

A SAVIOR *for* ALL PEOPLE

A Study of Luke's Gospel



LESSON 2

Luke 1:57-2:52

Information for Teacher

There is still a good bit of text to cover this week, but since there is no background (authorship, date, themes, etc.) to cover this week, hopefully you can feel a little less rushed and be able to engage the class in discussion more.

This week's text will be a good time to practice staying in Luke. We're always tempted to run to Matthew to "fill out" the birth of Jesus, but Luke and Matthew have different areas of focus that affect how they tell the story and what details they choose to include. These are significant and helpful in telling us how each writer wants us to view Jesus.

Opening Discussion

- *Describe a Christmas/nativity scene or pageant that has stuck in your memory.*

Introduction

This week's lesson continues the story of last week. After reading about the song Mary sings after discovering her son will be the Savior, we now begin to see all the predictions play out. John the Baptist, predicted earlier in Luke 1, is now born and his father sings a song about him similar to Mary's song about Jesus.

Then we come to the story of the birth of Jesus – a favorite story in the Christian faith. In it, we read of the glory and the humility that both surround the birth of our Savior. Luke tells this story in a way that highlights the humility of Jesus and his place alongside the poor and destitute. Matthew chooses to highlight elegance and glory (e.g., the visit by the wise men bringing elegant gifts). Luke wants us to remember that Jesus was born in a filthy place reserved for animals and that the birth was first announced not to the powerful, but to shepherds.

Luke is not finished telling us about the special place this baby boy will have. Next he tells us of a dramatic visit to the temple, in which Jesus' parents both fulfilled their obedience to the Law and received a blessing for their new boy.

We end with the only Gospel story of Jesus between birth and adulthood, where pre-teen Jesus pays a visit to the temple and begins to own his identity as the Son of God.

The Biblical Text

Luke 1:57-66 (Birth of John the Baptist)

- The neighbors interpret John the Baptist's birth as the **Lord showing Elizabeth mercy**.
- It was **customary to name children after their grandfather or father**, so Zechariah would be an acceptable and expected name.
- Somehow, even though Zechariah was rendered mute earlier, **his wife knows the baby should be named John**.
- Elizabeth has to **buck the expectations of her peers** to name her son according to the will of God.
- Zechariah's reaction to the naming of John is to **praise God** – a common action we see repeatedly through these birth stories.
- The people are then **filled with awe** – another common reaction.
- John the Baptist's birth **inspires talk throughout the region** (the hill country).
- Note: **"the Lord's hand was with him"** (1:66) – another common statement we'll notice again later.

- *When have you had to go against peer expectations to follow the will of God?*
- *What kinds of things generally inspire awe or praise in you?*

Luke 1:67-80 (Zechariah's Song)

- Luke **paired** the predictions to Zechariah and Mary. By including Zechariah's song, he is again **pairing** them, having recounted Mary's song earlier. (Later he will pair Simeon and Anna at the temple.)
- Zechariah interprets John the Baptist's birth in light of the **whole history of God's work** among his people.
 - The birth of John the Baptist means the Lord "has come to his people and redeemed them" (1:68).
- Zechariah sees John the Baptist as evidence of **"salvation"** or **"rescue"** from enemies (1:71, 74).
 - For a people engaged in a conflict with the Roman Empire, talk of salvation or rescue from enemies was very tangible.
 - The births of John the Baptist and Jesus are the beginning of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.
 - When Zechariah talks about his son, he feels hope.
- Zechariah sees his son as one who will **prepare the way for Jesus** (1:76).
- After this song, John the Baptist **disappears** from the story until adulthood (1:80).

- *Which part(s) of Zechariah's response would have stirred its original hearers? Which part(s) stir you?*

Luke 2:1-20 (Birth of Jesus)

- The Jews are living under such **oppressive control** by the Romans that Mary, close to delivering a baby, was forced to take a trip to register for the census, a tool often used to extort money from the poor and marginalized.
- Mary and Joseph end up in a **stable**, because there is no guest room available for them.
 - **“Inn” is not the best translation** for where Joseph and Mary tried to stay. Don’t think “hotel” – that word is indeed used elsewhere in Luke (10:34), so Luke knows how to say “hotel.” In reality, this means a **guest room** (see Luke 22:12) where travelers could stay. So Joseph and Mary could not find a household able or willing to take them in.
- Luke **doesn’t tell** the birth of Jesus **as an elegant event**:
 - Jesus is placed in a manger. Far from the cute scenes we’ve come to imagine, the Savior of the world spends his first days in an animal **feeding trough**.
 - Shepherds, a **low class of people**, hear the news in the middle of the night.
- Although not physically elegant, the event is **still glorious**:
 - First, the **glory of the Lord shines** and an **angel appears** (1:9).
 - The angel tells the shepherds that Jesus’ birth is **good news for all the people**. (Remember one of the themes and indeed the title of this series: Jesus is the Savior of all people, not just a privileged few.)
 - Normally, a birth that is called “good news” is that of the Roman ruler (Caesar). Now, in a direct affront to the Roman rule, Jesus’ birth is announced as “good news.”
 - After giving the shepherds instructions on how to find Jesus, the angel is joined by a **full host** of angels who sing “Glory to God...” (1:14).
- The shepherds find Jesus in the manger, and when word spread, people were **“amazed.”** (Remember the reaction to John the Baptist’s birth?)

- *Recall the nativity scene or pageant you mentioned earlier. Does our image of Jesus’ birth match up with Scripture?*
- *What elements of the birth of Jesus do you remember that don’t show up here? (Edict to kill boys, visit by wise men, etc.)*
- *What does Luke’s account of this story offer for us that other accounts might not?*
- *Are we prepared to accept a Savior who was born and placed in a feeding trough and then visited by lowly shepherds? In what ways has Christianity conditioned us to expect something more elegant?*

Luke 1:21-40 (Following the Law at the Temple)

- Joseph and Mary were good Jews, and it is now time for them to **follow the laws** about childbirth.
 - **Circumcision** (Lev 12:1-3)
 - 8th day
 - Naming happens the same day of circumcision (John the Baptist’s naming on the day of his birth is a rarity).
 - **Purification** (Lev 12:4-8)
 - 40 days after birth if baby is boy
 - Joseph and Mary offer two doves or pigeons
 - The Law specifies a young goat as the primary option.

- Doves and pigeons are for people who are too poor to offer a goat.
- Joseph and Mary are obviously **not well off financially**, adding to their social stigma (unwed parents, now they can't give the preferred sacrifice).
- **Consecration/Dedication** (Exod 13:2-14)
 - Every firstborn male
 - As a sign of what God has done for his people in the past
- Simeon speaks a song or poem (the third such instance in these birth stories).
- Simeon views Jesus as “a light for revelation **to the Gentiles**” (2:32). Again, Jesus is the **Savior of all people**.
- Simeon's picture isn't all roses.
 - Jesus will cause both **falling and rising** (2:34). This is a reminder that because of Jesus, **fortunes will be reversed**.
 - A sword will pierce Mary's soul (2:35). Most think this is a reference to Mary having to **watch her son be executed**.
- Until now, Simeon's faith has been about **waiting**. Now that Jesus is on the scene, faith is about **following**.
- Next we come to Anna, a sort of super-spiritual temple attendant and prophet (2:36-37).
- Anna views Jesus' birth as hastening the “**redemption of Jerusalem**” (1:37).
- Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary did “**everything required by the Law** of the Lord” (1:39).
- Luke finishes this story by telling us **three behind-the-scenes things** about Jesus (2:40):
 - He became strong.
 - He was filled with wisdom.
 - The grace of God was on him.

- *Tell a story about some elderly brother or sister who has encouraged you with his/her spiritual service.*
- *Is your faith in the “waiting” or “following” stage? Where does it need to be right now?*

Luke 1:41-52 (At the Temple Again)

- Again, Luke points out that Mary and Joseph had a **habit of following the Law**. Every year they made the trip to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover, “according to the custom” (2:41-42).
- It is **not unimaginable** that in a large group of travelers who all took care of each other and each other's children during the journey, a **twelve-year-old boy would get lost** and not be noticed for a whole day.
- Joseph and Mary are certainly **surprised** to see their twelve-year-old sitting in the temple and interacting with the teachers.
- People who heard Jesus are “**amazed**” (1:47).

- His parents, while not “amazed,” are “**astonished**” to find him in the temple. Whereas others are amazed (positive) at Jesus’ understanding, Jesus’ parents are “astonished” (negative) and scold him for the anguish he has caused.
- **Jesus’ reaction** is interesting: “Didn’t you know I had to be in **my Father’s house?**” (2:49).
 - Jesus is beginning to **own his identity** as the Son of God.
- Despite this incident of going against his parents, Jesus was overall an “**obedient**” child (1:51). Luke won’t have us believe Jesus was a rebellious child.
- Again, Luke concludes with a few items about Jesus (2:52):
 - He grew in **wisdom and stature**.
 - He grew in **favor with God and people**.

- *What do we learn about Jesus from this story?*
- *Parents: what do you learn from this story?*
- *What is Jesus’ sense of his mission here (see v. 49)? What is your sense of mission?*
- *Joseph and Mary were models of obedience. Though the old Law was insufficient and we now live under a new covenant, how can we show that obedience is still important?*

Application

- *Today we read repeatedly of people being “amazed” when they hear about or encounter Jesus. What is our reaction? Amazement, apathy, something else?*
- *If amazement, how do you show it?*
- *How would you feel about putting your child in an animal feeding trough because that was the only option? How do you react to inconveniences in God’s plan?*
- *In what ways does Jesus not conform to people’s expectations in these stories? In what ways does he not conform to your expectations?*
- *After the visit from the shepherds (and subsequent around-the-town buzz) and after Jesus is found in the temple, Luke tells us that Mary “treasured all these things in her heart” (2:19, 51). Mothers (if there are several in your class), what does this mean?*

Next Week’s Text

Luke 3:1-38 (all of chapter 3)