bethlehem, and that Zacharias was killed protecting John.

The *Infancy Story of Thomas* tells of episodes in Jesus’ childhood prior to his going to Passover at age 12. This was a very popular writing and was translated into many languages. It is relatively short, only about 7 pages in the standard text by Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*. Read the excerpt on the following page that gives a sample of the type of material included.

7. What is your first impression of this account?
8. Just using the episode in Luke covered in this lesson (Luke 2:40-51), how can we be certain that this apocryphal account is inaccurate?
9. Note how the language and events anticipates the acts of Jesus in the Gospels. Give examples?

Excerpts from *The Infancy Story of Thomas*

1. I, Thomas the Israelite, tell and make known to you all, brethren from among the Gentiles, all the works of the childhood of our Lord Jesus Christ and his mighty deeds, which he did when he was born in our land. The beginning is as follows.
2. ¹When this boy Jesus was five years old he was playing at the ford of a brook, and he gathered together into pools the water that flowed by, and made it at once clean, and commanded it by his word alone. ²He made soft clay and fashioned from it twelve sparrows. And it was the Sabbath when He did this. And there were also many other children playing with him. ... ⁴And when Joseph came to the place and saw (it), he cried out to him, saying: "Why do you do on the Sabbath what ought not to be done?" But Jesus clapped his hands and cried to the sparrows: "Off with you!" And the sparrows took flight and went away chirping. ⁵The Jews were amazed when they saw this...
3. ¹But the son of Annas the scribe was standing there with Joseph; and he took a branch of a willow and (with it) dispersed the water which Jesus had gathered together. ²When Jesus saw what he had done he was enraged and said to him: "You insolent, godless dunderhead, what harm did the pools and the water do to you? See, now you also shall be wither like a tree and shall bear neither leaves nor root nor fruit." ³And immediately that lad withered up completely; and Jesus departed and went into Joseph's house...
4. ¹After this again he went through the village, and a lad ran and knocked against his shoulder. Jesus was exasperated and said to him: "You shall not go further on your way" and the child immediately fell down and died. But some, who saw what took place, said: "From where does this child spring, since his every word is an accomplished deed?" ²And the parents of the dead child came to Joseph and blamed him and said: "Since you have such a child, you cannot dwell with us in this village; or else teach him to bless and not to curse. For he is slaying our children."
5. ¹And Joseph called the child aside and admonished him saying: "Why do you do such things that these people (must) suffer and hate us and persecute us?" But Jesus replied: "I know that these words are not yours: nevertheless for your sake I will be silent. But they shall bear their punishment. And immediately those who had accused him became blind. ²And those who saw it were greatly afraid and perplexed... And when Joseph saw that Jesus had done so, he arose and took him by the ear and pulled it hard. ³And the child was angry and said to him: "It is sufficient for you to seek and not to find, and most unwisely have you acted. Do you not know that I am yours? Do not vex me."
- ...
8. ... ²And when the child had ceased speaking, immediately all those were healed who had fallen under his curse. And no one after that dared to provoke him, lest he should curse him, and he should be maimed.
9. ¹Now after some days Jesus was playing in the upper story of a house, and one of the children who were playing with him fell down from the house and died. ... ²And the parents of him that was dead came and accused him of having thrown him down. And Jesus replied: "I did not throw him down." But they continued to revile him. ³Then Jesus leaped down from the roof and stood by the body of the child, and cried with a loud voice: "Zenon" – for that was his name – "arise and tell me, did I throw you down?" And he arose at once and said: "No, Lord, you did not throw me down, but raised me up." And when they saw it they were amazed. And the parents of the child glorified God for the miracle that had happened and worshipped Jesus.
- ...
12. ¹Again, in the time of sowing the child went out with his father to sow wheat in their land. And as his father sowed, the child Jesus also sowed one corn of wheat. ²And when he reaped it and threshed it, he brought in a hundred measures; ³and he called all the poor of the village to the threshing-floor and gave them the wheat, and Joseph took the residue of the wheat. He was eight years old when he worked this miracle.
- ...

LESSON 12

RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Over the course of the centuries, several religious traditions and teachings have evolved concerning the birth of Jesus and Mary, his mother.

CHRISTMAS

December 25th has been stated to be the birthday of Jesus from at least the time of Hippolytus (ca. AD 165-235). The first record we have of Christmas (= 'Christ's Mass') as a festival of the church dates from AD 336. Initially, the Eastern church (Greek Orthodox) accepted January 6th as Jesus' birthday, but from the fourth century they joined the Western church (Roman Catholic) in accepting December 25th.

Since there is no historical basis to accept one date over another for Jesus' birthday, it is generally believed that December 25th was chosen in the hopes of replacing the Roman pagan festival of the sun god that was celebrated on the winter solstice, which was taken to be on December 25th.

Christmas is just one of the days on the Christian calendar kept by Roman Catholics and many other religious groups. Also associated with the birth of Jesus is Annunciation (March 25; the angel's announcement to Mary), Circumcision (January 1; the circumcision of Jesus), Epiphany (January 6; the Twelfth Night of Christmas, the visit of the Wise Men to Bethlehem, the baptism of Jesus, and the miracle of Cana) and Candlemas (February 2; the purification of Mary and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple).

Following the reformation, some protestant groups (e.g. Puritans in New England) discontinued the celebration of Christmas and other religious holidays. Christmas started taking on the secular aspects of gift giving and good cheer in the mid-19th century. It was at this time the first Christmas card was sent (1846) and that Santa Claus was popularized in New York. The name Santa Claus derives from St. Nicholas (Dutch, *Sint Nikolaas*), the 4th-century bishop and patron saint of children and sailors.

Observation It is always proper to give thanks to God for his good gifts which surely include the gift of his son. Consequently, it is appropriate to be mindful that in the birth of Jesus God was bringing to fruition his design to redeem mankind. The blessedness of that day is highlighted by the momentous events surrounding the birth of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. Clearly, we can teach, sing, and rejoice concerning this day.

Yet the blessedness of that day lies only within the person of the one born that day in view of what he would do. The New Testament is clear that it is only in the death of Jesus that redemption was secured and the only memorial requested by God is that which takes place each Lord 's Day when those redeemed by Jesus' death observe the Lord's Supper.

PERPETUAL VIRGINITY OF MARY

The Gospels clearly teach that Jesus was born of a virgin. By this they mean that Jesus was miraculously conceived within the womb of Mary without a human father. Beginning in the third century, belief in Mary's perpetual virginity became very widespread. By this is meant that not only was Mary a virgin at the time of conception, she remained a virgin her entire life. This came to include the teaching that Jesus was miraculously born; thereby Mary did not experience pain or any of the normal biological changes during childbirth. This doctrine was promoted during a time that the Catholic Church was also promoting celibacy among the servants of the church.

Observation The New Testament records that following the conception of Jesus that Joseph took Mary as his wife. Matthew 1:25 does state that Joseph abstained from sexual relations

until the birth of Jesus. Yet the very way that this is recorded suggests that Joseph and Mary had full marital relations following the birth of Jesus. Consequently, it is not unexpected to read that Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55-56). Believers in the perpetual virginity of Mary have to explain this reference in an unnatural way and they do so without the slightest scriptural evidence in support of their position.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The teaching on the Immaculate Conception has to do with the conception of Mary, not Jesus. Pope Pius IX issued a papal bull in 1854 decreeing that “the most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by the singular grace and privilege of almighty God and in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin, [that this] is revealed by God and, therefore, firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.” For at least four centuries prior to this, Catholic authorities had taught that Mary, though still subject to the consequences of Adam’s sin such as sickness and death, was freed from the inherited sin that plagued all mankind since Adam. This grace was granted to her because of her unique role in bearing Jesus.

Observation The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception rests on a faulty premise. Original sin, as defined by Catholics or Protestants, is not taught in the scriptures and, thus, is not something that Mary needs to be excluded from. Nor do the scriptures teach that Mary was free from sin in her life. She, like all humankind, sinned and was in need of the redemptive work of her son.

The teaching concerning Mary evolved, ever getting more complex and elaborate. Besides simply being an agent of God’s grace, Mary came to be seen as a protector and an intercessor. Therefore, she was an object of prayer and veneration (i.e. worship). In 1950, Pope Pius XII issued a papal bull on the Assumption of Mary. That is, Mary did not die, but was assumed, body and soul, into heaven.

LESSON 13

REVIEW

Hopefully we have gained familiarity with the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth and childhood. First, without using your Bible, answer the following questions. Then, using your Bible, grade yourself.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

- _____ 1. The genealogy of Jesus is recorded in which gospel(s)?
 - a. Matthew only
 - b. Matthew and Mark
 - c. Mark and Luke
 - d. Matthew and Luke
- _____ 2. Which of the following is not affirmed by the apostle Paul in Galatians 4?
 - a. Jesus was born under the law.
 - b. Jesus came to redeem those under law.
 - c. Jesus was born of Mary.
 - d. Jesus was sent by God.
- _____ 3. Which of the following is not affirmed in Matthew 1:1?
 - a. Jesus is the Messiah
 - b. Jesus is the son of David
 - c. Jesus is the son of Abraham
 - d. Jesus is the son of God
- _____ 4. Which of the following is not listed in Jesus' genealogy?
 - a. David
 - b. Hezekiah
 - c. Levi
 - d. Jehoshaphat
- _____ 5. Which of the following women is not mentioned in Jesus' genealogy?
 - a. Rahab
 - b. Tamar
 - c. Sarah
 - d. Ruth
- _____ 6. Which of the following is not foretold by Gabriel concerning John?
 - a. Many will rejoice at his birth
 - b. He will be great
 - c. He will be a Nazarite
 - d. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit
- _____ 7. Who of the following did an angel not appear to?
 - a. Zacharias
 - b. Elizabeth
 - c. Joseph
 - d. Mary
- _____ 8. Which of the following sons of Herod did not succeed him in power?
 - a. Herod Antipas
 - b. Antipater
 - c. Archelaus
 - d. Philip
- _____ 9. Herod the Great died in which year?
 - a. 6 BC
 - b. 5 BC
 - c. 4 BC
 - d. 2 BC
- _____ 10. Which of the following is not said to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
 - a. Zacharias
 - b. Elizabeth
 - c. John
 - d. Joseph

TRUE or FALSE

- _____ 11. John (the Baptist) was four months older than Jesus.
- _____ 12. There are exactly 42 (=3x14) generations between Abraham and Jesus.
- _____ 13. Josiah is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus.

The Birth and Childhood of Jesus

- _____ 14. Luke's genealogy includes the kings of Judah.
- _____ 15. Matthew's account of Jesus' birth is written from the perspective of Joseph.
- _____ 16. Both John and Jesus were named at the time of their circumcision.
- _____ 17. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
- _____ 18. Jesus was born during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
- _____ 19. Zacharias was stricken blind for not believing the angel.
- _____ 20. Zacharias prophesied concerning Jesus.
- _____ 21. The prophets foretold that Jesus would be raised in Nazareth.
- _____ 22. Elizabeth was of the tribe of Judah.
- _____ 23. The angel told Mary that Jesus would be called "Immanuel".
- _____ 24. The shepherds gave gifts to Jesus.
- _____ 25. Simeon was told he would not die until he saw the Messiah.
- _____ 26. The Latin name for the song of Mary is the Magnificat.
- _____ 27. The Latin name for the song of Elizabeth is the Benedictus.
- _____ 28. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Judea following Herod's death.
- _____ 29. Jesus began his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius.
- _____ 30. Bethlehem is called the city of David.

WHICH GOSPEL TELLS OF THE FOLLOWING EVENTS: MATTHEW (M) OR LUKE (L)?

- _____ 31. The census taken at the time of Jesus' birth.
- _____ 32. The birth of John the Baptist.
- _____ 33. Jesus' birth in a manger.
- _____ 34. Herod's massacre of the male children.
- _____ 35. The shepherds who visited Jesus.
- _____ 36. Joseph's desire to put Mary away secretly.
- _____ 37. Jesus' visit to Jerusalem at the age of 12.
- _____ 38. The flight of Joseph and his family to Egypt.
- _____ 39. The prophecy of Zacharias.
- _____ 40. The prophecy of Anna.
- _____ 41. The wise men's visit to Jesus.

WHICH OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET FORETOLD OF THE FOLLOWING?

- _____ 42. Jesus would be "called" out of Egypt.
- _____ 43. Jesus would be born of a virgin.
- _____ 44. Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.
- _____ 45. Herod's massacre of the male children.

SHORT ANSWER

- _____ 46. Under Jewish law, how many days was a woman considered unclean after the birth of a male child?
- _____ 47. The Levitical priests were divided into how many courses?
- _____ 48. How many months did Elizabeth "hide" herself during her pregnancy?
- _____ 49. How many times does an angel appear to someone in the Gospel birth narratives?
- _____ 50. About how old was Jesus when he began his ministry?

REFERENCES

Introductions

Barker, Glenn W., William L. Lane, J. Ramsey Michaels. The New Testament Speaks. Harper & Row, 1969.

France, R.T. Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher. Paternoster Press, 1989.

Guthrie, Donald. New Testament Introduction. InterVarsity Press, 1975.

General Studies

Barclay, William. Jesus As They Saw Him. Eerdmans, 1978 (1962).

Barnett, Paul. Jesus and the Logic of History. Eerdmans, 1997.

Edersheim, Alfred. The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. Eerdmans, 1971 (one volume edition).

Finegan, Jack. The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church. Princeton, 1969.

Foster, R.C. Studies in the Life of Christ. Baker, 1971 (reprinted).

Hennecke, Edgar and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, eds. (trans. R. McL. Wilson). New Testament Apocrypha, Volume 1 (Gospel and Related Writings). Westminster Press, 1963.

McBrien, Richard P. Catholicism: Study Edition. Harper & Row, 1981.

Richardson, Peter. Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans. University of South Carolina, 1996.

Chronologies

Boorstin, Daniel J. The Discoverers. Random House, 1983.

Finegan, Jack. Handbook of Biblical Chronology. Princeton, 1964.

Hoehner, Harold W. Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ. Zondervon, 1977.

Special Gospel Studies

Bauckham, Richard. Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels. Eerdmans, 2002.

Brown, Raymond E. The Birth of the Messiah: New Updated Edition. Doubleday, 1993 (1977).

Farris, Stephen. The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives: Their Origin, Meaning and Significance. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 9. JSOT Press, 1985.

Green, Joel B., Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall, eds. Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels. InerVarsity Press, 1992.

Hastings, James, ed. A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924.

Witherington, Ben III. Women and the Genesis of Christianity. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Commentaries

Bovon, Francois. Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50. Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Fortress Press, 2002.

Chumbley, Kenneth L. The Gospel of Matthew. 1999.

Ellis, E. Earle. The Gospel of Luke. The Century Bible, New Edition. Nelson, 1966.

Evans, Craig A. Luke. New International Biblical Commentary. Hendrickson, 1990.

Filson, Floyd V. The Gospel According to St. Matthew. Harper's New Testament Commentaries. Harper & Row, 1960.

France, R.T. The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Eerdmans, 1985.

Keener, Craig S. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Keener, Craig S. A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. Eerdmans, 1999.

Manson, William. The Gospel of Luke. Moffatt's New Testament Commentary. Harper and Brothers, 1930.

Marshall, I. Howard. Commentary on Luke. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Eerdmans, 1978.

Morris, Leon. Luke. Eerdmans, 1988 (revised edition).

Nolland, John. Luke 1 – 9:20. Word Biblical Commentary. Word Books, 1989.

Robinson, Theodore H. The Gospel of Matthew. Moffatt's New Testament Commentary. Harper and Brothers, 1927.

Stein, Robert H. Luke. The New American Commentary. Broadman, 1992.

Summers, Ray. Commentary on Luke. Word Books, 1972.

Wright, Tom. Luke for Everyone. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2001.

Wright, Tom. Matthew for Everyone, Part 1, Chapters 1-15. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002.