

# IN EXPECTATION OF MESSIAH

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LUKE 1-2

WILDERNESS CAMP

**LUKE 1-2**

**IN EXPECTATION  
OF MESSIAH**

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**STUDY NOTES • 2022**



# WELCOME

Dear Young Person,

Welcome to Wilderness Camp 2022! We are delighted that you have chosen to join us and are looking forward to a motivating study of Luke 1-2 followed by an exciting camp together. Wilderness Camp is designed to help each of us put aside quiet time regularly - away from all the distractions in our lives - and spend time alone with God and His Word.

As you are no doubt aware, to meet this aim, the Camp involves a personal commitment by each of us as attendees to study Luke 1-2. These notes will help in accomplishing that - they are easy to read yet filled with fascinating insights into this incredible story of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The Camp will be structured around interactive workshops and discussion groups, rather than a series of talks, so the success of the camp relies upon your preparation.

## What does this mean for me?

As an attendee at Wilderness Camp, you are expected to:

- Prioritise attendance at the **Preparatory Workshops** and **Mentor Sessions**.
- Listen to either the series on **In the Fulness of Time** by Bro John Martin, OR **In Expectation of Messiah** by Bro Steve Hornhardt, available on the website.
- Study Luke 1-2 using the **Camp Notes**, as well as any other materials you may find helpful.
- **Mark your study** into your Bible.

With that done, we will all be well prepared for the activities at the Camp!

Of course, there are far more insights into Luke 1-2 than could be captured in these Notes. There are many additional resources available from within and without the Christadelphian community; some of these will be placed on our Resources page, should you like to utilise them. All of the study resources can be found at [wilderness-camp.com/studyresources](http://wilderness-camp.com/studyresources).

We would like to thank the many Brothers and Sisters who have contributed to these notes and pray that God will remember their work for good.

We trust this will be an exciting opportunity to study Luke 1-2. We recommend you put aside time regularly for your study. Please get in touch with us early if you would like any assistance planning how you can complete the study.

We look forward to sharing Wilderness Camp 2022 with you, God willing.

In the Hope of our Lord's return,

*The Wilderness Camp Committee*  
*January 2022*

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# RESOURCES

## USING THESE NOTES

Following the background content, these notes work through Luke 1-2, section by section. Each verse is printed from the KJV text, after which a key word or two may be briefly reviewed, with the Greek word and the Strong's Concordance reference number, followed by a definition of the word. Where the source is not mentioned for these word meanings, a combination of Strong's Concordance and Thayer's Lexicon have generally been used. This is followed by exposition of each key phrase in each verse, along with historical notes and insights from other passages of Scripture. You will notice a broad range of additional sources mentioned throughout - these are provided for anyone who finds a particular aspect interesting and would like to chase it further.

## OTHER CHRISTADELPHIAN WORKS

- *A Life of Jesus*, Bro Melva Purkis. Book 1 (Chapters 1-5)
- *Nazareth Revisited*, Bro Robert Roberts, Chapters 1-10
- *In the Fulness of Time - Preparations for the Birth of the Lord*, 1986 Glenlock Bible Camp notes (based on notes by Bro John Martin)
- *In Expectation of the Messiah*, 1983 Salisbury Special Effort Study Notes (see Study Resources page on the website)

## PEOPLE

Talk to older people in your meeting, friends and family about what you're studying! Study groups are also a fantastic way to learn and help each other.

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## KEY ABBREVIATIONS

mg = margin

s/w = same word

Heb = Hebrew

Gk = Greek

Vine = Vine's Expository Dictionary

Thay. = Thayer's Lexicon

Str. = Strong's Concordance

Bull. = Bullinger's Lexicon

Cp = compare

OT = Old Testament

NT = New Testament

LXX = The Septuagint OT

A scenic view of a coastal town built on a hillside overlooking the sea. The foreground shows a rocky shore with dark, jagged rocks and a rope. The town features numerous buildings with terracotta roofs and a prominent domed church. The sky is a clear, bright blue with a few wispy clouds. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and picturesque.

# SETTING THE SCENE

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*The people that walked  
in darkness have seen  
a great light: they that dwell  
in the land of the shadow  
of death, upon them hath  
the light shined.*

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**ISAIAH 9:2**

# INTRODUCTION

We have a fascinating set of events to consider together this year – a narrative rich in its own history, yet strangely familiar to our times. It is of course the story of the birth of our Lord and the times in which he came.

When we enter upon the world of 6BC, just before Jesus was born, we find a world in waiting. Prophets had, for centuries, predicted the coming of the Messiah, or ‘the Christ’ as it is in Greek. But it was not into a world of outstanding spirituality or national glory that our Lord was born. Instead, it was to a nation torn by political rivals, oppressed by religious leaders, and overcome with secular ambitions. Many looked to Messiah as the deliverer from Roman tyranny. Others had lost sight altogether and succumbed to spiritual apathy. It has been well observed that, *‘the political unsettlement, the shamelessness of crime, the sense of secular exhaustion, the wide-spread Messianic expectation, marked “the fulness of time”.*’ (Cambridge Bible Commentary on Lk 1:80).

How similar is the world in which we live! A world governed by ambitious politicians, haunted by crime, worn out by disease, and generally united by apathy towards God.

The respected New Testament scholar, Alfred Edersheim, writes eloquently on the times into which our Lord was born:

*“The general conception which the Rabbis had formed of the Messiah differed totally from what was presented by the Prophet of Nazareth... All that Israel hoped for, was national restoration and glory. Everything else was but a means to these ends; the Messiah himself only the grand instrument in attaining them.”*

(The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Bk2, Ch5, p160-164).

What a shock Jewry would receive when the Messiah finally did appear!

But this was not true of everyone living at that time. There were a few who clung to God’s promises of a Saviour, who waited for his salvation, and lived in expectation of the Messiah. And it is Luke’s Gospel that beautifully recounts the dedication, the faithfulness, and the endurance of this small community, as they waited for God to send His Son.

Now, 2000 years later, we find ourselves in a very similar situation. Christ is soon to return. We are waiting for *‘the fulness of the Gentiles’* to come. Prophetic forecasts are coming to fruition all around us. The nations are aligning; God’s Son is at the door. And so, our hope and prayer is that in our preparation and time spent together at Wilderness Camp 2022, we may be inspired to live more resolutely *in Expectation of Messiah*.



# THE TIMES OF JESUS' BIRTH

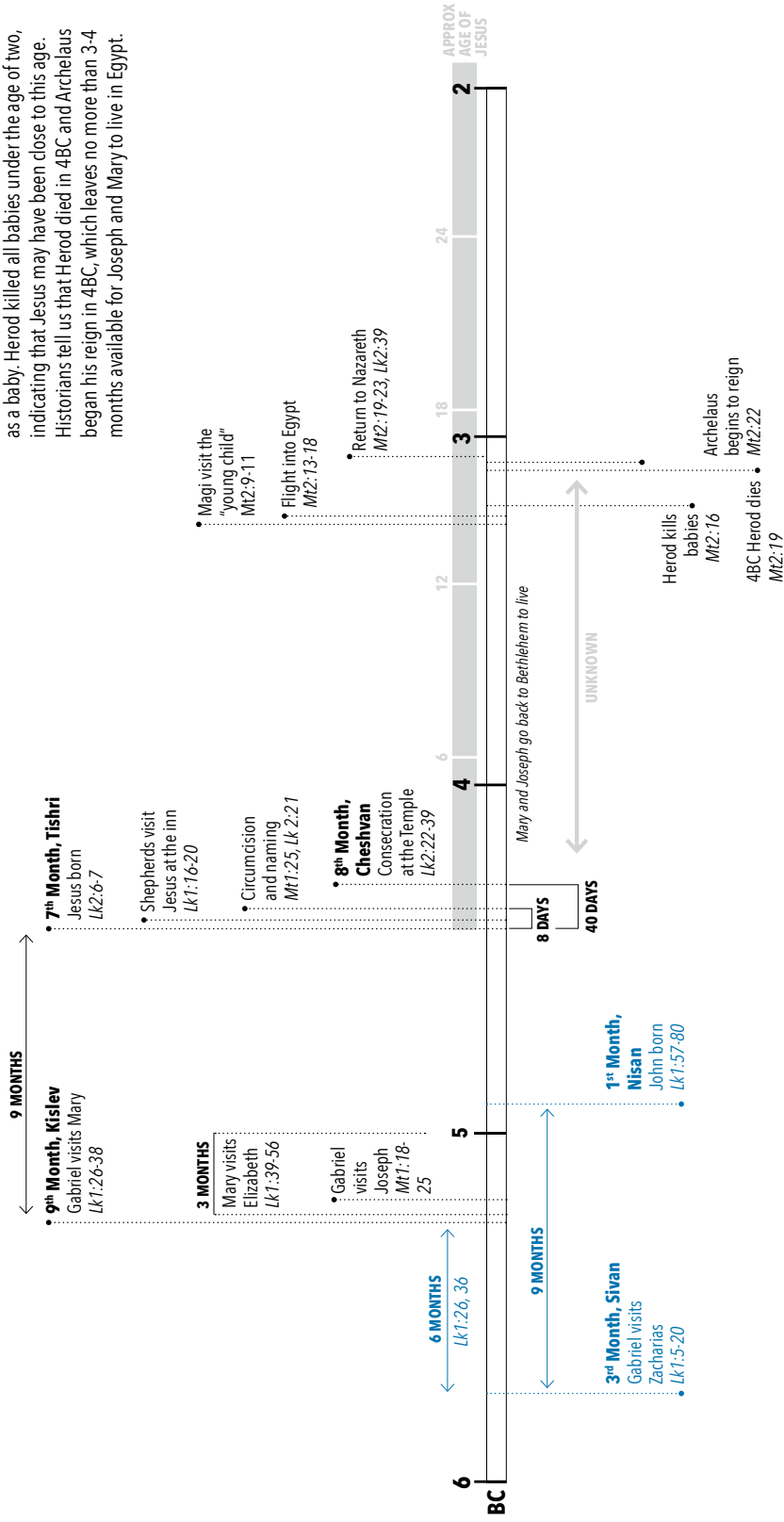
In looking at the days leading up to the birth of Christ, it is useful to construct a chronology. This of course comes with its complications, given that approximately 2000 years of history have elapsed between the events we are studying and our own day. A reasonable amount of information, however, can be derived from Scripture, and this can then be anchored on historical landmarks to produce a timeline of the events around the birth of our Lord.

Of the four Gospel records, only Matthew and Luke record events from his early years. The table below shows the sequence of events described in Mt 1-2 and Lk1-2 and proposes dates for each event. The following page then provides further detail on the key events.

Date (BC)	Event	Matthew	Luke
03/6	Course of Abia serves in Temple		1:5,8
03/6	Gabriel visits Zacharias		1:5-20
09/6	Gabriel visits Mary		1:26-38
09/6	Mary visits Elisabeth and stays with her for 3 months		1:39-56
09/6	Gabriel speaks to Joseph	1:18-25	
01/5	Birth of John the Baptist		1:57-80
07/5	Mary and Joseph journey to Bethlehem		2:1-5
07/5	Jesus is born		2:6-7
07/5	Angel appears to the shepherds		2:8-15
07/5	Shepherds visit Mary and baby Jesus in the manger		2:16-20
8 days after birth 07/5	Circumcision and naming of Jesus	1:25	2:21
07/5	Mary, Joseph, and Jesus relocate to a house, most likely in Bethlehem		
40 days after birth 09/5	Consecration of the firstborn in the Temple, blessing of Simeon and Anna		2:22-39
09/5	Mary, Joseph and Jesus go back to the house in Bethlehem		
	Visit of the Magi	2:1-2	
9/4 ?	The Magi arrive and see Herod	2:1-8	
9/4 ?	The Magi visit Jesus and bring gifts	2:9-11	
9/4 ?	The Magi return to their country	2:12	
9/4 ?	Flight into Egypt	2:13-18	
9/4 ?	Herod kills the babies	2:16	
Late 4BC ?	Herod dies		
Late 4BC	Archelaus begins to reign	2:22	
Late 4BC	Return from Egypt to Nazareth	2:19-23	2:39
	The childhood of Christ		2:40
	Annual visits to the Temple		2:41
8AD	Visit to the Temple at 12 years of age		2:42-50
	Subject to Joseph and Mary in Nazareth		2:51-52

# TIMELINE OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS

The time between returning to Bethlehem after presenting Jesus at the Temple and the visit of the magi is unknown, however Jesus is likely older than 12 months as he is referred to as "the young child", not as a baby. Herod killed all babies under the age of two, indicating that Jesus may have been close to this age. Historians tell us that Herod died in 4BC and Archelaus began his reign in 4BC, which leaves no more than 3-4 months available for Joseph and Mary to live in Egypt.



## How do we know when Jesus was born?

It is difficult to ascertain an exact year in which Jesus was born upon which all historians and scholars agree. There are, however, several historical landmarks mentioned in the Gospels:

1. Death of Herod the Great (Lk 1:5) and the ascension of Archelaus (Mt 2:22)
2. The Course of Abia's turn in the Temple (Lk 1:5,8)
3. The four Passovers in the ministry of Jesus (Jn 2:13, 5:1; 6:4; 11:55)
4. The Census (Lk 2:1-2)

Each of these historical landmarks is discussed very briefly below, but considered in more detail in Appendix 1 (p 122).

### Death of Herod the Great and ascension of Archelaus

In looking for **the year of Christ's birth**, the death of Herod the Great is one of the most significant historical landmarks mentioned in the Gospels, given Jesus was born before Herod died. Concerning this, the consensus view is that Herod died in 4BC, meaning Jesus was born in 5-6BC, shortly after Archelaus commenced his reign.

### The Course of Abia's turn in the Temple

In looking for the **time of year** that Jesus was born, we know that there were 6 months between John the Baptist's conception and that of Jesus (Lk 1:36). Consequently, if we can identify the time of year John was born, then Jesus was born 6 months later.

As explained in Appendix 1, this leads to two options, with Jesus being born in either the 7<sup>th</sup> month, Tishri, or six months later. The 7<sup>th</sup> month, during the summer months, appears the most likely time for Jesus to have been born. That is around September/October, not the conventional December 25<sup>th</sup>.

### The Length of Jesus Ministry

Another way to arrive at the time of year in which the Lord was born is to jump to the end of his life on earth and then work backwards, seeing we know which month he died in. We know that Jesus' ministry lasted 3½ years, based on the Passovers listed in John and the 70-Week Prophecy. Given that his ministry ended with his crucifixion in the 1<sup>st</sup> month, Abib, it follows that it started 3½ years earlier, in the 7<sup>th</sup> month, Tishri. If we take the 30-years age at which Jesus commenced his ministry to be a relatively precise indication, then this would also lead to the 7<sup>th</sup> month being the time of year for Jesus' birth.

### The Census

In Luke 2:1-5 a census was taken by Cyrenius, who lived 51BC - 21AD. Much work has been done in an attempt to credit or discredit Bible chronology on the basis of this census, and this is briefly discussed in these notes on Lk 2:1-2, p 80. However, due to the lack of historical data on the census, it is of little use in pin-pointing exactly the year or time of year in which the Lord was born, and it will therefore be passed over for now.

### Conclusion

Whilst these clues these do not secure an undisputed estimate, the most likely proposition is that he was born **in summer around the seventh month Tishri, in the year 5 BC.**



# LUKE'S PROLOGUE

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LUKE 1:1-4

# THE PROLOGUE TO LUKE'S GOSPEL (1:1-4)

## A UNIQUE INTRODUCTION

Luke's Gospel opens in a unique way.

- No other Gospel writer begins with a prologue; Luke does.
- No other Gospel writer informs us of the recipient's name; Luke does.
- No other Gospel, in fact, no other section of Scripture rivals the quality of the Greek prose seen in Luke's prologue.

Whilst all three other Gospels commence with a description in some form of the origins of the Lord, Luke first has a 'prologue'. A prologue, from the Greek *pro-logos*, meaning 'before word', is simply a piece of writing that precedes the first chapter of a book and is separate from the main story. It may introduce background details or characters that have some connection to the story, but whose relevance may not be immediately obvious. Such is the case with Luke's.

It comes as little surprise, then, that our understanding of these short four verses can have a dramatic effect on our appreciation of the remainder of Luke's Gospel; and not only that, but upon his sequel as well, the book of Acts. Of particular relevance to us is the fact that within this short prologue is a key that will explain why it is that Luke described the birth and boyhood of the Lord the way he did – and cast light on the various differences in the early chapters of Luke, when compared with the other Gospels.

## THE FOCUS OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

### Four Gospel Records, Four Gospel Writers

It has often been asked, why are there four Gospel accounts? Couldn't God have instructed one writer to compile a 'perfect' volume detailing the complete life and work of Jesus Christ?

This is a very good question, and it unlocks a fascinating aspect of the life and work of God's Son. Of course, God could have arranged for the record of His Son's life to be preserved however He chose. Obviously, He chose the best way; the question is simply whether we understand it.

The answer lies in the *focus* of each Gospel. The Gospels record the life, death and resurrection of God's only begotten Son. Yet, when Jesus Christ came, he came not only as the Son of God; he came as the King of Israel, he came as the Servant of Yahweh, he came as the Priest of the Most High God, and he came as the Judge of all the earth. God chose to use the pens of four different men, each with their varying backgrounds, to depict His Son in each of these ways.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the subject of these notes, however, it is an extremely profitable exercise to explore this concept further as it colours the Gospel records with many more shades of meaning. *The Four Faces in the Gospels* by Bro Roger Lewis, is a good overview (available on [christadelphianbibletalks.com](http://christadelphianbibletalks.com)).

## Luke the Man

Little is known of Luke, yet that which is known provides a great deal of insight into the type of man he was. He was an associate of Paul (Phm v24; 2Tim 4:11), who was evidently very dear to him and to the Ecclesias throughout the word, as he is termed, '*Luke, the beloved physician*' in Col 4:14. He travelled with Paul throughout his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Journeys and on to Rome.<sup>2</sup> He was, perhaps, the very last companion of Paul before his death in Rome (2Tim 4:11).

Luke's profession is an interesting one. As a doctor he saw the grave effects of mortality upon helpless individuals. Sympathy and care became characteristic of this man and his writing. He has been noted for his emphasis on the poor, his frequent reference to women, and his use of medical terminology throughout his Gospel. Luke looked at life through the eyes of a physician, and he wrote his Gospel with the pen of a doctor.

## Luke's Gospel

We might ask what effect this would have upon the account of Christ's life. Why did God choose a doctor to write this Gospel? In Old Testament times the 'doctor' for the children of Israel was the priest, as is seen in Lev 13-14, when instructing the Israelites how to deal with leprosy. The priest was both the 'spiritual' and 'physical' doctor in Israel.

How then would we expect Luke to portray the Lord Jesus in his Gospel? When we take a look a theme begins to emerge:

- The first main character is '*a certain priest*' (1:5).
- Luke mentions '*the course of Abia*' (1:5), one of the 24 courses of priests.
- Elisabeth was '*of the daughters of Aaron*' (1:5).
- Zacharias and Elisabeth are presented as the very best that the Aaronic priesthood could offer (1:6).
- Zacharias' first work is to perform '*the priest's office*' (1:8).
- Following '*the custom of the priest's office*' (1:9).
- There's the burning of incense (1:9).
- In the Temple (1:9).
- Prayer (1:10)... at the time of incense (1:10).
- The layout of the altar of incense in the Holy Place is referred to (1:11).
- '*The presence of God*' is mentioned (1:19).
- The shepherds saw '*the glory of the Lord*' (2:9) - usually reserved for the Most Holy.
- Later, the Lord's first visit to the Temple (1:22) involving his presentation to the priest (Lev 12:6).
- And his second recorded visit to the Temple (2:42).

And what is fascinating about that list - centred around the priesthood as it is - is that Luke, and only Luke, will mention each one of those details in his account. And that is only taking into account the first two chapters.

So now we might ask the question, who might we expect Luke to address his Gospel to? Now we finally get to Luke's prologue, and the man to whom he addresses it.

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<sup>2</sup> This is evidenced by the sections in Acts where Luke switches to the first-person pronouns ('we') rather than the third ('they'). They are termed the 'we passages': Acts 16:10-1; 20:5-16; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16.

## UNDERSTANDING THE PROLOGUE

**1-4** *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.*

Luke set out to 'write in order' an account of the things believed by the followers of Jesus Christ in his day. It has been well suggested that when he put pen to parchment in writing the book of Luke, he envisaged already a second volume. But by the time he reached the ascension of the Lord in Luke 24, the scroll would be full, and Luke would have to take up a new scroll for the continuation of his story. As it stands, the Gospel of Luke is already the longest book in the New Testament, with Acts a close second.<sup>3</sup> Both volumes he would address to a man by the name of *Theophilus* (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1).

### So, who was Theophilus?

Theophilus has been variously described as 'A Roman official', 'The mysterious Theophilus', 'Luke's patron who funded his writing', 'Paul's judge in Rome' and 'A fictitious name, referring to any "friend of God" who reads it'. The basic question for each of these propositions is, where is the case for it?

Some can be easily dismissed, such as the proposal that Theophilus is a fictitious name representing any faithful reader. Firstly, why should Luke use this when no other Gospel writer does? It seems far more likely that the name is that of a man whom Luke addresses when he says, 'to write unto **thee**...'. In addition to this, there is no logical explanation for the use of the honorific title 'most excellent' in Lk 1:3 and its subsequent absence in Acts 1:1.

There is a far more satisfactory answer: one whose evidence may be found from both within and outside the book of Luke, and which harmonizes perfectly with the grand theme of Luke already presented: that of his over-arching focus on the priesthood.

In Ch 16, Luke records a parable spoken by Jesus but captured only in Luke's Gospel. It is the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. It is beyond the scope of these notes to expound the parable, but in essence its thrust is as follows:

- There was 'a certain rich man' living in appalling luxury (v19).
- Outside his gate lived a poor beggar named Lazarus (v20), the only man ever named in a parable.
- In the story, both men die and, in the fashion of the Jewish afterlife as recorded by Josephus<sup>4</sup>, the beggar is taken to Abraham's bosom, a place of rest and comfort, whereas the corrupt Rich Man is conveyed to hell (v22-23).
- A discussion ensues in which the Rich Man pleads to Abraham for relief from the heated torment, but he is told that he has already had his opportunity (v24-26).

<sup>3</sup> Ed: R. T. France, *Luke*, in Teach the Text Commentary Series, Introduction to Luke, p 1.

<sup>4</sup> Flavius Josephus, *An extract out of Josephus' discourse to the Greeks concerning Hades*.

But then the parable becomes alarmingly relevant to the Lord's own day:

- The Rich Man then asks for Lazarus to be sent to his father's house, '*For I have five brethren*' to give them an opportunity to repent (v27-28).

Lazarus was a real man, but he wasn't the only real man mentioned in v27-28. There was '*a certain man*' who lived in Judaea at the time who was filthy rich, who had five brothers, the names of which we know.

- **The Rich Man** was Caiaphas, the High Priest at the time of Christ's ministry, who was '*in every respect, to excel all other priests, and if he were poor, the rest were to contribute, so as to secure him an independent fortune*'.<sup>5</sup> As High Priest, he was attired in purple and fine linen – an unmistakable clue to the listeners (Ex 39:27-29)!
- **His five brothers-in-law**, the sons of Annas, are named for us by the historian of the day, Josephus: Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophilus, Matthias and Jonathas, each of whom were later High Priest.<sup>6</sup>

The remainder of the parable then handed across a severe inditement to the priesthood:

The Rich Man was told that if his family would not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they would not listen to Lazarus (v29). The Rich Man pleads, '*Nay, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent*' (v30). The reply is devastating: if they will not listen to the Bible, '*neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*' (v31).

That is exactly what happened. The Jewish leaders saw a man by the name of Lazarus rise from the dead (Jn 11:1,43-45). But instead of repenting, they resolved to kill Lazarus again (Jn 12:9-10), and not only him – but the man who had raised him (Jn 11:45-46, 53). Notice who it was who resolved to kill Jesus for raising Lazarus in Jn 11 – none other than the 'chief priests' (v47) and their ring-leader Caiaphas, the Rich Man himself (v49)!

So why was Luke the only one to record this parable? Why, other than to tell a certain man by the name of *Theophilus* that the priesthood of which he was a part is doomed?!

### **Luke's Gospel in Perspective**

If we are to take the suggestion that the Theophilus to whom Luke writes was indeed Theophilus the son of Annas, there are now a few more details that fall into place.

At one time, Theophilus was High Priest (AD 37-41<sup>7</sup>), a position appointed by the Roman Governor of Syria at the time.<sup>8</sup> Given the position of priesthood was conferred by the Roman Governor, it brought with it the official honorific title of '*Most Excellent*' (Lk 1:3), also used of the Roman Procurators Felix (Acts 23:26; 24:3) and Festus (Acts 26:25), who like the High Priest at that time, also reported to the Governor of Syria. Later, when Theophilus was no longer High Priest, Luke removed the official title in the book of Acts (Acts 1:1).

If you were to go back and read over the list of details and allusions relating to the priesthood and temple in Luke 1-2 (p 13), you will now see why, for example, it mattered to

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<sup>5</sup> Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, p 64-65.

<sup>6</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk 20, Section 8, footnote (Published by Whiston, p 437).

<sup>7</sup> Bruce, FF 1969. *New Testament History*. Ch 5, Part 4, footnote 33, p64.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce, FF 1969. *New Testament History*. Ch 5, Part 4, p65.



Theophilus which side of the altar the angel stood on - because Theophilus knew exactly the layout of the Temple!

As we continue to read through Luke, there are further details that correlate with his focus on priesthood and the appropriateness of Theophilus the High Priest being the recipient:

- Theophilus was well acquainted with the people of Lk 3:1-2, into whose world John the Baptist came.
- Only Luke informs us of Jesus' age when he began his ministry (Luke 3:23), which happens to be the age at which a priest began his duties (Num 4:3).
- The Parable of the Kind Samaritan is found only in Luke (Ch 11). Consider the inditement upon the staunch pride of the priest and Levite!
- The NIV Study Bible states that when Zacharias had concluded his service in the Temple, in Lk 1:22, he would ordinarily have conveyed the Priestly Blessing of Num 6:24-26. But he couldn't. The priesthood of Aaron was unable to bless.
- The Gospel of Luke concludes with another priest - the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, who lifted up his hands and *could* bless his people (Lk 24:50).

Thus, in his Gospel, Luke will show Theophilus that, not only did Jesus Christ come as the Son of God; he was also the Anointed Priest. Throughout his Gospel he would show the compassion of the Lord, his desire to heal<sup>9</sup>, to save<sup>10</sup> and his care for individuals.<sup>11</sup> Luke would paint the portrait of the perfect priest; and the outline he would sketch in the first two chapters on the birth and boyhood of Messiah.

Finally, Luke would place a stamp of authenticity upon his Gospel, designed specifically for Theophilus. He would include a first-hand witness to the resurrection, and therefore to the truth of Jesus' claim to priesthood. Joanna, the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, is only mentioned in Luke's Gospel. She is introduced in Lk 8:3 as one of the women who served Christ during his ministry, and the only other reference is Lk 24:10 when she witnessed the empty tomb and received angelic confirmation of his resurrection. It so happens that Theophilus knew a certain woman by the name of Joanna: she was his granddaughter. A stone ossuary found in 1984, now held by the Israeli Department of Antiquities, bears the inscription: *'Yehohanah, Yehohanah daughter of Yehohanan, son of Theophilus the high priest' - i.e. Joanna, the granddaughter of Theophilus the High Priest.*

### To write unto thee in order

In order      Gk *kathexes* G2517 = 'in sequence' (Str).

This is often used to suggest that Luke writes everything in chronological order, however this may not quite be the case:

*'Readers often assume that he is referring especially to putting events in the right **chronological order**, but there are other types of order - thematic order, a satisfying literary structure, and so on. Luke is a sophisticated writer who knows how to tell a good story, and putting the elements of the story in chronological sequence may not always be the most effective way of presenting it.'*<sup>12</sup>

What a story Luke was about to tell! What a theme he had to develop!

<sup>9</sup> Gk *iaomai* (heal/cure) and its derivatives occ. 16x in Lk, but only 3-5x in each of the other Gospels.

<sup>10</sup> The word *sozo*, or save, will turn up some 27x, almost twice that of any other Gospel.

<sup>11</sup> A doctor/priest cares for individuals. Gk *iaos* occ. 36x in Lk, but only 15 in Mt, and 3 in Mk and Jn.

<sup>12</sup> Ed: R. T. France, *Luke*, in Teach the Text Commentary Series, Introduction to Luke, p 6.



ANNOUNCEMENT  
OF THE  
FORERUNNER

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LUKE 1:5-25

# ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOHN'S BIRTH (1:5-25)

The invigorating return from exile in the days of Zerubbabel had sown amongst the nation a spirit of enthusiasm, hope and a determination to return Yahweh. Opposition was prayerfully and courageously silenced, and the restored captives unitedly worked together to rebuild the destroyed Jerusalem. But as time went on, the nation of Israel had fallen into a state of apathy and corruption. The prophets Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi had zealously endeavoured to stir the people up, with a short-lived result. As we begin our narrative in Luke 1, we are entering the record after a period of 400 years of no open vision from God (Mic 3:6), where the Jews were oppressed by the control of the Romans, internal strife and division was rife with the rise of extremist groups such as the Zealots, and the people were guided spiritually by a group of religious leaders who were corrupt to their core.

Against this backdrop, we are introduced to a faithful remnant who were earnestly waiting for God to reveal Himself in the birth of Messiah. It was to Zacharias and Elisabeth, an elderly Levite couple, that the angel Gabriel appeared with an incredible message.

**5** *There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.*

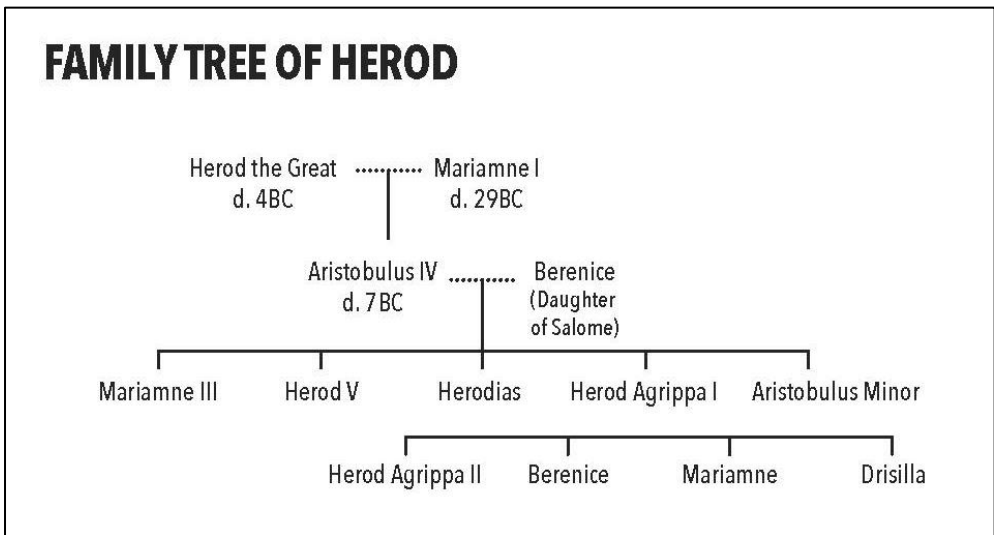
Zacharias Gk *Zacharias* G2197 - From Heb. *Zachariah* = 'Yah hath remembered' (Str).

Elisabeth Gk *Elisabet* G1665 - From Heb. *Elisheva* = 'the oath of God' (Thay)

## There was in the days of Herod

Both Luke (in Lk 1:5) and Matthew (in Mt 2:1) draw attention to the fact that the events of Christ's birth begin in the days of Herod. There are several men of this name and title mentioned throughout the New Testament, all of whom are regarded as horrific men of a godless disposition. The Herod of Luke 1 is none other than Herod the Great, the patriarch of this wicked family:

Figure 1: Family Tree of Herod



## HEROD THE GREAT BUILDER

Herod the Idumean (or half-Jew) entered the world in 73BC, in Judaea. He rose from commoner to king with the aid of civil unrest, corruption, and the Emperor's favour. To secure his kingdom Herod married Mariamne the Hasmonaean princess (affording connections with the royal priestly line) and then embarked on unlikely his mission to win the Jews' favour.

Two decades of economic prosperity ensued for Herod and during this time he undertook some remarkable building projects. He invented concrete to construct the artificial sea-port Caesarea. He made fortresses serve as sumptuous palaces in the desert with vast water supplies. He is regarded as *'an astute and generous ruler, a brilliant general, and one of the most imaginative and energetic builders of the ancient world, who guided his kingdom to new prosperity and power.'*<sup>13</sup>

But all was not well at home. Herod had a large and fractious family - ten wives and more than a dozen children, *'whose frequent conspiracies brought out Herod's cruelty and paranoia.'*<sup>1</sup> He used every opportunity within his means to amplify his greatness and squash his competitors. Every threat to his kingship and glory had to be silenced immediately. Herod's insatiable desire for power fed an endless fire of jealousy that was fatal for many: the infant boys in Bethlehem, his favourite wife and sons, all the members of the Sanhedrin (save one friend), and many conspiracy suspects. In the words of his friend, Augustus Caesar: *'It is better to be Herod's pig than his son.'*<sup>14</sup>

Josephus records Herod's deathbed lament: *'I shall die in a little time, so great are my pains... but what principally troubles me is this, that I shall die without being lamented, and without such mourning as men usually expect at a king's death.'* For he was not unacquainted with the temper of the Jews, that his death would be a thing very desirable, and exceedingly acceptable to them.' He therefore arranged for the slaughter of many leading Judaeans to ensure genuine mourning at his death.

What, then, made Herod "the Great"?

The same power-hungry spirit that ordered countless murders also drove the building works. When Herod died, 60,000 stone masons lost their jobs. The archaeologist who uncovered Herodium (Herod's tomb), observed: *'His ambitions as builder knew no bounds. He overcame every natural, economic and political obstacle. Indeed, these remains eternalize Herod as the builder nonpareil.'*<sup>15</sup> A journalist touring the same site remarked: *'Epic was Herod's preferred scale. Herod the man is hard to admire, but everything the man touched still has the power to inspire awe.'*<sup>16</sup>

Most notably, Herod saw to it that his buildings eclipsed all others, by building large platforms for many of his buildings. In this way, his own monuments were exalted, while previous edifices beneath were rendered inferior and concealed from onlookers. His own theatre, still under construction at Herodium was ordered to be covered over and serve as a platform for his memorial tomb. When he realised that Herodium couldn't be seen from Jerusalem, his solution was to double the size of the mountain.

<sup>13</sup> Mueller, T 2008, 'King Herod Revealed - The Holy Land's Visionary Builder', National Geographic

<sup>14</sup> Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, Saturnalia, book II, IV:11

<sup>15</sup> Netzer, E 2011, 'The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder', *Bible History Daily*, 11 March.

<sup>16</sup> New York Times, 2013, 2015.

For the same reason, the Temple Mount as we know it today is the platform upon which Herod completely renovated the Temple. True to character, Herod decided to surpass the magnificent Temple built by Solomon. The reason? *'To secure him his place in history and perhaps in the people's hearts.'*<sup>17</sup> His motive could not be further from that which inspired Solomon. *'Herod's Temple was so magnificent in its spectacle and customs, that it was said that if a person had not seen Herod's Temple, he had not yet seen a beautiful building. However, beneath it all lay corruption, compromise, and greed. The Temple taxes combined with taxes imposed by Herod and Rome were literally threatening the existence of the Jewish people. The people of the land were carrying a burden they could scarcely bear or tolerate. Palestine had become a powder keg waiting to ignite.'*<sup>17</sup>

Such was the fulness of time. The time had come for God to send forth His son.

**Figure 2: Map of Herod the Great's Building Projects<sup>18</sup>**



<sup>17</sup> Reed, D. n.d., 'Who were the Herods?', *Thorncrow Journal*.

<sup>18</sup> Barnes, I and Swanston, M 2006, *The Historical Atlas of the Bible*, Star Standard Industries Pty Ltd, p.261

## Zacharias... and his wife... Elisabeth

Zacharias and Elisabeth first enter the record in Lk 1:5. Zacharias was a priest and Elisabeth was of the priestly line, being a descendant of Aaron. Interestingly, she also shares the same name as Aaron's wife, Elisheba (Ex 6:23.) There must have been a direct link with the royal family in the tribe of Judah and this Levite family, as Elisabeth and Mary were related (Lk 1:36).

Zacharias is introduced as a priest of Yahweh of the course of Abia (Lk 1:5). The course of Abia is first mentioned in 1Chr 24:10 when David divides the priests into twenty-four courses to perform the temple service in turn.

## CHARACTER SKETCHES

### ZECHARIAS: The Faithful Priest

<b>Age:</b>	Well stricken in years	Lk 1:7
<b>Status:</b>	Married	Lk 1:5
<b>Hometown:</b>	Hill country of Judah, possibly Hebron	Lk 1:39-40; Josh 21:11
<b>Tribe:</b>	Levi, a priest of the course of Abia	Lk 1:5
<b>Relatives:</b>	Elizabeth (wife); John (son)	Lk 1:13
<b>Name meaning:</b>	Yahweh hath remembered	Lk 1:5

### ELISABETH: The Patient

<b>Age:</b>	Well stricken in years	Lk 1:7
<b>Status:</b>	Married	Lk 1:5
<b>Hometown:</b>	Hill country of Judah, possibly Hebron	Lk 1:39-40; Josh 21:11
<b>Tribe:</b>	Levi, of the daughters of Aaron	Lk 1:5
<b>Relatives:</b>	Zacharias (father); John (son); Mary (cousin)	Lk 1:13, 36
<b>Name meaning:</b>	The oath of my God	

**6-7** *And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.*

Righteous Gk *dikaios* G1342 = 'equitable, innocent, holy' (Str).

Walking Gk *poreuomai* G4198 = 'to traverse or travel' (Str).

Blameless Gk *amemptos* G273 = 'irreproachable' (Str).

This old faithful couple had all the impeccable qualities of priesthood, yet they were barren. This is a type of the situation that the nation was in at the time in relation to the Law of Moses. It was barren. It needed rejuvenating.

Notice that Zacharias and Elisabeth were actively demonstrating their faith, by walking. Even after a lifetime of faithful service to God, they were still consistently moving forwards in their spiritual walk. We are told that Zacharias was still diligently ministering in the Temple service! What an example to us as young people.

### **And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren**

There are only six other women recorded in scripture as being barren. All of these women went on to conceive at a time when it would seem impossible without God's intervention. The final record of a miraculous conception was Mary, who was a virgin with child by the Holy Spirit.

	<b>Who</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Special Role for Child</b>
1	Sarah	Gen 11:30	Isaac, the promised Seed
2	Rebekah	Gen 25:21-26	Jacob, father of the 12 tribes
3	Rachel	Gen 29:31; 30:22-24	Joseph and Benjamin - Joseph saved his brethren
4	Manoah's Wife	Jud 13:2-3, 24	Samson saved Israel from the oppression of the Philistines
5	Hannah	1Sam 1:2, 20	Samuel established the Kingdom of Israel
6	Shunamite Woman	2Ki 4:14-17	First barren Gentile woman to be given a son
7	Elisabeth	Lk 1:7	John the Baptist, the forerunner to Messiah
	Mary	Lk 1:30-33	Jesus Christ, the Son of God

### **The Trial of Infertility**

The Bible presents fertility as a gift from God. Pregnancies occur when Yahweh *'remembers'* women and *'opens their wombs.'* Biblical women who experienced epochs of barrenness in their lives often understood their inability to conceive as a Divine withholding of blessing, a punishment, or even a curse. Sarah, for example, took her barrenness to be the result of God withholding the gift of pregnancy: *'Yahweh has prevented me from bearing children'* (Gen 16:2; see also Gen 30:2). Later, during Sarah's strange sojourn in the house of King Abimelech, Yahweh is said to have *'closed fast all the wombs of the house of Abimelech'* as punishment for Abimelech's taking Sarah into his house (Gen 20:18).

A notification of a woman's barrenness can also serve as a harbinger of the miraculous birth of Divinely chosen people. The Matriarchs of ancient Israel; Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, were all described as being barren, and each became pregnant through God's intervention. In the Rachel and Leah saga, the narrator tells us *'when Yahweh saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren'* (Gen 29:31). He later *'remembers'* Rachel and *'opens her womb,'* allowing her to conceive and bear her son Joseph (Gen 30:22-24).

The sons of these once-barren women became the chosen sons in their fathers' houses and the foundations of the nation of Israel. The sons born to these women were singled out as special; they were Nazarites, priests, or heralds of the future Messiah. In each of these stories, barrenness served a special purpose, heightening the tension around a Divine promise of fertility and marking a child for divinely ordained leadership.

**8-10** *And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.*

### **In the order of his course**

When David first established the Levites to minister in the Temple in 1Chr 24, he divided them into 24 'courses', or families. Each of these courses did one week's service in the Temple twice every year, but on the weeks that there was a feast, all the courses would serve because there was much more that needed to be done. (See p 123 for a chart showing the order of the courses).

Every day lots were drawn to determine the three priests who would enter the Temple and carry out the duties in the holy place:

1. To remove all traces of the previous day's incense burning
2. To carry in red-hot coals from the altar of burnt offering and put them on the incense table before the veil
3. To enter the Holy Place alone and do the actual burning of the incense, offer a prayer and then come forth and pronounce the priestly blessing on the worshippers in the court without.<sup>19</sup>

At the time when Luke wrote, the number of priests available for Temple service had multiplied to over 20,000. Some priests lived their whole life through without ever having received this privilege, so it would have been with extreme gratitude that Zacharias entered the Temple when he was chosen.

### **Abia: The Eighth Course**

It is interesting that Zacharias was of the **eighth** of the priestly courses, and that it was followed by the ninth course, 'Yeshua', or Jesus. Probably Zacharias had pondered this too!

The number eight is representative of a new beginning in scripture (see notes on p. 100). God waited for the 8th course to be set forth till Jesus would be born - a true spiritual birth. The name Abia means 'Yahweh is my Father' - how relevant this is to Jesus the son of God!

### **His lot was to burn incense**

Incense was burned by the priest twice a day (Ex 30:7). The incense used in the Temple was made of stacte, onycha, and galbanum (Ex 30:34), with pure frankincense, and it was not lawful for this compound to be used elsewhere than in the house of God. This was the loftiest and most coveted of priestly functions (Ex 30:1-10; Num 16:1-40). King Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for trying to usurp the priests in this role (2Chr 26:18).

The golden Altar of Incense stood before the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Ex 30:6). The priest entered in white robes and with unclad feet with two attendants who retired when they had made everything ready. The people waited outside in the Court of Israel praying (Psa 141:2) in deep silence till the priest who was sacrificing the evening lamb at the great Altar of Burnt Offering in the Court gave a signal to his colleague in the shrine, perhaps by the tinkling of a bell. He then threw the incense on the

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<sup>19</sup> Whittaker, H A. *Studies in the Gospels*, p 10.



fire of the golden altar, and its fragrant smoke rose with the prayers of the people. This was the closest the priest ever got to the Most Holy Place, a wonderful privilege to all who had the opportunity.

Zacharias was a man given to prayer, and had been consistent in this for many years, despite the apparent lack of answer. The angel commends him for this consistency in v13.



How can we make our homes houses of prayer?

Is there anything holding you back from spending time with God in prayer?

**11-12** *And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*

Troubled Gk *tarasso* G5015 = 'to stir or agitate' (Str).

Fear Gk *phobos* G5401 = 'alarm or fright' (Str).

Imagine the scene for Zacharias - he is solemnly going about this work of a lifetime, meticulously ensuring he does everything according to the laws he has so carefully studied, and all of a sudden as he approaches the altar he sees an angel standing there on its right! Who was this angel? Why was he here?

### **An angel of the Lord**

We know the angel of the Lord is Gabriel from v19. He also appeared to Mary (v26). Of all the angels working to fulfil the Almighty's commands, why was the angel Gabriel sent to Zacharias and Mary?

#### **GABRIEL - MESSIAH'S ANGEL**

Gabriel's name means '*Warrior of God*'. He is one of only two angels named in Scripture, the other being Michael, '*one of the chief (or first)*' angels, i.e. an archangel (Dan 10:13, Jude 1:9). The fact that Michael is '*one of*' the archangels, indicates there is at least one other, which logically would include Gabriel, with whom he worked closely (Dan 10:13,21).

Gabriel is mentioned by name only four times in Scripture: twice in Daniel (8:16; 9:21), and twice in Luke (1:19,26). In the book of Daniel, he was chiefly concerned with prophecies leading to the coming of Messiah.

When Zacharias looked up and saw Gabriel, he was all of a sudden standing before the very angel who, over 500 years earlier, had given the Prophet Daniel the amazing 70-Week Prophecy to which Jews ever since had clung! Imagine how Zacharias' heart must have skipped a beat when he heard Gabriel's proclamation a little later: '*I am Gabriel, that stands in the presence of God!*' Every Jew must have known that Gabriel was Messiah's angel!

Gabriel's wonderful mission continued in his appearance to Mary (v26), and it is likely he was also the angel who appeared to Joseph (Mt 1:20; 2:13,19,22) and the Shepherds (Lk 2:8-9), and who warned the wise men (Mt 2:12).

Given his long-standing dealings with the Messiah, is it not likely that Gabriel was one of the angels who appeared to Jesus after the temptation (Mt 4:11), and that it was Gabriel who strengthened him in the garden (Lk 22:43), and that it was he who opened the tomb (Mt 28:2-5), and that it was Gabriel who spoke to the women (Mk 16:5)?

It would not be inconsistent to think also that Gabriel may be the one to herald the Lord's return (1Thess 4:16). Imagine the joy of this 'Warrior of God' when he finally sees the completion of his work, when 'Messiah', the 'Prince of Princes' finally takes 'the throne of his father David' to 'reign over the house of Jacob for ever'.

## **GABRIEL: The Angel of Yahweh**

**Role in Scripture:** Archangel

**Mission:** Messiah's Angel

Dan 9; Lk 1

**Name meaning:** Mighty Warrior

### **Standing on the right side of the altar of incense**

Throughout Scripture the right hand of God is spoken of in relation to God's strength (Ex 15:6; Psa 80:17) and acceptance by Him (Mt 25:33; Psa 16:11). Only through God's strength would Zacharias and Elisabeth have a child, and only by His grace would they be found acceptable.

### **Fear fell upon him**

It is interesting to note that both Zacharias and Mary had the same initial reaction when the angel appeared unto them (Lk 1:12,29); they were both troubled, yet Zacharias followed this initial feeling with fear (v12) in contrast to Mary who 'cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be' (v29).

**13** *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.*

John            Gk *Ioānneṣ* G2491 - From Heb. *Yohanan* = 'Yahweh is a gracious giver' (Thay), 'Yahweh has graced'.

### **Thy prayer is heard**

Although it is not recorded for us, the implication is that Zacharias and Elisabeth, despite being past childbearing age, were still praying in faith for a child, if not for themselves, for the nation. And this day, after so many years of doing so, that prayer was to be answered.

There is a wonderful lesson in this event. Zacharias was offering incense, the smoke of which is symbolic of prayer (Rev 5:8). David writes in Psalm 141:2, 'Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.' The angel's confirmation that Zacharias' petition had been heard assures us that God hears *and remembers* all our prayers, regardless of whether He answers them when or how we would like Him to.

## **Zacharias... Elisabeth... and thou shalt call his name John**

Gabriel specifies that a child would indeed be born to Zacharias and Elisabeth, and they were to call his name John. The name John means '*Yahweh is a gracious giver*'. When the names of Zacharias, Elisabeth and John are placed together, we see that God was at work: *Yahweh remembered (Zacharias) His oath that he made (Elisabeth) and He was gracious to them (John) in answering their prayers.*

In Malachi 3:1, God announced that He would send His messenger (John the Baptist) who would prepare the way for the Messiah - '*the Messenger of the Covenant*'. This covenant would offer salvation to the world, as John says in John 1:15-16, '*grace for grace*', or '*an abundance of grace*'.

Perhaps the words of Psalm 77:7-9 express how Zacharias may have felt. Notice the ideas behind these three names in this passage:

*'Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? doth **His promise** fail for evermore? **Hath God forgotten** to be **gracious?** hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?'*

Zacharias would now learn '*He is faithful that promised*' - and what remarkable, life-changing events that would involve for this man and his wife!

**14-15** *And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*

### **Joy and gladness**

We see an out-working of this in v58, '*And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her*'. Even inside Mary's womb, Jesus leapt for joy (v44). In Jn 3v29 we also read of John's own joy to be in the presence of the Messiah. This joy at John's birth was because he was the herald of the long-awaited Christ.

### **He shall be great in the sight of the Lord**

There is no other person in scripture other than Messiah about whom such language is used (cp Lk 1:32). John was born into the world of Herod 'the Great', who's life mission was to exonerate himself. John, however, would be great in the only way that matters - in the sight of God.

The Lord Jesus later alluded to John's status in God's eyes, when he said, '*among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist*' (Lk 7:28, Mt 11:11). That greatness did not consist of social status, wealth or refinement (Lk 7:24-25), but rather in God's work upon which he was engaged (v27).

### **He... shall drink neither wine nor strong drink**

The Nazarite Vow was designed to consecrate a man specially to God's service by re-enacting in him certain characteristics of the High Priest (Num 6:3).

Characteristics	High Priest	Nazarite Vow
They were not to drink wine or strong drink	Lev 10:8-11	Num 6:3-4
They were to have no contact with the dead	Lev 21:1,5	Num 6:6-7
They were to wear the crown of God (ie. not cut their hair)	Ex 28:36-38	Num 6:5

Thus, during the period of his consecration, the Nazarite enjoyed devotion to his God akin to that of the Priest. But there is a strange irony here. John was *already* of the priestly line, on both his mother's and father's sides! Why should he have to undergo a *Nazarite Vow*? Evidently God is making a point. The point is that *the Aaronic priesthood is deficient*. Descent from Aaron would not provide this child with the qualifications he required. A greater priesthood was about to be ushered into office; a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek!

### MEDITATION POINT

The Nazarite vow was a vow voluntarily entered into by an ordinary Israelite, so that they could dedicate themselves with the devotion of a priest even though they could never be a priest if not of the tribe of Levi. They were to wholly dedicate themselves, to the extent that even the grape that alcohol came from could not be consumed or touched. It is important for us to think about what draws us away from God at any time. Perhaps it is time to imitate a Nazarite vow and cut it off completely?

**16-17** *And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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.*

This prophecy of Gabriel is an astounding précis of the work of John the Baptist, in which he clearly paints John's work upon the backdrop of Elijah's. To do this, Gabriel refers back to a number of Old Testament passages:

The Work of John (Lk 1)	The Work of Elijah
'Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God' v16	'That this people may know... that Thou hast turned their heart back again' (1Ki 18:37)
'And he shall go before him [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elijah' v17	'He shall prepare the way before me' (Mal.3:1)
'To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children' v17	'I will send you Elijah the prophet... he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children' (Mal 4:5-6)
'And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just' v17	'And the heart of the children to their fathers' (Mal 4:6)
'To make ready a people prepared for the Lord' v17	'Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Yahweh' (Mal 4:5)

The essential message of these prophecies is as follows:

Elijah came to turn God's people back to Him (1Ki 18:37); John will do the same (Lk 1:16). For both men, this would involve repairing the relationship between Israel and their fathers (Mal 4:5-6; Lk 1:17), as a means of preparing them for the coming of the Lord (Mal 4:5; Lk 1:17). To accomplish this work, John would take on 'the spirit and power of Elijah' (Lk 1:17).

This provokes a number of questions:

1. What is 'the spirit and power of Elijah'?
2. Was John's work the complete fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy, that God would send Elijah?
3. What does it mean to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers, and vice versa?

We will examine these questions in order.

## **1. What is 'the spirit and power of Elijah'?**

John came in Elijah's '*spirit and power,*' and yet we are specifically informed that he '*did no miracle*' (Jn 10:41). It therefore cannot refer to the miracles performed by Elijah.

James and John, the sons of thunder, thought it meant bringing down fire from heaven to burn up everyone who refused to submit to the Gospel (Lk 9:54), but the Lord responded, '*ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*' (Lk 9:55). He had come to save men's lives, not to destroy them (v56), a lesson which Elijah himself had had to learn. Elijah took all his life to learn this. He wanted the wind, earthquake and fire of Sinai to shake the nation – that is why he went to Horeb in 1Ki 19. Yet God taught him that He would work instead through the **still small voice** of instruction (1Ki 19:12).

It is the still, small voice of instruction that appears to be that referred to by this phrase.

## **2. Was John's work the complete fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy, that God would send Elijah?**

Malachi had concluded the last of the Old Testament prophecies with the promise:

*'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Yahweh: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.'*

These words from Mal 4:5-6 would later be used by the Scribes to assert that he cannot be the Messiah, because Elijah has not yet come. This is the basis of the disciples' question in: '*Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?*' (Mt 17:10).

The Lord's response to this question helps us understand that Malachi's prophecy, like many relating to the Messiah and his forerunner, has both an initial and a later fulfilment:

*'Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.'* (Mt 17:11-12).

The essential points of Jesus' reply are as follows:

1. Elijah has already come (v12) – i.e. John the Baptist has come 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' (Lk 1:17; Mt 17:13).
  - a. Jesus had told them this before: '*If you are willing to accept it, he [John] is the Elijah who was to come.*' (Mt 11:14 ESV)

- b. But the Jews 'knew him not.' Instead, they said 'he hath a devil' - he's crazy because he doesn't eat and drink like a normal person (Mt 11:18).
    - c. Therefore they did to John 'whatever they pleased' (Mt 17:12 ESV) - i.e. beheaded him (Mt 14:3-12).
  2. Elijah will come again (v11) - i.e. The real Elijah will come again.
    - a. He will come to 'turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers' (Mal 4:6) before Jesus Christ returns.

Jesus' explanation of Malachi 4 harmonizes with an earlier prophecy given by Malachi:

<b>Malachi's Prophecy</b> Mal 3:1	<b>First Fulfilment:</b> Malachi and Nehemiah's times	<b>Second Fulfilment:</b> Christ's first advent	<b>Third Fulfilment:</b> Christ's second advent
<b>'Behold, I will send my messenger'</b>	Malachi (name = 'my messenger')	John the Baptist	Elijah
<b>'And he shall prepare the way before me'</b>	Warned Judah of Nehemiah's coming	Warned priesthood (Mal 3:3) and in fact everyone (v2) that the Messiah had come (Mt 3:7-12; Jn 1:19-30).	Will regather scattered Israel (Ezek 20:33-35) & purge them (v38; Mal 3:3) ready to meet Christ.
<b>'And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the Covenant'</b>	Nehemiah returned from Babylon (Neh 13:6-7) to re-instate the covenant made with Yahweh in Neh 10 (see v29).	Christ came to confirm God's covenant (Dan 9:27; Rom 15:8).	Christ will 'make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah' (Jer 31:31-34; cited of Christ Heb 8:8-12)

From this table we can see once again the parallel work of John the Baptist (at Christ's first advent), and Elijah (at his return). This then leads us to the question of their work:

### **3. What does it mean 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just'?**

Gabriel's reference to Malachi 4:6 is part quotation, part commentary. In the second part of the reference Gabriel has substituted some key words:

- 'children' becomes 'disobedient' - this reflects the true moral state of the natural children of Abraham
- 'fathers' becomes 'the just' - the fathers were justified by faith
- 'heart' becomes 'wisdom' - the father's justification was on the basis of faith. Faith is a condition of the heart, a way of thinking which God considers to be wisdom.

In discussing the work of John the Baptist and Elijah in *The Mystery of the Covenant and the Holy Land Explained* (p 20-23), Bro John Thomas re-translates this phrase, making both parts refer to the children's attitude towards their fathers:

*"John shall go before the Lord Israel's God in Elijah's spirit and power, to restore to posterity the father's dispositions, and disobedient ones to just persons' mode of thinking; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17)... The restoration effected by this power through John, was a spiritual restoration affecting the hearts of many of the people, not of all; a restoration of the Abrahamic mind and disposition in his [John's] contemporaries.'*

John's work was not simply to re-unite natural families – that would have been in contrast to the work of the Lord whom he went before (Lk 12:51-53). Rather, John came to unite God's family: the 'children' of his own day needed to 'look unto Abraham' (Isa 51:2), yet not just to say, 'we have Abraham to our father' (Mt 3:9), but to show the faith and works of Abraham. i.e. Abraham's children needed to learn to think like him. That was John's work, and that will be Elijah's.

Thus, 'they are not all Israel, which are of Israel, neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children' (Rom 9:6-7). Rather, 'they which be of faith' – i.e. those who believe God like Abraham believed – they 'are blessed with faithful Abraham' (Gal 3:9).

As Bro John Carter wrote,

*"The work of Elijah is to bring Abraham's children back to Abraham's faith. The patriarch will then recognize them as his, as they in a new way will consider themselves Abraham's seed."* (Prophets after the Exile, p.307).

When this is accomplished, and all Israel are saved, the work of both John and Elijah will be complete.

**18** *And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.*

Zacharias' response to the words of Gabriel may seem natural, and perhaps even similar to the words of Abraham in Gen 17:17. But Gabriel understood the heart of Zacharias, that there was doubt, unlike Abraham who was counted faithful. Mary also, had the reaction of Abraham, with complete faith and belief, as she was told later in the chapter, 'Blessed is she who **believed**...those things which were told her from the Lord' (v45). Mary's son Jesus Christ was to be a son of Abraham, who *believed* what God told him concerning a promised seed (Gen 15:6).

It is interesting that although Zacharias and his wife had been praying all their married life for a child, he now doubts what the angel has promised. Gabriel makes clear that nothing is impossible with God (v37), and rebukes him for his lack of faith. It is easy at times to pray long and hard for something from God, but when He answers our prayer, to forget or not even realise that He has answered.

**19-20** *And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.*

In response to Zacharias's disbelief, Gabriel presents him with as it were, his awe-inspiring credentials:

- 1. I am Gabriel:** As a faithful believer, Zacharias would have been completely familiar with the 70 weeks prophecy in Daniel 9, especially as he and Elisabeth were awaiting the birth of Messiah at around this time. To be told that he was doubting the words of *Gabriel*, one of the chief angels, would have been humiliating.

2. **I stand in the presence of God:** Gabriel is reminding Zacharias that he stands in the throne room of the Almighty God, an incredible privilege and proof of his status in the angelic host.
3. **I have been sent to speak to you:** God Himself has sent Gabriel to speak to Zacharias. This is the closest man can come to direct communication with God. Who is man to doubt?

### Glad tidings

The last time Gabriel brought a message was concerning the 70 Weeks prophecy, heralding the arrival of Messiah. The glad tidings he brings are the commencement of the fulfilment of this prophecy. These glad tidings are not only to Zacharias and Elisabeth, but to the whole world! (See notes on 2:10, p 92)

### Behold, thou shalt be dumb

Evidently much more was said here than is recorded in Luke, because *'the people marvelled that he tarried so long in the Temple'*, yet v12-20 need not have taken more than a few minutes.

It seems that Zacharias was rendered deaf as well as dumb, else why, when John was born, would the people need to *'make signs to his father, how he would have him called'* (v62),?

Zacharias was not the first of Israel's priests to be Divinely made dumb! Compare Ezekiel's experience:

Ezekiel	Zacharias
Name means: El hath strengthened	Name means: Yah hath remembered
Made dumb because of the nation's rebelliousness (Ezek 3:26)	Made dumb because of his own unbelief (Lk 1:20)
Could not warn of impending destruction of Jerusalem (Ezek 3:26)	Could not proclaim the coming redemption of Jerusalem (Lk 2:38)
Dumb until the day the city was smitten (24:27; 33:21-22)	Dumb until the day the day of John's birth (1:20)
Made signs to the people (4:3; 12:6; 24:24)	He beckoned to the people (1:22) and people made signs to him (1:62)
Final message: 'The horn of Israel to bud forth' (29:21)	Final message: 'Raised up a horn of salvation' (1:69).

The dumbness of both men was an appropriate depiction of the spiritual state of the nation in their eras. As Zacharias disbelieved the message about John, so they also disbelieved the message about the Messiah: *'This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.'* (Mt 13:15; cp Isa 6:9-10, written shortly before Ezekiel's time).

Consequently, Ezekiel spoke of the coming fall of the Temple. The first eleven chapters of his prophecy are largely devoted to that event, and the consequent removal of God's glory from the city and Temple forms the single greatest theme of Ezekiel.



Zacharias was about to bring a child into the world who would herald a very similar message. 'Who has warned you to flee from God's coming wrath?' he would ask. 'The axe is laid to the root of the tree' - Enjoy the Temple and all you can see, because it's all coming down. And it won't be long! But Zacharias' son would come to declare more than just the fall of the Temple. John was to be, ironically, 'a voice' to prepare the way for the Lord, as Yahweh brought 'His Salvation' to His people. Immediately after his power of speech returned, Zacharias would rejoice in this fact in his Prophecy of v68-80.

**21-22** *And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.*

Marvelled Gk *thaumazo* G2296 = 'to wonder' (Str).

Whilst this encounter with Gabriel was in progress, that people were waiting outside the Temple, for the priest to reappear and give the Levitical blessing of Num 6:24-26: 'Yahweh bless thee and keep thee: Yahweh make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Yahweh lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.'

Zacharias had been inside the Temple for an unusual length of time, and the congregation was becoming restless. Their minds would have been prepared for something abnormal to happen, and indeed it did. As the aged priest re-entered the Court, the crowd rose to their feet, heads bowed, awaiting the ancient benediction. But not a sound came from his lips. The Law could, even at the climatic point of that ceremony, not bless. It was barren.

Gesticulating and signalling, the people understood from Zacharias's gestures, that he had seen something in the Temple which had deprived him of the power of speech.

**23-25** *And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.*

It is amazing to note Zacharias' commitment to the work of the Temple. Instead of rushing home to Elisabeth to show her what had taken place, he waited until the days of his ministration were over. He fulfilled his duty first, despite his inability to speak and obvious excitement.

### **To take away my reproach among men**

This comment is an insight into the deep bitterness of soul that Elisabeth had experienced during her many years of barrenness. Elisabeth is quoting from the words of Rachel when she became pregnant with Joseph 'and she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach' (Gen 30:23). It would be hard to find a more disastrous family situation than that recorded of Jacob's family, and Rachel's greatest trial was that she did not have children. Many years later, as an elderly woman, Elisabeth still compares herself to that of Rachel. God was indeed very gracious in granting Zacharias and Elisabeth a baby boy, another fitting link to John's name.

A scenic landscape at sunset. The foreground is filled with tall, golden-brown grasses. In the background, there are rolling mountains under a warm, orange sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a soft glow.

# PROMISE OF MESSIAH

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LUKE 1:26-56

# GABRIEL'S APPEARANCE TO MARY (1:26-38)

## EARTH WAS WAITING - SPENT AND RESTLESS

The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ was a remarkable event. The entire of the Old Testament, all the faithful characters, the types and shadows – animate and inanimate – were looking forward to the advent of the Messiah. The prophets had searched and enquired to know more about the grace, or gift, of God's Son to a sinful world. As the Apostle Peter once reflected,

*'Receiving... the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify' (1Pet 1:9-11).*

From the moment of the promise of Genesis 3:15, God had revealed that there would be a seed who would crush the power of sin and its consequence of death. Approximately 4000 years passed before the promised one would be born. In the minds of the faithful, even in the minds of the angels, anticipation for the birth of Christ was mounting, or, as Hymn 191 puts it, *'Earth was waiting spent and restless'*.

How did these believers know that *'the fulness of time'* had come? All were waiting. All felt a degree of anticipation. But why? For what? How did they know what was coming?

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- How did believers in the First Century know about the coming Messiah?
- What could they have looked for?
- Are there similar signs today?

## THE PROMISED MESSIAH

For us, prophecies of the coming of the Messiah are at times obvious and sometimes our familiarity with them leads to a dwindling of our amazement. But imagine you were living in the First Century. You would not have the New Testament; you would only have the Old. How might you know that the Messiah was coming at that time? How could you tell if this was the true Messiah from God?

For the faithful believer in the days of Herod the Great, there had been a long succession of prophets in Israel who had conveyed many and varied details of the coming of Messiah. The Bible student who took the time to memorise and meditate upon these prophecies and promises would have constructed a composite picture of what to expect in the arrival of the Anointed.

The following table shows some examples of the 'signs of the times' that Christ was soon to be born. It is worth marking these somewhere near the start of the New Testament, and then pondering what signs or promises we look to for the second advent of our Lord (see p 37 for fulfilment).

Prophecy	Signs of First Coming	To be fulfilled later
Gen 3:15	A 'seed of the woman'	Who would conquer sin
Gen 13:15, cp. Gal 3:16	A descendant of Abraham	Will inherit the land of Israel
Gen 22:17-18	Blessing through the seed of Abraham	Blessing and possess the gate of his enemies
Gen 49:10	A king of the tribe of Judah	People will gather to him
Deut 18:15-19	Prophet like Moses, would speak God's words	Those who disobey, God will hold accountable
2Sam 7:12-14	A descendant of David, whose Father would be God	The throne of his Kingdom will be established forever
Isa 7:14-16	Born of virgin, discerning child, land forsaken of both kings	
Isa 9:6-7	Has exalted names/status from God	Government, peace, kingdom will be forever
Isa 11:1-4	Lineage of David, knowledgeable, wise	Judge of the earth
Mic 5:2	Born in Bethlehem, origins have been from old	Ruler in Israel

All of these 'signposts' would have allowed the faithful to anticipate *where* Messiah would be born, *who* he would be in terms of his lineage, and even *how* he would be born, in that it was to be a virgin-birth. But what of the timing?

There is one more prophecy which, for the Jewish people, was both thrilling and dreadful. The prophecy held the key for *when* Messiah was to be born, but no sooner had it conveyed that knowledge, it proceeded to tell of Messiah's 'cutting off' - his death. This was the **70-weeks Prophecy**, given to Daniel in Babylon (Dan 9).

Dan 9:24-27	Gives approximate timing, confirm the covenants of old	Messiah had to die
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Appendix 2 contains a more detailed explanation of the 70 Weeks Prophecy.

Many of the prophecies of Christ include details of his origin and birth **but also** aspects of his current and future work. Living after his death and resurrection, it is far easier for us to distinguish between those details, having the ability to recognise what had happened and what is yet to come. It was not so for those awaiting the first advent of Messiah. And so, it is little surprise that many people expected Christ to come as the conquering King who would vanquish the Romans and rule Israel. Even his disciples wondered:

*'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1:6-8).*

It would take the discerning scholar and the meditative disciple to realise that other prophecies had to be fulfilled before Christ would rule over a Kingdom on the earth. Acts 1 speaks of how the Gentiles had to be included in the Israelitish hope (e.g. Deut 32:43, Isa 54:1-3). Israel also had to be scattered and regathered (e.g. Jer 16:15-16, Ezek 37). Not to mention, Messiah himself had to die and rise again (e.g. Psa 16, 22), a fact that the disciples did not understand until after the resurrection (Mk 9:30-32).

**MEDITATION POINT**

Would you have recognised Christ as the promised Messiah? Why or why not? What about Israel in the First Century? For such an auspicious event in the Jewish mind, why were so few found awaiting it in earnest expectation?

Perhaps some did not know the prophecies well. Perhaps others failed to watch the events around them to realise that prophecy was being fulfilled before their very eyes. Perhaps other people were so busy with their own lives that the Christ was the last thing on their minds. Perhaps some were caught up in finding fulfilment and glory of men in their lives that they ignored any news of a Messiah, in order to focus on themselves? Perhaps others didn't really want Messiah to come so they could focus on their relationships, their careers, their goals?

Surely these are lessons for us in light of the imminent Second Coming of Christ!

How is Jesus Christ introduced in the Old Testament? What are the titles given to Him?

Title	Old Testament	New Testament
A Prophet (like Moses)	Deut 18:15-18	Jn 1:21
Immanuel - 'God [El] with us'	Isa 7:14	Mt 1:23
Wonderful	Isa 9:6	
Counsellor	Isa 9:6	
The mighty God	Isa 9:6	Heb 1:8
The everlasting Father	Isa 9:6	Cp. Heb 2:13
The Prince of Peace	Isa 9:6	Heb 7:2
Messiah	Dan 9:25	[Gk <i>Christ</i> ] Mt 16:16
Ruler in Israel	Mic 5:2	Mt 2:6

Christ is described as a mighty ruler, chosen of God, but also someone who would speak the words of God, instructing the people, demonstrating wisdom, and bringing about peace. Again, elements of these descriptors were seen in the first coming when Christ came as a teacher and healer (Mt 4:24, 22:16); but he will come at his second coming to rule with a rod of iron (Psa 2:9, Rev 2:27). We also see him as a manifestation of God then and now, acting as representative of his Father (Php 2:9-11).

**FURTHER EXPLORATION**

Are there any other times when Christ's OT titles are used or alluded to in recognition of who he is?

Though we see the humble beginnings of our Lord in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke, we also see his huge importance right from the moment of the announcement to Mary. *'He shall be great...the son of the Highest...he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever.'* The visit of the shepherds, the wise men, the fear of Herod of the King of the Jews, all demonstrate the importance of this tiny babe. Our minds should never underappreciate this moment described as *'the fulness of the time'* that had finally come (Gal 4:4).

## THE PROMISES FULFILLED

The work of Christ was such that there are not just prophecies surrounding his birth, but his whole life: his family; his ministry; his death; his resurrection; his ascension; his work in heaven; his second coming; his future kingship, and his ultimate victory. Christ applies a number of prophecies to himself in the gospel records. The gospel writers often quote the Old Testament to illustrate how Christ's coming and actions were foretold. In the Acts, prophecies are used to add reason and power to the speeches, and in the epistles the doctrines surrounding Christ are corroborated by the Old Testament scriptures.

Notice in Luke 1:26-38, as well as in the parallel records and the surrounding context, the fulfilment of what was expected concerning the first coming of Christ (compare table p 35).

Ref	Signs of 1 <sup>st</sup> Coming	Fulfilment	Ref
Gen 3:15	A 'seed of the woman'	<i>'Blessed art thou among women.'</i>	Lk 1:28
Gen 13:15, cp Gal 3:16	A descendant of Abraham	<i>'The generation of Jesus Christ... the son of Abraham.'</i>	Mt 1:1-2, Lk 3:34
Gen 22:17-18	Blessing through the seed of Abraham	<i>'He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham'</i>	Lk 1:54-55
Gen 49:10	A king of the tribe of Judah	<i>'Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda... out of thee shall come a Governor.'</i>	Mt 2:6
Deut 18:15-19	Prophet like Moses, speak God's words	<i>'I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me.'</i>	Jn 17:8
2Sam 7:12-14	A descendant of David, whose Father would be God	<i>'Son of the Highest... throne of his father David... that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.'</i>	Lk 1:32, 35
Isa 7:14-16	Born of a virgin, discerning child	<i>'Behold, a virgin shall be with child' 'the angel Gabriel was sent... To a virgin.'</i>	Mt 1:23, Lk 1:26-27
Isa 9:6-7	Has exalted names/status from God	<i>'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.'</i>	Lk 1:32
Isa 11:1-4	Lineage of David, knowledgeable, wise	<i>'A man of the house of David', 'His father David', 'Jesus increased in wisdom and stature.'</i>	Lk 1:27, 32, 52
Dan 9:24-27	Gives approx. timing, confirm covenants of old	<i>'She [Anna] spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.'</i>	Lk 2:34, 38
Mic 5:2	Born in Bethlehem, origins from of old	<i>'Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea'</i>	Mt 2:1

**26-27** And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

### **The Angel Gabriel**

See notes on Gabriel v11 – p 24.

### **Unto a city of Galilee**

Galilee was a despised place for the Jewish people and had been since OT times (1Ki 9:11-13); so much so that it was commonly held upon the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, that no Prophet ever arose out of Galilee (Jn 7:52). In fact, this was a common rebuttal to the authenticity of Jesus' claim to being the long-awaited Messiah! When some said, *'This is the Christ'*, others retorted, *'Shall Christ (the Messiah) come out of Galilee?'* (Jn 7:41).

The reason for this dislike of Galilee and its people was the prevalence of Gentiles in the region. It was termed *'Galilee of the Nations, or Gentiles'* ever since Old Testament times (Isa 9:1). Its populous were renowned for their strange dialect (Mk 14:70), and there was a tendency amongst Jews to think the worst of them – a prejudice that Jesus used to teach an important lesson in Luke 13:1-3. The Sanhedrin's claimed that no prophet ever arose out of Galilee (Jn 7:41), however the prophet Jonah actually came from Gath-hepher in Galilee (2Ki 14:25). His mission to the Gentiles evidently landed him in disrepute with the religious authorities of the day.

### **Named Nazareth**

Regarding the city of Nazareth itself, Smith's Bible Dictionary says the following:

*'All the inhabitants of Galilee were looked upon with contempt by the people of Judea because they spoke a ruder dialect, were less cultivated and were more exposed by their position to contact with the heathen. But Nazareth laboured under a special opprobrium [harsh criticism], for it was a Galilean and not a southern Jew who asked the reproachful question whether 'any good thing' could come from that source.'*

The citation is from John 1:46 where Nathanael says, *'Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?'* We know from John 21:2 that Nathanael himself was of Cana in Galilee. The Lord was called *'Jesus of Nazareth'* (or a variation) 21 times. While it was a point of identification, there were likely other boys named Jesus (or Joshua from the Hebrew origin) in Israel. However, is it not also an initial fulfilment of Isaiah 53:3 *'He is despised and rejected of men?'* Well before he was rejected by the Scribes and Pharisees (Lk 9:22) and crucified by the nation of Israel (Acts 3:13-15), he was to live in a town rejected by the nation of Israel.

Bro Geoff Henstock, in *Mary: Handmaid of the Lord*, writes:

*'It is surely significant that Almighty God chose a poor family living in an obscure and despised place, remote from the centre of national life in Jerusalem, for His Son's upbringing. God knew that an upbringing among simple country folk and in touch with the rhythms of nature was more suitable for Jesus than an upbringing in the sophisticated courts of Jerusalem. His childhood in Nazareth must have equipped Jesus to understand and relate to the challenges of ordinary men and women and the pressures that come with poverty and with being a social outcast.'*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mary, Handmaid of the Lord Bro Geoff Henstock, *The Christadelphian*. p 10.

But even that town was to stoop to new lows. They were later to reject their Messiah; ‘No prophet is accepted in his own country’ (Lk 4:24, cp. Mt 13:67, Mk 6:4). See further notes on Nazareth, p 83.

### To a virgin espoused

This miraculous aspect of our Lord’s birth was both a wonderful confirmation of his Messiahship, and yet at the same time a mark he would bear throughout all his mortal life.

If the blight of his hometown were not enough, the Lord was to be born under the cloud of conception by a woman without a husband. For all who rejected the Divine Sonship of Christ, this was their supreme weapon against the Lord during his ministry, as we shall see later (p 49-50).

Yet first and foremost, as every Israelite should have known, this was the stamp of Divine approval and anointing. The Lord’s birth from a virgin sealed as the Immanuel (Isa 7:14) and hence the promised seed of David and Son of God (2Sam 7:14).

### The virgin’s name was Mary

If we were to build up a character profile of Mary, what do we know?

<b>MARY: The Handmaid of the Lord</b>		
<b>Age:</b>	Approx. 17 (virgin=unmarried young maiden)	Lk 1:27
<b>Status:</b>	Betrothed	Lk 1:27
<b>Hometown:</b>	Nazareth, Galilee	Lk 1:26
<b>Tribe:</b>	Judah, line of David	Lk 1:27, 3:33
<b>Relatives:</b>	Elisabeth (cousin)	Lk 1:36
<b>Income &amp; Assets:</b>	Minimal	Lk 2:24, cf. Lev 12:8
<b>Name meaning:</b>	Bitterness (Gk form of Heb ‘Marah’)	Ruth 1:20; Lk 2:35

**28-30** *And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.*

Hail            Gk. *chairo* G5463 = ‘to rejoice, be glad; in salutations, hail!’ (Thay).

Troubled      Gk. *diatarasso* G1298 = ‘to agitate greatly, trouble greatly’ (Thay).

Cast in her mind      Gk. *dialogizomai* G1260 = ‘to bring together different reasons, to reckon up the reasons, to reason, revolve in one’s mind, deliberate’ (Thay).

Favour        Gk. *charis* G5485 = ‘grace, good will, favour’ (Thay).

### Hail!

This greeting of the angel Gabriel was a prelude to the joyful nature of the message about to be delivered.



## Highly Favoured... blessed among women... found favour with God

Mary's commendations are lofty.

- *'Highly favoured'* is also rendered 'graciously accepted' as in Eph 1:6.
- *'The Lord is with thee'* is said to Gideon (Jud 6:12), Israel (Isa 43:5), Jeremiah (Jer 1:19), and Paul (Acts 18:10).
- The commendation *'blessed art thou among women'* is only used of Jael when she performed the courageous and highly symbolic act of killing Sisera by *'bruising his head'* (Jud 5:24). Mary's son would perform the work that Jael had prefigured (Gen 3:15). This honorary description is repeated by Elisabeth in v42, sealing Mary as a virtuous woman - *'a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised'* (Prov 31:30).
- Other people described as finding *favour with God* were Samuel (1 Samuel 2:26), David (Acts 7:46), and Christ (Luke 2:52).

How did they find favour with God?

- By desiring to make a permanent dwelling place for God in their life (Acts 7:46).
- By growing in godly wisdom and maturity (Luke 2:52).

These individuals made God a genuine part of their life. Proverbs 3:1-4 expands upon finding God's favour. It speaks about (1) keeping God's commandments and (2) holding on to mercy and truth. In fact, Proverbs 3:4 speaks about these qualities not only finding favour in God's eyes but man's too.

### DISCUSSION POINT

What qualities do you value in your mother or any other mother? Why did God choose Mary to bear and raise His son? What were her qualities?

### Cast in her mind

As noted above, the Greek word indicates that Mary was not hasty in her judgment of the angelic visitor, but rather thought through all the possible reasons he could have appeared to her with such a greeting. Her Bible knowledge was deep, and so she had an inventory of examples to ponder.

### Fear not

A common instruction at an angelic visitation to a faithful servant of God, such as when Gabriel appeared to Daniel (Dan 10:12,19). Within the story of Christ's birth itself, repeated instruction is given to those who receive an angelic message, illustrating just how awe-inspiring these events must have been: Zacharias (1:13); Mary (1:30); the Shepherds (2:10).

### Characteristics of Mary

What qualifications would you choose for the mother of the Messiah? In some way, the choice of wife by a man denotes the characteristics he values. What virtues do we know that Mary possessed?

- **Trusting** - Psa 22:9 *'thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts'* - taught by Mary as well as God
- **Humble** - Lk 1:38 *'be it unto me according to thy word'*

- **Praising** - Lk 1:46 *'My soul doth magnify the Lord'*
- **Obedient** to God's law - Lk 2:21, 22, 24, 41-43 *'according to the law of Moses'*
- **Thoughtful / pondersome** - Lk 2:51 *'his mother kept all these saying in her heart'*
- **Faithful** - still following Jesus at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25-27)

Why is it that these characteristics were beneficial to Mary?

**Trusting:** No matter what happened to her, or to her son, whether jeers by peers or hardship from leaders or Romans, she would trust that God was in control. Even though she would need to learn that a relationship with her son would depend upon obedience to the will of God rather than flesh-and-blood connections (Mt 12:50) and despite having to watch him die an horrific death upon the cross, she would depend upon her God for a reason and hope. Mary would learn that having this special son would feel like a sword-thrust to her heart (Lk 2:35), and through it all she would trust that *'all things work together for good'* (Rom 8:28).

**Humble:** the changes to Mary and her entire life-course by this one event required her to be willing to submit herself totally to God. She embraced the attitude that she was but a slave and that God had complete power.

**Praising:** Mary needed to be able to attribute everything in the life of her son to God. When he confounded the religious elite, when he astounded the crowds with miracles, and when he overcame sin by leading an impeccable life, she needed to ascribe all those things to God. It was not her doing; the power of God had worked in her and in her son. Other elements of praise are of joy, worship, adoration. The pains and sorrows of her life would need to be balanced with the joy of praising and worshipping her God in heaven.

**Obedient** to God's law: Christ was going to fulfil the law, but the law still had a great purpose. In knowing and keeping the spirit of the law, she would be brought to the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 3:24), to see in him the substance of the shadow (Heb 10:1). The obedience that Mary demonstrated would be the right spirit for the household of the Son of God. God's commands would be obeyed in everything.

**Thoughtful / pondersome:** there would be much in Mary's life that she would not understand at the time; perhaps not until the Kingdom. Yet, she did not give up, nor accuse God. She carefully stored up what she saw and heard to think upon them. After the resurrection, she would receive clarification on the work of Christ just like the disciples (Lk 24:45).

**Faithful:** Mary was faithful to Christ throughout his ministry. Even when she didn't fully understand the actions of Christ (such as at the Wedding at Cana, Jn 2:1-11), or when she struggled to cope with what was done to him (at the crucifixion, Jn 19:25-27). Mary always maintained her respect, honour and submission to a man who, in the natural course of events, should have shown respect, honour and submission to her.

**31** *And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.*

### **Thou shalt conceive in thy womb**

The demands upon a mother can be considerable. There is the giving of her body, oxygen, and nutrients for the growing of the child inside the womb. This is followed by the giving of

much time, energy and emotion to the feeding, loving, supporting, educating and disciplining of the child. There is a huge requirement of the mother to give, and give ceaselessly, long before any gratitude is received in return. Sometimes we leave our consideration of Mary purely at the point that she was chosen to bear Christ, as if God needed a surrogate mother to carry and give birth to His son. While this was a special privilege, this greatly neglects her far more enduring role of a mother: raising her child.

**32-33** *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

**He shall be great**

The greatness of Christ was of crucial importance for Mary to understand. He would be a child with destiny, a specific purpose, and a powerful future. Notice all the great things that follow the statement in v32:

- Called the Son of the Highest.
- God will give him a throne.
- He will rule as King David did.
- His reign will be forever over the house of Jacob.
- No end to his Kingdom.

Not only was this to be a miraculous conception like none other, but Jesus would also be a son like none other.

- God had only fathered a national son – the nation of Israel – in a spiritual sense (Deut 32:5,18; Hos 11:1); never a literal son.
- No other king had reigned forever, their reign had come to an end and even their kingdom had not lasted.
- The house of Jacob – both Israel and Judah – were taken into captivity.
- Every kingdom to this point in time – Jewish or Gentile – had enjoyed its prosperity only to fade away when another brighter Empire eclipsed them.

The greatness of Christ is seen in the fact that he is a culmination of the three great promises in the Old Testament: Edenic, Abrahamic, and Davidic.

<b>Promise</b>	<b>Original</b>	<b>Fulfilment (Luke 1)</b>
Edenic	The seed of the woman (Gen 3:15)	<i>'Thou (a virgin) shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son'</i> (v31)
Abrahamic	<i>'In blessing I will bless thee... and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'</i> (Gen 22:17-18)	<i>'He hath holpen his servant Israel... as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.'</i> (Lk 1:55).
Davidic	<i>'I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.'</i> (2Sam 7:13)	<i>'The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David'</i> (v32)

## The Highest (v32, 35)

God is termed 'the Highest' by Gabriel twice. 'The Highest', or the 'Most high', are common titles of God, speaking of His exalted nature, His power and might, especially when compared to our weakness. The Hebrew for 'high' or 'highest' is 'Elyon'. W.H. Boulton in *Names and Titles of the Deity* (p.45) says: 'It refers to the position of the Deity as the Supreme, the One who is above, or over all'.

Here are some examples of the use of this title:

- **First occurrence:** Melchizedek said, 'Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.' (Gen 14:19-20)
- **Bestower of blessings:** 'When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.' (Deut 32:8)
- **Power over nature:** 'The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire.' (Psa 18:13)
- **Vindicator of saints:** 'And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest himself shall establish her.' (Psa 87:5)
- **Condescended to men:** 'For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' (Isa 57:15)
- **Ruler of Earth:** 'This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.' (Dan 4:17)

Why is it used in Luke 1:32, 35? Perhaps there are a number of reasons:

1. In the birth of Christ, God's power and supremacy would truly be known. In this Messiah He would be manifest, and through this Messiah the age-old problem of sin and death would be conquered.
2. Christ is described as being great (v32), yet God was still higher than he. The hierarchy was not to be confused or misunderstood (see section on wrong doctrine comments on v35, p 45)
3. It emphasises the uniqueness of this situation. The God who is higher than the heavens and earth is about to use His power to bring about a child in the womb of this one human being, the humble virgin Mary.

This title of God is also used by the angels in Luke 2:14 (p 95).

## The house of Jacob

This term is first used in the Old Testament in reference to the entire nation of Israel, before it ever split into the northern or southern kingdoms (Gen 46:27). Jesus will reign over all Israel, united and restored.

## Of his kingdom there shall be no end

A clear reference to Dan 2:44.

**34** *Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*

**How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?**

Mary's question is entirely valid. At first it may hint of the doubt experienced by both Zacharias 6 months beforehand (Lk 1:18,20) and Sarah many centuries earlier (Gen 18:12-13). But notice the difference: Zacharias asked *how will I know this is true?* (v18), expressing doubt in the veracity of the promise. But Mary's question was simply, **how** will this occur, given *I'm not married?* (v34). She did not doubt **if** God would do it, but rather wanted to know the *modus operandi*. Mary is later commended by Elisabeth as '*she that believed*' (v45), in contrast who her own husband who at that very time was dumb!

The birth of this boy would indeed be a miracle.

The power of God was about to perform something never seen before (v35): to make a woman conceive without the involvement of a man. Mary was to be the first and only woman in history to have a child born by the Holy Spirit, a *literal* son of God, not just a spiritual son or son by adoption. Her question was therefore not one of doubt, but a request for clarification. Her comment (*'I know not a man'*) was not a question of her willingness, but a desire to understand more about the ways of God.

**DISCUSSION POINT**

Who else questioned God in scripture? Were they right or wrong? When/why can we question God? When is it not proper for us to question God?

**MEDITATION POINT**

Mary fully embraced God's power working in her life, despite all the consequences it would bring.

What hinders you from fully embracing the power of God to work in your life? Are you concerned He will direct you away from your aspirations, goals or dreams? Are you unsure of the future and hesitant for anything to change? Perhaps you are worried about comparisons between yourself and those perceived as 'successful', 'influential', or even 'likeable'?

**35** *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

**The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee**

We are not told exactly how this worked in the womb of Mary. The words of David in Psalm 139:13-16 reflect the wonder of this event; yet the miraculous nature of it, which we never can quite understand in this life, is typical of the formation of the Ecclesial body of Christ (Eph 4:12-16).

## The Holy Spirit... Power of the Highest... Son of God

This verse (in fact all of v28-35), are a powerful section for laying some doctrinal basics concerning the birth of Jesus Christ and disproving false doctrine.

Foundation Doctrines in Luke 1	
The Holy Spirit	When people question what the Holy Spirit is and whether it is part of a Trinitarian God-head then the answer is in Luke 1:35. It called the Holy Spirit, 'the power of the highest'. It does not have any special position. It is simply defined as God's power. It would also be strange for the Holy Spirit part of the Trinity to enter Mary's womb as one element and emerge as another, Christ.
The Trinity	Not only does this passage disprove the Holy Spirit element of the Trinity, but also the idea of ' <i>God the son</i> '. These verses make the relationship between God and Christ very clear - Jesus is ' <i>the son of the Highest</i> ' (v32), ' <i>the Son of God</i> ' (v35). Why use the womb of Mary or go through the process of conception, gestation, and birth, if it was one part of the God-head changing to another part?
Pre-existence of Christ	Again, this is tied in with the Trinity but can be a separate issue. In the same way a child is not known until they are born, this is the case with Christ. Mary would ' <i>bring forth a son</i> ' (v31) just like the rest of humankind; the difference was to be in the miraculous conception, not the birth and arrival of the child. God had obviously thought about the child before, that is why the angel is specific about calling ' <i>his name Jesus</i> ' (v31). However, that is the only sense in which Christ pre-existed, in the mind and plan of God. It is therefore most appropriate in John 1 that the ' <i>word or concept</i> ' (Gk <i>logos</i> ) existed from the beginning, and when that concept of God's plan was made flesh, Jesus Christ was the result. But it was the idea, not the person, that pre-existed.
Mariolatry	Mariolatry is idolatrous worship of the Virgin Mary. As such, Mary has been called: <i>Mother of God, Blessed Mother, Madonna, and Our Lady</i> . All of these are exalting Mary based upon the idea that she gave birth to Christ as part of the Trinity. It is also exalting her as being the one chosen to be mother of Christ. Mary is certainly remarkable, as we have seen, but we are not told to worship her. She is there as an example to us, like all the other faithful in scripture. <sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> These, and other points, are further argued very effectively by Brethren Ron Abel and John Allfree in *Wrested Scriptures* (The Christadelphian, 2011), p.30,285,287,290,291,296,303,313,318,320.

**36** *And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.*

### **Behold, thy cousin Elisabeth**

Why does Gabriel mention her cousin Elisabeth? It is likely that Mary had already heard the news, given Elisabeth was 6 months into her pregnancy. Gabriel was emphasising the fact that Elisabeth had experienced the same power of God in her life – cp. v37. Mary knew another woman, a relative, whose womb had been touched by the power of God. Not a virgin birth, but still miraculous for someone *'who was called barren'* (v36).

Even if others did not believe Mary's account of the angel and the miraculous conception, Zacharias and Elisabeth would. After all, the angel Gabriel had visited them too. This would provide great companionship and support for Mary as her stomach began to grow and the rumours spread. In fact, in v39 Mary headed to Elisabeth's house *'in those days'*, only a short time after she had seen Gabriel herself.

### **Her who was called barren**

Roth. *'her, the so-called barren one'*. When Mary arrived in Elisabeth's house, she would find herself in the sympathetic company of a woman who knew what it was to bear a stigma.

**37** *For with God nothing shall be impossible.*

### **With God nothing shall be impossible**

This is the final phrase of Luke's record of the visit of Gabriel. It both affirms God's power to give Elisabeth a child and His ability to perform all that He had promised to Mary. This wasn't just about her conceiving; through the child that Mary was to bear would be confirmed all of God's promises to His people (Rom 15:8).

Aside from the miraculous intervention in the life of Elisabeth, there had been around 400 years of silence from God before Gabriel's appearance to Mary. No prophets, no patent miracles, no overt signs. Yet, Mary believed, straight away, without doubt.

The words echo those spoken to Abraham in Gen 18:14, also spoken by an angel in relation to the Promised Seed:

*'Is any thing too hard for Yahweh? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.'*

Abraham believed God entirely, not considering the deadness of his body or Sarah's (Rom 4:19-21). God had performed the impossible before; He would do it again. Mary fully believed like Abraham (v45), not deterred by the fact that Gabriel's words were impossible to humankind.

The Lord Jesus later uses a phrase very similar to Gabriel's in his teachings. Twice in the healing of the epileptic lad (Mt 17:14-21; Mk 9:14-29), Christ refers to God being able to do the impossible. The father of this boy had asked the disciples to cure him, but they could not. The first time Jesus' words were directed towards the father:

*'Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, **all things are possible to him that believeth**. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'* (Mk 9:23-24)

Following the incident, the disciples came to Jesus and asked:

*'Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.'* (Mt 17:19-20)

The father was taught the importance of belief and the disciples were reprimanded for their lack of it. Both needed to learn that God's abilities have no bounds. The Lord used that same phrase to illustrate to the disciples God's power to perform the impossible in the saving of individuals as well (Lk 18:25-27).

As a young child, Jesus doubtless had this lesson impressed upon him by his mother. Imagine Mary sitting Jesus on her knee and recounting all the wonderful things God had made and done. She would then tell him that it was his very own Father who had done all that, and there was *nothing* too hard for Him. Jesus grew up with that mentality; it stayed with him forever (Prov 6:20-23).

### DISCUSSION POINTS

Where did Mary's faith come from? How did she develop it? How do we use the example of Mary to grow our own faith so that we completely believe in God, and the angel that comes to take us to His Kingdom?

**38** *And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.*

Handmaid Gk *doule* G1399 = 'a female slave, bondmaid' (Str, Thay).

### Behold the handmaid of the Lord

Many faithful women in Bible times described themselves as a '*handmaid*,' such as Ruth to Boaz (Ruth 2:13; 3:9), Abigail to David (1Sam 25:24-28) and Bathsheba to David (1Ki 1:17). But only one woman in Old Testament times called herself the handmaid '*of the Lord*', and that was Hannah (1Sam 1:11). Mary evidently respected all of these women, but she had chosen her role model - the handmaid of Yahweh - as will become evident from her song a little later on. As such, Mary becomes the only woman in New Testament times to call herself '*the handmaid of the Lord*.'

In this serene phrase spoken by Mary, '*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word*', there is captured the essence of humility that each of us should be developing. In this single statement, Mary sums up the two important aspects of true humility: (1) our own inferiority, and (2) the superiority of God. She calls herself the slave of God, realising her own weakness and her true position, and she exalts God by giving Him the total control over her life.



Bro Dennis Gillett, in *Genius of Discipleship* (p.43), speaks about the kind of humility Mary demonstrated:

*'Think what the change [to be humble] could mean: willing to be anywhere if God wants us there; willing to do anything if God wants us doing it; glad to be silent rather than speak proudly; satisfied to be forgotten if to be remembered feeds our self-esteem; glad to help others do what we might have done ourselves for our reputation's good; anxious to serve for love's sake and not minding how small it may seem; able to do important things without becoming self-important. This is the true meaning of humility.'*

### **FURTHER READING**

Bro Dennis Gillett's chapter on 'Humility' in *Genius of Discipleship*, pp.41-45.

Imagine Mary hadn't been so willing. She could have found excuses: *I'm too young; I'm not ready; I'm not spiritual enough for such a role; others might make hurtful assumptions about me; Joseph might divorce me.* These can all be valid at times, but not when you believe that God knows best.

We can use these excuses too, not always for the best. We may be concerned about our own inexperience or doubts when asked to perform a role in the Ecclesia, but perhaps the person asking us knows better than we do what will be good for us and the Truth!

### **DISCUSSION POINT**

How do we surrender ourselves, our lives, our bodies, and minds to God? We need to be inspired by the faithful example of Mary to surrender control and give ourselves entirely to God.

Do we strive to earn a living, be successful, pursuing our own career goals, or do we let God's principles direct our choices?

Do we keep back secrets in our mind that we are ashamed to utter aloud in prayer?

# ELISABETH'S JOY (1:39-45)

Upon receiving her most exciting news, Mary immediately left for the house of her cousin Elisabeth. These two women shared the most exciting of stories; yet it was also a story that would bring many trials.

**39** *And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;*

## **Mary arose... and went**

Mary wasted no time. From her hometown in Nazareth, Galilee, she travelled south through the region of Samaria and into the hill country of Judea, in the general vicinity of Jerusalem. This journey to Elisabeth's house would have been some 160-200 km, depending on exactly which town they lived in. This is a long journey for a single young lady on foot.

As she journeyed, Mary would have been bubbling with excitement and anticipation. Within her she bore not only the Messiah of Israel, but the Saviour of the world! The prophet Isaiah well captured the significance of Mary's journey to Elisabeth:

*'O thou [Mary] that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!' (Isa 40:9 AV mg).*

Mary was the herald of the best tidings this world had ever seen. As she ascended from the Jordan plane into the hill country of Judea, she came to announce to the cities of Judah, *'Behold, this is Immanuel - God with us'* (cp Mt 1:23). Notice also the context from which Isa 40:9 is taken - that of the work of John the Baptist in heralding the Messiah (v1-8)! This is not the last time good tidings will come to Zion - Isaiah echoes similar sentiments in Ch 52:7, speaking of the time when Zion's King will reign supreme.

What a time of joy this was for these two women, as at such different stages of life they could both experience the blessing of bearing a child for the first time. And not just any children, but both incredibly special boys as had been prophesied by Gabriel. It would have been a wonderful time for the two of them to bond and to encourage one another as they shared in the hope that their two boys would bring to the world together.

## **Into the hill country**

There was a difficulty, however, that would be incurred for Mary by her journey to Elisabeth. Recall that this is the first and last time in history that a woman has conceived without the intervention of a man. Also bear in mind that the angel Gabriel did not appear to all Judea to announce these events, but rather to a select few. Many, therefore, would be left wondering who the real father of Jesus really was.

Mary's journey to Elisabeth included a stretch through the territory of Samaria. Samaritans were despised by the Jews to the point where there was almost no interaction between the two groups (Jn 4:9). In years to come, many would cast aspersions on Mary's purity during this journey, insinuating that Mary must have committed fornication with a Samaritan, thus alleging that Jesus was the son of a Samaritan (Jn 8:41,48). This was one of the trials that Mary and her son would have to bear all their mortal lives.

**40-41** *And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:*

Leaped Gk. *skirtao* G4640 = 'to skip, jump, leap for joy' (Str).

### **The babe leaped**

The word 'leaped' signifies 'to leap with joy' and is translated that way in Luke 6:23. Before he was even born, John miraculously expressed his delight by leaping for joy when he first met his Lord, whilst both in their mothers' wombs. This joy in the Lord's presence continued throughout the rest of John's life.

Later in life, John used a wonderful analogy to describe his own relationship with the Lord, and the joy he felt because of his company (Jn 3:28-30):

*'Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.'*

The Lord himself likens the joy felt by his disciples in Mt 9:14-15 to the joy of the groomsmen in the presence of the bridegroom. The twelve rejoiced in his presence here on earth, just as John here leaped for joy at this first encounter with the Messiah.

**42-45** *And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.*

### **A loud voice**

The Greek for these words is 'megas phone', from which we take the English megaphone. Elisabeth was filled with excitement! She was not afraid to be heard. Messiah was here and Elisabeth could not contain her joy.

### **Blessed art thou among women**

This compliment extends beyond the five words that Elisabeth used. It places Mary alongside one of Scripture's greatest female warriors. The phrase is taken from the Song of Deborah, in reference to Jael who was 'blessed above women' because of her valiant slaughter of Sisera, leader of the Canaanite enemy (Jud 5:24). In the battle of Judges 4-5,

Sisera represented sin – the serpent power – and Jael, with great faith, took a tent peg and hammered it through his temples. In type, she crushed the serpent’s head, and through death, destroyed the one who was threatening death to all of God’s people (Cp. Gen 3:15 and Heb 2:14). This was not an easy feat for Jael: Jud 5:26-27 describes the drama of Sisera’s vain and repeated attempts to get up and fight off Jael. Yet she would be victorious, and the victory would be typical of Christ’s over sin and death (Jud 5:12 is cited in Psa 68:18 and Eph 4:8). Such was the significance of the birth of this child!

### **THE STRENGTH OF SPIRITUAL SISTERS**

Just this single citation of Elisabeth brings four incredible women of faith together in this story. Deborah wrote a most insightful song of victory regarding the inspiring victory of Jael; Elisabeth quoted it to Mary, whose life was dedicated to the greater battle against sin. These women demonstrate the power for good in a sisters’ life when she nurtures a deep reservoir of Scriptural knowledge and is unafraid to live the principles she has learned.

### **Blessed is the fruit of thy womb**

Another phrase rich with Scriptural meaning. David had been promised that, *‘of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne’* (Psa 132:11 – cited of Christ in Acts 2:30).

### **The mother of my Lord**

Notice the humility of this aged woman Elisabeth. The priestly credentials, the blameless reputation and the maturity of her family featured nothing in her view of the young lady before her. Elisabeth felt the full weight of the privilege of this visit. The humility of Elisabeth would become characteristic of her son as well (Jn 3:30).

The phrase *‘my Lord’* is lifted directly out of Psalm 110 and is illustrative of the status of the one to be born from Mary. It was not the done thing in ancient times for a son to be greater than his father: as Bro John Martin aptly puts it, *‘It might be done in our perverse society; NEVER in Israel.’* The Lord uses this fact (that an ancestor is always honoured above his progeny) to explain Psalm 110:1 in Mt 12:35-37. He essentially asked, *‘why do the Scribes say that Messiah is [only] the Son of David, given that David actually calls him ‘my Lord’ in Psalm 110?’* The very clever inference, here, is that Jesus Christ must have a superior lineage for David to call him *‘Lord’* – making him, of course, the Son of God as well. Such was the appreciation of these faithful individuals as they contemplated the baby inside Mary’s womb. He truly was, *‘God with us’* (Mt 1:23).

### **Blessed is she that believed... there shall be a performance**

ESV: *‘And blessed is she who believed **that there would be a fulfillment** of what was spoken to her from the Lord’*

In contrast, of course, to her husband Zacharias. Victory here would come by faith, not by law or the Aaronic priesthood that served under it. Mary showed the faith of Abraham, being *‘fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform’* (Rom 4:21-23).

# THE SONG OF MARY (1:46-56)

Mary now responds to the blessing of Elisabeth. Her song is to go down in history as one of the greatest of all time. In it, Mary draws on two previous songs, each of which is set in the most significant of contexts:

- **The Song of Moses** (Ex 15:1-19) was the triumphal song of the Israelites following their miraculous exodus from the land of sin and death. The allusions featuring in Mary's song highlight the greater deliverance that her son would initiate.
- **Hannah's song** (1Sam 2:1-10) was penned by a woman in remarkably similar circumstances to Mary. In a time of spiritual decay, and set against the backdrop of a corrupt priesthood, Hannah spoke this prayer of thankfulness to Yahweh in celebration of the announcement of the birth of her son. Hannah recognised that her son would bring reprieve to a nation in spiritual drought, but more significantly, she understood the need for the Messiah - in fact, she is the very first person in Scripture to use the term, translated '*His anointed*', in relation to Yahweh's King in 1Sam 2:10!

It is no wonder, therefore, that Mary's song is filled with references to these two masterpieces of spiritual poetry, along with echoes of many other Scriptures.

The Song of Mary provides an insight into the amazing scriptural knowledge that this young lady had. The fact that she could spontaneously utter the words of such a song and prayer, bringing together so many relevant Scriptural passages, is a testament to her love of the Scriptures. Remember, Mary had left '*with haste*' after Gabriel's announcement (v39); she had had little time to read or ponder the Scriptures in relation to this news. All of this was, therefore, *already* in Mary's mind when God chose her for His work.

In a matter of ten verses, Mary quoted or alluded to an astonishing number of Scriptures. She must have been keenly aware of the promises of the Messiah and anticipating their fulfilment. So familiar was she with the Word of God, that it had become her vocabulary and terminology. Mary is a wonderful example of a sister who was a genuine Bible student.

It is thought that Mary may have been as young as 18 at this time. Such a response does not just happen and is especially rare amongst teenagers. This is the result of reading and meditating upon the Scriptures from a child (2Tim 3:15).

## MARY'S ROLE MODEL

How was Mary so inspired as a young woman to deepen her relationship with God and immerse herself so fully in His Word?

As we read Mary's Song, it quickly becomes pertinently obvious that she had a very deep respect for a woman who had lived over a millennium before her time. Mary's Song is framed upon that of Hannah's, and as outlined above, she found herself in a situation not unlike that of her role model, Hannah.

Notice the similarities between the two songs:

Lk 1	Mary's Song	Hannah and her Prayer	1Sam
v46	My soul doth magnify the Lord	My heart rejoiceth in Yahweh	2:1
v47	Rejoiced in God my Saviour	I rejoice in Thy salvation	2:1
v48	Regarded the low estate of His handmaiden	Look on the affliction of Thine handmaid	1:11
v49	Holy is His name	None holy as Yahweh	2:2
v51	Shewed strength with His arm	He shall give strength unto His king	2:10
v51	Scattered the proud	Talk no more exceeding proudly... adversaries... broken to pieces	2:3, 10
v52	Put down the mighty...	Bows of the mighty men are broken	2:4
v52	...from their thrones (Gk)	Throne of glory	2:8
v52	Exalt them of low degree	He bringeth low, and lifteth up	2:6
v53	Filled the hungry	Those who were hungry have ceased to hunger (ESV)	2:5
v53	The rich hath He sent empty away	Yahweh maketh poor, and maketh rich	2:7

Not only did Mary find in Hannah's prayer the inspiration for a beautiful song of praise and exhilaration, but she found in Hannah herself a pattern upon which to build her life and character. Notice the response of Mary to the words of the angel and the events that ensued. Time and again the record informs us that Mary '*cast in her mind*' (v29), '*kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart*' (2:19), '*kept all these sayings in her heart*' (2:51). Where did Mary take this meditative trait from? Perhaps she had learned to think like her spiritual predecessor, Hannah, who '*spake in her heart*' to Yahweh, in 1Sam 1:12.

This illustrates the immense value and importance of having Biblical role models in our lives. It has been well said, that '*all human help is but with weakness fraught*'; but the characters of Scripture remain unchanged through all the ups and downs of our lives. It is true they had their weaknesses; yet God's hand in their lives can be a constant reassurance that He can work in our lives too.

### FURTHER READING

Ch 8 - 'Hannah and her Lord (Luke 1:46-56)', in *Hannah - Handmaid of the Highest*. Published by the Christadelphian. Bro Roger Lewis, pp 175-199.

## MARY'S SONG

In the analysis of Mary's Song below, we will trace through some of her other allusions and references. In general, the parallels to Hannah's Song noted above, which may have drawn on some of these passages in the first place, will not be re-stated.

### **46** *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,*

#### **And Mary said**

This was Mary's spontaneous response to the news she had just been given. Though the announcement of Messiah was not a surprise, her selection to be his mother was totally unexpected. This is how all of Yahweh's servants are found in these signature moments; just the way they are. No time to prepare. No time to write notes. No time to brush up, and in those moments, it is what has been put in over the years that immediately comes out. Jesus said,

*'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: **for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.**' (Lk 6:45).*

#### **My soul doth magnify the Lord**

In her opening line, Mary makes the first of her Old Testament allusions:

*'I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. **O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.**' (Psa 34:1-3)*

Mary was a true daughter of the man who wrote this Psalm, David. This Psalm spoke to her of the exalted state of the humble, whose heart overflows with gratitude towards Yahweh for his abundant blessings. Mary seeks to enjoin others with her to praise Yahweh and exalt His Name with her.

### **47** *And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

There are a number of Old Testament passages that reflect the spirit of this verse:

*'I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of **salvation**.' (Isa 61:10).*

*'And my soul shall be **joyful** in the LORD: it shall rejoice in **his salvation**.' (Psa 35:9).*

The expression 'his salvation' is equivalent to the name Jesus, which is Greek for *Yahoshua*, 'the salvation of Yah'. This is also referred to in the song of Moses: *'Yahweh is my strength and song, and He is become **my salvation**' (Ex 15:2).*

The prophet Habakkuk also makes reference to God as our Saviour:

*'Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in **the God of my salvation**.' (Hab 3:18)*

This passage has an amazing application to the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ. In Luke 2:7, the word translated 'manger' (Gk *phatne*) is also used in the LXX in Hab. 3:17. By the hand of providence, there was no room for Mary in the Inn, so she *'wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger'* (Lk 2:7).

This is not just a heart-warming story of the disagreeable turn of events for the birth of baby Jesus. This was a circumstance of great significance to the mission of Christ:

<b>Habakkuk 3</b>	<b>The meaning</b>
<b>v17</b> <i>'Although the fig tree shall not blossom'</i>	The fig tree can represent the nation of Israel (Jer 24:5), but this is a time when it was barren.
<i>'neither shall fruit be in the vines'</i>	There is no wine for the drink offering.
<i>'the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat'</i>	Oil and Wheat - No bread for the Meal Offering. Meal and Drink Offering were symbols of fellowship with Yahweh (Lev 23:13).
<i>'the flock shall be cut off from the fold'</i>	Lambs were used for a Sin Offering. The nation was without a sin offering (Lev. 4:32).
<i>'and there shall be no herd in <b>the stalls</b>' (LXX 'manger')</i>	The Bullock was used for the Burnt Offering. The nation was without a Burnt Offering (Lev. 1:3).
<b>v18</b> <i>'Yet I will rejoice in the LORD'</i>	Despite this terrible situation, Habakkuk rejoices! Why?
<i>'I will joy in the God of my salvation.'</i>	Because of 'Yahoshua' - Jesus.

Habakkuk saw an empty manger; a derelict stable. He sees the nation separated from Yahweh: They are like a fig tree dried up with no fruit; a nation out of fellowship with Yahweh and with no sin offering and no burnt offering.

But despite all this, Habakkuk rejoices! Because of Jesus: the one through whom *'Yah shall save'* His people (Mt 1:21). And how will He save? He will provide a lamb for a sin offering (Jn 1:29), a bullock for a burnt offering, a meal and drink offering. He will provide bread and wine. He will cause the fig tree to blossom again and bear fruit. The baby in the empty manger was to be all these things!

**48** *For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*

**For He hath regarded the low estate**

Mary echoes Psalm 136:23:

*'Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever:'*

This is a wonderful characteristic of our God. He never forgets the poor, the fatherless, or those without someone to help them:

*'I am poor and sorrowful: let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high... The humble shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God. **For Yahweh heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners.**' (Psa 69:29-33).*

*'For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, **with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit**, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'* (Isa 57:15).



*‘Thus saith Yahweh, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool... but to this will I look, **even to a poor and a contrite spirit, who trembleth at my word**’* (Isa 66:1-2).

And that was exactly who Mary was: ‘a poor and contrite spirit’ who had a deep regard for God’s word above all else. She lived in an age where the gap between rich and poor, slave and free was immense. Those of noble status had little to do with people of no status. Education determined your social class, along with any other basis for prejudice and class distinction. This was amplified by the fact that there were no equalizing factors like equal opportunity, human rights, government unemployment benefits or low-income subsidies. From a worldly perspective, even her son who was the wisest, most powerful and beneficent man who ever lived, was despised simply because of where he came from.

Mary was well aware of her low estate in the eyes of man. In view of this, how apt are these words of the Apostle Paul,

*‘Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and **things which are despised, hath God chosen**, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.’* (1Cor 1:26-28).

### **of his handmaiden**

In the two Messianic Psalms below, Messiah was to be the son of Yahweh’s handmaid. Mary could now see that these Psalms were speaking of her:

- *‘O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save **the son of thine handmaid.**’* (Psa 86:16).
- *‘O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and **the son of thine handmaid:** thou hast loosed my bonds.’* (Psa 116:16).

The two Hebrew words for ‘servant’ and ‘handmaid’ in these Psalms (*ebed* and *amah* respectively), both indicate a servant or bondslave. The former is a masculine word and the latter feminine. Mary saw herself and her son as two bondslaves of Yahweh. And so it was from his mother that our Lord learned a very important lesson that, at the last, would help him overcome:

- His motto: *‘Not my will, thine be done.’* (Lk 22:42)
- His mother’s motto: *‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.’* (Lk 1:38)

### **for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.**

It is possible that Mary here draws on the words of Leah, who rejoiced at the birth of her son Asher.<sup>22</sup> *‘Happy am I,’* Leah said, *‘for the daughters will call me blessed’* (Gen 30:13). Leah had been the lesser-loved wife of Jacob for many years. She knew what it was to be *‘of low estate’*.

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<sup>22</sup> It is of note that Anna the prophetess, who turns up a little later in Luke’s account, was from the tribe of Asher (Lk 2:36).

This phrase identifies Mary as the following:

- The virtuous woman: **'Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.'** (Prov 31:28-29)
- The type of woman that makes up bride of Christ: **'My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.'** (Song 6:9).

It is clear that Mary understood that this announcement from Gabriel had changed her destiny, because from henceforth succeeding generations would call her blessed. The same would also be true of Mary's son: *'all nations shall call him blessed'* (Psa 72:17).

## **49** For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

### **he that is mighty**

The Greek word *'dunatos'* means *'able, powerful, mighty or strong'*. It is Mary's acknowledgement that with Him, all things are possible – it is the same word *'a-dunatos'* in v35, but without the negative prefix.

It has been suggested that this is an allusion to the Old Testament title of God, *El Shaddai*, frequently translated, *God Almighty*. Whether this is what Mary intended, we cannot be sure.

### **hath done to me great things**

Mary appears to be alluding to Psalm 126:1-3:

*'The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.'*

This is one of the Songs of Degrees that celebrated the victory of Yahweh over Assyria in the days of Hezekiah. Hezekiah was an amazing type of Christ and the subject of both the Immanuel and Servant prophecies of Isaiah. This Psalm refers to the nation's joy at Assyria's fall and Hezekiah's recovery. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were elated beyond their wildest imagination. They thought they were dreaming. In the symbolic death and resurrection of Hezekiah, the enemy of Yahweh's people was destroyed in one stroke and they were set free from the power of the enemy. This was the mission of the Greater-than-Hezekiah, the son of Mary.

### **and holy is His Name**

Why does Mary particularly mention God's holy Name?

The Name by which God has chosen to be known to us is *"Yahweh"*, meaning *'I will be'*. At first this appears to be a peculiar Name – and perhaps even hard to understand. But Mary had a knowledge, love and respect for God's Name.

This is the Name by which He has, and will, be known – His memorial Name to all generations (see Ex 3:15). When we consider God's Name in the context in which it was shared with Moses (in Exodus 3 and 33-34), we learn that *'Yahweh'* is expressive of His plan to develop an entire family of people who share His character.

Mary is again drawing from the Psalms in the way she refers to God's Name:

*'He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his Name.'* (Psa 111:9).

Psalm 111 celebrates the great works of Yahweh, with repeated reference to them throughout the Psalm. God's works are expressed in connection with His character and Name: *'He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD (Yahweh) is gracious and full of compassion.'* (Psa 111:4; see Ex 34:6).

This Divine Name of Yahweh, and the purpose it expresses, was to be outworked, or manifested, in the son of Mary, Jesus, who very literally bore Yahweh's name, *'Yah shall save'*.

*'I have manifested **Thy Name** unto the men which Thou gavest me out of the world... And I have declared unto them **Thy Name**, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.'* (Jn 17:6,26).

### **50** *And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.*

Psalm 103:17-18:

*'The mercy of Yahweh is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.'*

This is a beautiful Psalm about the mercy and compassion of Yahweh towards His children. The Psalm that calls upon us to bless Yahweh and forget not all His benefits: Because He forgives all our iniquities; He heals all our diseases; He redeems our life from destruction; He crowns us with lovingkindness and tender mercies. All this Yahweh would do in the Son of Mary. In him, He would extend His mercy.

#### **UNDERSTANDING THE GRACE OF GOD**

Notice from v50 that Mary understood that the mercy of Yahweh, though unmerited and undeserved, **is** conditional. It is only extended to *'them that fear'* Yahweh.

- How does that compare to the type of gospel preached by the churches around you?
- What does it mean to 'fear Yahweh'?

### **51** *He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*

#### **He hath shewed strength with his arm**

The arm of Yahweh is a frequent term in the prophets, and just like our own arm, is an extension of His body and power. Consequently, Moses sang,

*'Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by **the greatness of thine arm** they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Yahweh, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased.'* (Ex 15:16. Cp Deut 5:15).

The arm of Yahweh often speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, Mary's own son (Isa 53:1). Psalm 98:1-3 reflects upon the work of God's arm in the context of *His salvation* (in Greek, Jesus):

*'O sing unto Yahweh a new song; for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand, and **His holy arm**, hath gotten Him the victory. Yahweh hath made known **His salvation**: His righteousness hath He openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered His mercy and His truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the **salvation of our God.**'*

The Psalm concludes with the second coming of the Son of Mary to judge the world in righteousness and ultimately to bring salvation to all people (Psa. 98:9).

Another Psalm expressing the power of God's arm in Christ is Psalm 89:13-18:

*'**Thou hast a mighty arm**: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand... I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him'*

In this Psalm we can see the assurance Mary felt in knowing that Yahweh had ultimate power over all things and was in control of her life, even though it appeared that evil men in the Jewish Priesthood as well as in the Roman dominion were in control. Ultimately David's greater son would be chosen, exalted and anointed king.

### **he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.**

Hannah contended with the proud of her day: *'talk no more exceeding proudly, let not arrogancy come out of your mouth,'* she said (1Sam 2:3). Many years later, Mary would watch as the proud - the mighty - the prestigious of her day were brought to their knees in comparison with her son. In fact, when the Lord began his ministry, Luke 3:1-6 introduces him as *'the salvation of God'* (v6 = Gk Jesus) in the context of the great and noble of his day. Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod the Tetrach, Philip his brother, Annas and Caiaphas are all introduced with their array of pompous titles; then comes John - a voice - introducing the *'Salvation of Yahweh'* to the nation. It would take a long time, but ultimately, the proud would be brought low.

Isaiah 2:11-17 prophesies about the time when this will be true in the fullest sense:

*'The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day...'*

Like Psalm 2, this passage speaks ultimately of the humiliation of all nations who oppose Christ in his Kingdom, however there was a sense in which the proud were brought down at his first advent.

## **52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.**

seats                      Gk *thronos* G2362 = 'a stately seat, a throne' (Str).

### **He hath put down the mighty from their seats**

Mary knew that God had the power to dethrone monarchs in the Kingdom of men and replace them according to His will. Her son was one day to take the greatest of thrones.

Hannah had spoken of this king as well, in 1Sam 1:10 – years before Israel ever had a king! But when Mary mentions the topic, there is now a great deal of history attached. Since the times of Hannah, the whole Kingdom of Israel and Judah had been and gone. Due to the rebellion of its kings, the last of them – Zedekiah – had been ‘put down from his seat,’ or dethroned:

*‘And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: **exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high.** I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, **until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.**’ (Ezek 21:25-27)*

The angel Gabriel had revealed to Mary that the royal throne of David – here removed from Zedekiah – was reserved for her son (Lk 1:32-33)! Not everyone in Christ’s life agreed with this, however. The Lord’s claim to kingship was to be contested the entire way through his life: from the day of his birth, when Herod the Great sought to slay him (Mt 2:2,7-8,16) to the day of his death, when Pilate asked, ‘*Art thou the King of the Jews?*’ (Mt 27:11, cp. v29, 37, 41). Yet Mary believed that God would remove the mighty from their thrones, because He had chosen one to set upon the throne of Israel.

Many in history have found this a difficult lesson to learn; the supreme example being King Nebuchadnezzar. God told Nebuchadnezzar that ‘*He changes the times and the seasons: He removes kings, and sets up kings*’ (Dan 2:21; cp 4:17). After a long life of pride and prestige, Nebuchadnezzar finally acknowledged that, ‘*those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*’ (Dan. 4:37).

### **and exalted them of low degree**

Psalm 113:7-9:

*‘He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye Yahweh.’*

Here is a beautiful Psalm that celebrates the elevation of those like Mary of low degree. The expression ‘*dunghill*’ is equivalent to the scrap heap of humanity. Mary was elevated to be set with her son – the Prince of Princes (Dan 8:25; cp 9:25; 12:1). She will also be elevated amongst the princes of his people, the Kings and Priests of the future age (Rev 5:9-10) This would be made possible by the sacrifice of Mary’s son.

**53** *He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

### **He hath filled the hungry with good things**

Mary appears to be alluding to Psalm 107:8-9:

*‘Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and **fillethe the hungry soul with goodness.**’*

Mary was poor and may well have experienced the pangs of hunger. But she had learned that there is a greater food – spiritual bread – upon which we must live (Deut 8:3).

How true Mary's statement would prove to be, for she was to give birth to the Bread of Life - bread that would satisfy for ever (Jn 6:51,58)!

### **and the rich he hath sent empty away**

This is clearly a reference to Hannah's song:

*'They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased' (1Sam 2:5).*

Both women had experienced the oppression of the poor. In Hannah's case, she mourned the way in which 'the rich', Hophni and Phinehas, had been filling themselves with the sacrifices made by the poor. Mary lived under a priesthood that was little different. But both women rejoiced in the reversal that Yahweh would bring through each of their sons.

### **54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;**

#### **He hath holpen his servant Israel**

Holpen = Lit. 'took by the hand' (Cambridge Commentary). Cp. Isa 41:8-9 LXX:

*'But thou, Israel, art my servant Jacob, and he whom I have chosen, the seed of Abram, whom I have loved: **whom I have taken hold of** from the ends of the earth, and from the high places of it I have called thee, and said to thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and I have not forsaken thee. '*

Moses referred to Yahweh as 'the shield of thy help' (Deut 33:29). Also cp Psa 115:9-11.

Mary understood that her son was to be evidence of Yahweh's help and Divine assistance to His people Israel. Israel had lost their inheritance and independent governorship of the Land of Promise. They were in desperate need of Divine aid. That came in the person of Messiah, Mary's son, because he would come to confirm and also fulfil the promises made to the Fathers:

*'Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy...' (Rom. 15:8-9).*

#### **In remembrance of his mercy**

This phrase is a reference to God's covenants of promise (v55) which are to be fulfilled on the basis of God's mercy (Mic 7:20; Isa 55:3).

Psalm 98:3 reflects beautifully upon this fact, and may well be the origin of Mary's phrase:

*'**He hath remembered His mercy** and His truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the **salvation of our God.**' (Yahoshua - Jesus)*

Mary knew that her son was evidence that Yahweh did remember the mercy that He had promised to His people. They had not been forgotten in their affliction under the burden of Roman oppression.

## **55** *As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.*

This appears to be a summary reference to all of the promises to Abraham, in which God promised His mercy and forgiveness to be available to all nations through Abraham's greater son (Acts 3:25-26; Gal 3:29).

There are many beautiful passages in this connection, as Mary has touched upon one of the heartstrings of Scripture:

*'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.'* (Mic 7:18-20).

Cp Psa 105:6-10; Jer. 33:25-26

Mary knew that her Son came for the purpose of fulfilling the promises made to the Fathers of Israel. Messiah was the promised son of Abraham and son of David. All Israel was in expectation of him, and this carefully selected young virgin was to bring him into the world.

### **Summary of Mary's Song**

What a brilliant summary exposition of the Gospel! The Good News of the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ. Mary uttered a song of joy; a prayer of faith; a psalm of hope; indeed, a marvellous and personal vision of the Kingdom to come.

## **56** *And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.*

### **Returned to her own house**

Mary returned *'to her own house'*, rather than to her father's house. This is in contrast to her arrival at Elisabeth's house, where we are told she *'entered into the house of Zacharias'* (v40). It would appear Mary lived on her own, she may well have been an orphan.

A desert landscape featuring a large, layered rock formation in the foreground, set against a clear blue sky. The rock formation is composed of distinct horizontal layers, suggesting sedimentary or volcanic origins. The foreground is a flat, reddish-brown desert floor. The overall scene is bright and clear, with strong shadows cast by the rock formation.

# BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

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LUKE 1:57-80



# THE BIRTH AND NAMING OF JOHN (1:57-66)

**57-58** *Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.*

## Now Elisabeth's full time came

Roth: 'to Elisabeth was the time fulfilled'. Compare Mary's 'full time' (Lk 2:6, p 85-86).

## Great mercy

The RV translates this 'magnified His mercy' (cp 2Sam 22:51 LXX). Mercy is often associated with the promises (eg. Luke 1:54-55; Mic 7:18-20)

## They rejoiced with her

This is in fulfilment of Gabriel's words in v14: 'thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth'.

## CHARACTER SKETCH

<b>JOHN THE BAPTIST: The Forerunner</b>		
<b>Age:</b>	Six months older than Christ	Lk 1:36
<b>Status:</b>	Unmarried	
<b>Hometown:</b>	Hill country of Judah, then the Wilderness	Lk 1:80
<b>Tribe:</b>	Levi, in the Priestly Line	Lk 1:5
<b>Relatives:</b>	Zacharias and Elizabeth (parents); Christ (second cousin); Mary (mother's cousin)	Lk 1:13
<b>Income &amp; Assets:</b>	Nil - no home	Lk 1:80; Mt 11:7
<b>Name meaning:</b>	Yah is gracious	

**59** *And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.*

## On the eighth day

See notes later on regarding the significance of the 8th day - p 100.

## **They came to circumcise the child**

In those times, the child was named at the same time they were circumcised (cp 2:21). See notes on p 100-101 regarding the significance of circumcision.

### **Called him Zacharias**

YLT: *'they were calling him by the name of his father, Zacharias.'* This implies they not only wanted to call him Zacharias, but were already doing so. There was a certain aptness of this name, given that Yahweh had *'remembered'* the elderly couple and given them a son. However, it was not to be.

**60-61** *And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.*

### **He shall be called John**

As instructed by Gabriel (v13). John means *'grace'* or *'the grace of God'*.

### **There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name**

This the whole point of circumcision - denying fleshly descent! John's message to the nation was summed up in the words, *'all flesh is grass'* (Isa 40:6). He did not come to claim priestly or royal descent. No, John had to be isolated from his priestly family, because he came to announce a better priesthood.

In commenting upon Isa 40:6, Peter writes that, because all flesh is as grass, we need to be *'born again... by the word of God'* (1Pet 1:23-25). That is exactly what happened to John; his special naming *'by the word of God'* heralded a new priest and his priesthood (cp 1Pet 2:9).

**62-63** *And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.*

### **They marvelled all**

Zacharias would have been waiting at least nine full months to have the opportunity to have an input into the amazing grace that God had granted to him and his wife. He remembers and accepts Gabriel's words in naming the child John despite the pressure of those around him.

**64** *And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.*

His last words doubted the angel's promise, but now he responds in faith to praise God (cp Psa 40:3). Edersheim suggests that Zacharias' Prophecy is based on the prayers said by the priests in their Temple service, but now Zacharias had learnt to understand what was truly meant.<sup>23</sup> Be that as it may, the out-pouring and weaving together is nothing short of amazing!

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<sup>23</sup> Edersheim A 1909. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p158

**65-66** *And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.*

### **These sayings were noised... all the hill country of Judaea**

Mary had earlier brought good news to Elisabeth in the vein of Isaiah 40:9, and Elisabeth now has her own glad tidings which were spread around throughout all the hill country of Judaea.

### **Noised abroad... laid them up in their hearts**

The birth and naming of John marked the commencement of the wonderful events prophesied by Isaiah (Isa 40:1-5). The time had come to prepare the way in the hearts of God's people for the coming of their Lord (cp Isa 40:3 mg '*speak to the heart of Jerusalem*'). And so, the faithful were encouraging each other as they read these prophecies and waited in anticipation (Mal 3:16).

Bro Melva Purkis, in *A Life of Jesus*, writes (p 19):

*'All Israel was watching for the coming of the promised Messiah, but only a remnant was waiting for him. It is not difficult to watch the signs of the times but only a life of devotion, a quiet submission of heart, a complete desire to sacrifice worldly ambitions and privileges, will create in us a true spirit of patient waiting for Christ where watching is only the visible sign of the intense expectancy of the whole being.'*

### **And the hand of the Lord was with him**

i.e. God blessed him, cared for him and guided him (Psa 37:4).

This places John in the company of Joseph (Gen 39:3,23); Samuel (1Sam 3:19), David (1Sam 18:12,14), Solomon (2Chr 1:1), Asa (2Chr 15:9), Hezekiah (2Ki 18:7) and many others.

The interesting thing about God's hand being with these faithful individuals is that they didn't necessarily always know at the time. They simply live a Godly, prayerful and trusting life, and God took care of the rest: e.g. *'David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and Yahweh was with him.'* (1Sam 18:14). One day, looking back, God's hand would be evident

# THE PROPHECY OF ZACHARIAS (1:68-80)

Before going into the detail of this amazing prophecy of Zacharias, it is important to understand the background and circumstances of the prophecy.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PROPHECY

### Zacharias' circumstances

For nine months, since Gabriel appeared to Zacharias in the Temple, he has been not only dumb (as Gabriel said he would be) but also deaf as well. Proof? Luke 1:62 tells us, *'they made signs to his father (Zacharias), how he would have him (the baby) called.'*

If Zacharias was not deaf, they could just ask him in words, but they didn't. So, Zacharias is both deaf and dumb and as a result has been living for nine months in an utterly silent world. He can't speak to others; they can't speak with him. What affect would this have? Yes, he would feel very isolated from other people, but the positive is that his mind would be extraordinarily free to think.

What would he have been thinking about? Undoubtedly, he would have been revolving these events over and over in his mind, searching for the meaning of all that had happened. Some of the thoughts he would likely have meditated upon would be:

- The sudden Divine intervention, when there had been no miracle or Divine prophecy for over 400 years since Malachi. Why had God chosen this time to intervene?
- The amazing appearance of Gabriel to him in the temple when he was performing his once-in-a-lifetime privilege of offering incense.
- The prophecy of the birth of the child John - humanly speaking he and Elisabeth could no longer have children. Yet the prophecy was evidently coming to pass.
- The responsibility of bringing up this special boy to be the prophet of Yahweh. What would they have to do to bring up this child for God?
- The visit of Mary for three months (1:56); no doubt he had been informed (by writing) of Gabriel's appearance to Mary and the promise of the birth of the Son of God given to her!
- That God had struck him deaf and dumb because of his unbelief. Why must it be so?!

One can imagine the increasing frustration Zacharias must have felt being deaf and dumb as the days, and weeks and months rolled on. He could easily have become resentful that God had done this to him despite the fact that he had been working as a faithful priest for many years when all around him the priesthood was so corrupt. Yes, he had succumbed to a moment's unbelief, but did he deserve to be struck deaf and dumb?

Now that the child John had been born and the ceremony of his circumcision and naming was in progress, one can imagine the joy in the mind of Zacharias. His mind and emotions must have been entirely preoccupied with this precious little boy.

## OBSERVATIONS ON THE PROPHECY

When we turn to look at Zacharias' prophecy with this background in mind there are some key points that come out.

### Zacharias' meekness

Firstly, there is no hint of resentment from Zacharias for God making him deaf and dumb. Rather, his mind is full of praise of God. E.g. v68: *'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.'* This implies his acceptance that God was right in striking him deaf and dumb for his unbelief. What a lesson for us all. When something goes wrong in our lives, our human nature can come to the fore and we can think to ourselves (if not say it to others) that we don't deserve what has happened and instead we can perhaps blame God rather than ourselves.

### Zacharias' selflessness

Secondly, the words he utters in the prophecy are not just about their son John. As new parents it would have been natural to be so absorbed by their little boy that his first words would have been about John. Yet he does not even mention John till v76 (*'And thou child'*), which is over halfway through the prophecy. Instead, he focussed on God (v68), the work of Christ (v69) and the needs of others (v74). Zacharias clearly cared deeply about his God and the needs of the nation, not just on his own family.

### A LESSON IN SELF-SACRIFICE

What are our own minds and hearts focused on? Human nature is biased to concentrate on self. We live in the 'me' generation. Our world tells us that 'I' am the most important person, and that I need to look after 'me' first. But the type of character suitable for the kingdom is vastly different. Such a person will be focused upon God and others: as Christ said, the two great commandments are, *'Thou shalt love Yahweh thy God... thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'* (Mt 22:36-40).

When we are at Young Peoples' events and Ecclesial activities, who do we talk to and what do we talk about? Do we look out for young people who might be feeling a bit awkward or not fitting in? Does our love of God show in our words and demeanour?

### Zacharias figured out God's plan of redemption

Zacharias used his nine months of silence wisely. During this time, he discovered from Scripture the purpose of the birth of the son of God and of John, his forerunner. Zacharias' prophecy is full of references and allusions to salvation coming through Christ as the fulfilment of **the Promises** God had made:

- To Abraham - v72-73 *'To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He swore to our father Abraham'*
- To David - v69 *'And hath raised up an horn of salvation (Jesus Christ) for us in the house of His servant David'*

Why is this so significant? We know about the importance of the promises to Abraham and David, but at the time of Zacharias the Jews had the wrong emphasis. They knew about the Promises but thought that salvation came by *keeping the law* - observing the Sabbath, performing ritual washings, participating in fasts etc.

In Zacharias' prophecy, there is *nothing* about salvation by keeping the Law. Zacharias had figured out the truth that salvation was by promise, not by Law. This is remarkable, given the context of the priesthood and religious aristocracy in which he lived.

### A LESSON IN MEDITATION...

Zacharias had used his 9 months of silence wisely in meditating on God's word. When we have free time, what do we do with it? It is so easy to do all sorts of other things other than studying God's word or thinking about Him. It is so simple... and addictive... to pull out our phones, check our emails, look at postings on WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, watch a video on YouTube or play a game.

Free time is an opportunity to imbibe Godly thoughts into our minds. We could listen to a Bible talk or podcast, read a Psalm, or meditate upon something in Scripture we have been studying.

If we ever want to ascend the spiritual heights that Zacharias and Mary attained, we will need to make a conscious effort in this world of distractions to spend time with our God.

### STRUCTURE OF ZACHARIAS' PROPHECY

This prophecy is not just a collection of nice thoughts presented in random order. It is highly structured with an amazing thought flow. The prophecy is written as a Psalm. It is Hebraistic in form, phrasing and rhythm. It doesn't rhyme as this is not the style of Hebrew poetry.

#### The Chiasmic Structure

The Prophecy of Zacharias is structured as a chiasm. A chiasm is a literary device in which the concepts, words or phrases at the beginning of the section are mirrored by similar concepts, words or phrases at the end of that passage. The result is a portion of text that 'hinges', or is 'mirrored,' around a middle portion. This central part of the chiasm often holds a key to unlocking the meaning of the whole passage.

The Chiastic structure of Zacharias' Prophecy is shown below. You will note the way in which concepts from the beginning of the Prophecy match those at the end, and so on:<sup>24</sup>

- |    |   |        |
|----|---|--------|
| a) | <b>Visited</b> and redeemed his people        | v68    |
| b) | Horn of <b>Salvation</b>                      | v69    |
| c) | Holy <b>prophets</b>                          | v70    |
| d) | Salvation from our <b>enemies</b>             | v71    |
| e) | His holy <b>covenant</b>                      | v72    |
| e) | The <b>oath</b> which he swore                | v73    |
| d) | Delivered from our <b>enemies</b>             | v74-75 |
| c) | <b>Prophet</b> of the highest                 | v76    |
| b) | Knowledge of <b>salvation</b> to his people   | v77    |
| a) | Dayspring from on high hath <b>visited</b> us | v78-79 |

The central idea (e) is that **salvation is given by God on the basis of His covenant** or oath, not because of Law or man's worthiness of salvation.

<sup>24</sup> Taken from Bullinger's Companion Bible

It is also interesting that Zacharias has woven into this central idea the names of John, Zacharias, and Elisabeth:

Centre of Chiasm	Name meanings
<i>'To perform the <b>mercy</b> promised to our fathers,</i>	John = Yahweh is gracious, or <b>merciful</b>
<i>'and to <b>remember</b> his holy covenant;</i>	Zacharias = Yahweh <b>remembers</b>
<i>'The <b>oath</b> which he swore to our father Abraham.'</i> (v72-73)	Elisabeth = <b>Oath</b> of God

## THOUGHT FLOW

The following provides a summary and then attempts to trace the flow of thought in the Prophecy.

Verses	Summary
v68-70	God is sending the long-awaited Messiah
v71	Messiah will bring deliverance
v72-73	Messiah will fulfil the Promises
v74-75	The Results of Messiah's deliverance
v76-79	The work of Messiah's forerunner

## EXPOSITION OF ZACHARIAS' PROPHECY

It is important to remember that the record of this prophecy given in just eleven verses is unlikely to be everything that Zacharias said. It would only take a minute or two to say these eleven verses. After being deaf and dumb for so long, it is probable that Zacharias spoke for a good deal longer, and that Luke has recorded an epitome of his speech. We can unpack this summary by referring to the quotations that Zacharias uses.

In fact, this prophecy or psalm of Zacharias is brimming with Scriptural citations. Zacharias knew his Bible well, which explains why Yahweh chose this man to bring up John. Not only would John be *'a prophet;*' he was to be the greatest of the prophets. Jesus himself affirmed, *'Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he'* (Lk 7:28).

### A LESSON FROM ZACHARIAS

How well do we know our Bibles? If we desire to be useful servants to our God, then we need to ensure that we know our Bibles well. The great leaders and workers for God in both Old and New Testaments knew their Bibles.

## V68-70 - GOD IS SENDING THE LONG-AWAITED MESSIAH

**68** *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,*

### **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel**

This expression is used for praise and thanks to Yahweh at great moments in Israel's history. For example, it was used:

- To conclude David's Psalm given when the Ark was brought to Zion (1Chr 16:36).
- To conclude David's speech at the coronation of Solomon (1Kings 1:48).
- To commence Solomon's speech at the dedication of the Temple (1Kings 8:15).

How fitting it was for Zacharias to use this expression at the birth of John, who would be the forerunner of Messiah – a truly great moment in history.

This expression is also used to conclude Books I, II and IV of the Psalms (see Psa 41:13; 72:18 and 106:48 respectively).

### **For he hath visited and redeemed his people**

The terms '*visited*' and '*redeemed*' are significant terms and carry allusions to Israel's deliverance from Egypt:

- Ex 4:31: '*And the people believed: and when they heard that Yahweh had **visited** the children of Israel.*' (See also Ex 3:16). This is when Moses and Aaron first spoke to Israel when they were in Egypt and gave them the good news that Yahweh would deliver them out of Egypt
- Ex 15:13: '*Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast **redeemed**.*' This is immediately after Israel had miraculously crossed the Red Sea and were rejoicing that they were now free from Egypt.

It appears that Zacharias uses '*visited*' to refer to the work of John Baptist who gave Israel the good news that Messiah would soon be revealed. '*Redeemed*' then refers to the work of Jesus - that he would redeem his people from their sins.

It is interesting that Zacharias uses the past tense for '*visited*' (the work of John) and '*redeemed*' (the work of Jesus) as if it were already accomplished; already finished. Yet John was only 8 days old, and Jesus was not yet born! To Zacharias, it was as good as done; such was his faith. This is the type of faith shown by Rahab, who told the spies '*I know that Yahweh **hath** given you the land*' (Josh 2:9), when Israel had not yet taken a single city on the west of the Jordan! Because God had promised it, to her it was as if Israel had already conquered the land.



How do we feel about the return of Christ and his reign over all the earth in the millennium? Do we by faith see this as an absolute certainty or do we have nagging doubts?

Zacharias once had doubts, and he chose to do something about it. We have to opportunity now to look for answers: to read God's word, to ask people questions, to meditate, to ask God for help.



**69** *And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;*

### **and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us**

Alluding to Psa 132:16-17: *'I will clothe her priests with **salvation**... There will I make the **horn** of David to sprout.'* This Psalm also refers to the promises to David in v11.

A horn is a symbol of power in the Bible. For example, in Dan 7:24 *'the ten horns'* are pictured to represent *'ten kings'*. In prophecies about the nations, horns frequently represent destructive powers. Here in Luke 1, the horn is referring to the **power to save** available through Christ.

Why did Zacharias choose to use this terminology? In addition to alluding to the Promises to David in this verse, through Psalm 132, there are a number of possible reasons.

- Zacharias had doubtless developed a certain kinship with Ezekiel, the dumb priest, whose last prophecy (chronologically) spoke of *'the horn of the house of Israel'* whom God would send, at the same time that he would *'give thee [Ezekiel] the opening of the mouth'* (Ezek 29:21).
- Hannah, in her song, rejoiced that Yahweh will *'give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his Messiah'* (1Sam 2:10).

Another interesting reference is 2Sam 22:3, where Yahweh is described as a horn of salvation to David.

### **In the house of his servant David**

Quoting 2Sam 7, the chapter about the Promises to David: *'And let thy name be magnified for ever, ... and let the **house of thy servant David** be established before thee'* (2Sam 7:26).

Jesus was not only of the house of David but was also of the lineage of the kings that came from David (Luke 2:4). He therefore fulfils perfectly the requirements of 2Sam 7.

**70** *As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:*

As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world (*aion* = age) began:

The point is that these promises of Messiah are not just given to David, but they are also in the mouths of the prophets before and after David.

Many prophets spoke of the coming of Messiah.

To name just a few:

- Jacob (Gen 49:10)
- Moses (Deut 18:15-18)
- David (Psa 132:11)
- Isaiah (Isa 9:6-7, 53:1-12)
- Micah (Mic 5:2)
- Jeremiah (Jer 23:5)
- Daniel (Dan 9:25)
- Ezekiel (Ezek 21:26-27)

The Lord Jesus Christ confirms this: *'Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.'* (Lk 24:27).

## **V71 - MESSIAH WILL BRING DELIVERANCE**

**71** *That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;*

Having introduced the Messiah as son of David and the long-awaited Saviour spoken of by the Prophets, there is now an implied question: What will the Messiah do?

The next few verses answer that question. The Jews expected Messiah to be a grand warrior who would liberate Israel from the Romans, because they focussed on the Scriptures that speak of his second advent and his ruling of the nations. However, they missed the key work of Messiah in his first advent; that he would provide the means for salvation from sin and death.

### **Saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us**

Zacharias is quoting 2Sam 7:10-11: '*neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them anymore, as beforetime... caused thee to rest from all thine enemies.*'

Zacharias could see that the enemies of Israel were more than just those nations that oppressed them. The greatest enemy was sin. In fact, sin was the root cause of all the persecution they suffered from enemy nations. Messiah would deal with this root cause first, which would pave the way to deliverance from domineering neighbours.

## **V72-73 - MESSIAH WILL FULFIL THE PROMISES**

**72-73** *To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,*

These two verses form the centre of the chiasmic structure and therefore encapsulate the kernel of the ideas Zacharias is presenting. God will deliver Israel from their enemies because He will honour the promises He made to the Fathers.

### **To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant**

Zacharias appears to be quoting the concluding verse of Deut 7:6-12: '*it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that Yahweh thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers.*'

But the previous verses explain more (Deut 7:7-8): '*Yahweh did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye [were] the fewest of all people: But because Yahweh loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers*'.

The Covenant is of course the covenant God made with Abraham in Gen 15:8-21: '*In the same day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram...*' (v18). There may also be an allusion to Psa 105:8-10, '*He hath remembered his covenant*', and Ex 6:5.

### **The oath which he sware unto our father Abraham**

What is the significance of this oath? '*When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee... and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.*' (Heb 6:13-16). The oath that God swore was a confirmation - on the basis of His very own existence - that He would perform His promise to Abraham.

This oath was given to Abraham in Gen 22:16-18, after he had virtually sacrificed Isaac. *'By myself have I **sworn**, saith Yahweh, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son... that in blessing I will bless thee... And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'*.

Notice the last portion of this promise, or oath: *'in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed'*. This is a promise of victory over sin, as explained in Acts 3:25-26: *'the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, 'And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.'* Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, **sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.'**

The boy whom John was to go before was to become the man through whom God would fulfil this wonderful promise!

## **V74-75 - THE RESULTS OF MESSIAH'S DELIVERANCE**

In the Chiastic structure (see p 69) this verse is labelled d) and is counterpart to v71 which is also labelled d). Both verses deal with enemies.

v71 was about Messiah's work in the future, *'that we should be saved from our enemies'*. v74-75 now project our minds further into the Kingdom age, when we can then look back at what Messiah has done (in the past tense):

**74** *That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear*

### **Being delivered out of the hand of our enemies**

Quoting Psa 107:2: *'Let the **redeemed** of Yahweh say so, whom he hath **redeemed from the hand of the enemy**'*. Why does Zacharias quote this Psalm?

Firstly, it is a contrast with what God said he would do to Israel when they failed to fear him and instead disobeyed him. Lev 26:25 says, *'I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and **ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy**'*.

Secondly, Psa 107:1-7 has a latter-day application<sup>25</sup> to the **redeemed** (v2 - quoted above), which is the saints, coming to a 'city of habitation' (v7). What is a city of habitation? The Hebrew word for habitation is also used in Psa 132:13: *'For Yahweh hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for His **habitation**.*' So the city of habitation refers to Zion as the city in which God will dwell. Zacharias is going to quote from Psa 107 again in v79.

### **might serve him without fear**

Israel were commanded to fear Yahweh and serve Him: *'And now, Israel, what doth Yahweh thy God require of thee, but to **fear Yahweh thy God**, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to **serve Yahweh thy God** with all thy heart and with all thy soul.'* (Deut 10:12).

So, what does it mean to serve Him without fear?

Serving Yahweh with fear is a requirement for mortal man, because the fear of Yahweh restrains the committing of sin, because man fears the punishment from God if we sin. But,

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<sup>25</sup> Psa 107:1-7 has an initial application about Israel's returning from the Babylonian exile and coming back to the land and back to a 'city of habitation' Zion.

when, in the kingdom, Yahweh has destroyed the enemy of sin in us (through the redemption in Christ Jesus), and we can no longer sin, then we can **serve Yahweh without fear**. What a wonderful prospect that is!

### **75** *In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.*

The words *'of our life'* are not in the Greek text. Indeed, they do not fit the context either. This verse is still talking about the saints in the kingdom, who do not have a finite life anymore.

Appropriately, the RV, ASV, NASB, ESV and NIV translate the phrase as:

#### **'In holiness and righteousness before him all our days'**

Holiness means holy thinking. On the High Priest's forehead was a golden plate with the words, *'holiness to Yahweh'*, engraved upon the front (Ex 28:36). The purpose of the High Priest wearing this plate upon his forehead to show that all his thoughts should be holy.

Righteousness is about right actions, which will flow from holy thinking. Deut 6:25 refers to these: *'And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to **do** all these commandments'*

In the kingdom we will be able to serve Yahweh without fear (because immortal saints cannot sin) and will have only holy thoughts and righteous actions. What a wonderful time that will be - Not having to fight to control the evil tendencies of the flesh, because we will neither think evil thoughts nor perform sinful deeds anymore.

### **V76-79 - THE WORK OF MESSIAH'S FORERUNNER**

After rejoicing in the amazing work of deliverance and redemption that the Messiah will perform, Zacharias now turns his attention to his own son John - the Forerunner - and underscores the significance of the work before him.

### **76** *And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;*

#### **And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest:**

John is now only eight days old. The destiny of this little boy is to be *'the prophet of the Most High'*. Not just *'a prophet'*; *'the prophet.'* There have been many prophets of the Most High. But, as noted before, Christ describes John as the greatest prophet ever (Lk 7:28).

In the chiasmic structure, this verse matches v70, which spoke of God's *'holy prophets.'* This verse is extending the thought by referring to John the Baptist as being *'the prophet'* - that is the greatest prophet.

#### **for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways**

Here Zacharias is quoting from Mal 3:1: *'Behold, I will send **my messenger**, and he shall **prepare the way before me**: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the Covenant.'*

Mt 11:10 informs us that *'my messenger'* is John the Baptist. As Yahweh's messenger, John would prepare the way before another man, who is termed *'the Lord - the messenger of the Covenant'* - i.e. Jesus Christ (Rom 15:8). John came simply as the messenger - a voice (Isa 40:3; Mt 3:3), announcing the coming of Christ.

## **77** To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

In the Chiastic structure this verse matches v69. Both have the theme of salvation:

- v69 is about the horn of salvation being raised, which is quoting the promises to David about the coming of Christ as Saviour.
- v77 refers to John (the child of v76) as the one to give knowledge of this salvation to the people. He pointed them to the Saviour.

This work was important because the Jews had corrupted the knowledge of salvation given in the Scriptures by placing more importance on the teachings and rituals of the oral law (the laws added by the Rabbis). Consequently, the Pharisees fasted twice a week, yet in the Law of Moses fasting was only required once a year. The priesthood had corrupted the worship in the temple too. The people didn't really know what God required for salvation. But John showed them. Multitudes came out to hear him (Matt 3:5-6) and were baptised confessing their sins.

### **To give knowledge of salvation unto his people**

The expression '**knowledge of salvation**' is taken from Psa 98:2. Here are v1-2 for context:

*'O sing unto Yahweh a new song; for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory. Yahweh **hath made known His salvation**: His righteousness hath He openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.'*

John gave the knowledge of salvation and Jesus Christ openly showed God's righteousness.

### **By the remission (forgiveness) of their sins**

The remission of sins is clearly a reference to the work of Christ. The connection between 'knowledge of salvation' and 'remission of sins' is shown in Jer 31:31-34, which speaks of Israel in the kingdom coming into the New Covenant in Christ (Matt 26:28):

*'Behold the days come when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel ... I will put my law in the inward parts... for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Yahweh: for I will **forgive their iniquity**, and I will remember their sin no more.'*

## **78-79** Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Dayspring      Gk. *anatole* G395 = 'a rising of the sun and stars; the east (the direction of the sun's rising)' (Thay).

Guide          Gk. *kateuthuno* G2720 = 'to make straight, guide, direct' (Thay).

The basic message of these verses is that Christ will save his people when he returns and brings a time of peace.

## Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us

'Day-spring' is an old English word meaning 'sunrise,' which is exactly how it is translated in the NASB, ESV, NIV, and ASV. In the Chiasmic structure these verses parallel with v68. Both refer to the people being '**visited.**'

- v68 is about Yahweh visiting his people to **initiate** the process of redemption through Christ in the birth of John and Jesus.
- v78-79 refer to God **completing** the process of redemption, when the saints are made immortal at Christ's return - the rising of the Sun of Righteousness.

Zacharias' reference to the dayspring (or sunrise) appears to be taken from Malachi 4:2. Malachi 4 is a chapter about Christ's return to destroy the wicked (v1) and turn Israel to righteousness (v6). Verse 2 refers to the sun of righteousness arising, which represents the return of Christ:

*'But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up (ESV: leaping) as calves of the stall.'*

The redeemed saints are likened to calves that have been kept in the barn all winter (typical of death) and when released from the stall in springtime (resurrection) go outside and frolic in freedom and happiness.

The Gk *anatole*, translated '*dayspring*', is also used in Rev 16:12 of Christ and the saints: '*the kings of the east*' - kings from the rising of the sun.

There may be another reason why Zacharias quotes from Malachi 4 at the end of his Psalm. At the time of Zacharias, Malachi 4 was the last prophetic message that had been given to Israel. It was written some 400 years before his time. They were the last words of God to the nation. Many at Zacharias's time would have wondered when and how the prophecy of Malachi 4 of God's future judgments on the wicked and joy for the righteous would come about. Zacharias now knew the answer - it will come through the work of Jesus (yet to be born) and his son John!

### **to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,**

Zacharias is quoting from Psa 107:10:

*'For He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. Such as **sit in darkness and in the shadow of death**, being bound in affliction and iron'*

Zacharias has previously quoted Psa 107:2 in v74 (see p74). As mentioned there, Psa 107 has more than one application. It refers to the regathering of the exiles from Babylon but also looks forward to the great ingathering of God's people when Christ returns. When Christ does return, those saints who 'sit in darkness' (those in the grave Job 17:13), and those saints 'in the shadow of death' (alive but knowing they are headed for death) will both be given light. Why does Zacharias quote v9-10 now?

Some have thought that Zacharias is quoting Isa 9:2:

*'The people that walked in **darkness** have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the **shadow of death**, upon them hath the light shined.'*

This verse carries some of the same terminology but is really a prophecy about the first advent of Christ and is quoted in Mt 4:16 about Christ's ministry being in Galilee.

## to guide our feet into the way of peace

The feet here represent the walk of a person in life – straightened feet represent walking in righteousness. Crooked feet would represent walking in the way of evil. Because we have human nature and the bias to sin, we often walk crookedly. In the kingdom our feet will be straightened, and we will only walk in paths of righteousness (cp Isa 30:21).

Zacharias may be alluding to Isa 59:7-8:

*‘Their **feet** run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts [are] thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction [are] in their paths. The **way of peace** they know not; and [there is] no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall **not know peace.**’*

‘Peace’ in Hebrew is ‘shalom’. But ‘shalom’ carries a wider meaning than the English word peace. It carries the idea of completeness, harmony, health, and peace.<sup>26</sup> Zacharias concludes his prophecy with this word ‘shalom’. In the kingdom the saints will have all aspects of the meaning of shalom. Health, harmony with God and all the saints, completeness of being and total peace of mind. How has this come about? Through the work of redemption in Jesus Christ, whose way was prepared by John the Baptist.

This concludes Zacharias’ wonderful psalm of praise. You may have noticed throughout that there are frequent allusions to the Exodus – with direct references at times. In fact, the news Zacharias is announcing is actually the commencement of the greatest exodus of all time, as illustrated in Appendix 4.

## **80** *And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.*

Shewing                      Gk. *anadeixis* G323 = ‘a public showing forth’ (Thay).

### **The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit**

Language reminiscent of that of Samson (Jud 13:24) who was also moved by the spirit (Jud 13:25).

### **Was in the deserts**

Out in the deserts lived the Essenes – an extremely strict group of men who kept the Law and associated traditions meticulously and spent their days in the study and meditation. One such group was at Qumran, southwest of Jerusalem – just by the Dead Sea. It has been conjectured that John may have spent time with the Essenes, as his ascetic lifestyle reflects the austere approach to life held by the Essenes. John’s teachings, however, differed significantly from the Essenes, and *‘there is not in the Gospels the faintest trace of any intercourse between John, or our Lord and His disciples, with the Essenes.’* (Cambridge Commentary)

### **Till the day of his shewing unto Israel**

John’s life, like that of the Lord he preceded, was spent first in formative seclusion, then in public ministry.

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<sup>26</sup> Refer Vines Expository Dictionary of Old Testament words – article on Peace – shalom.

A serene landscape featuring a calm river in the foreground, reflecting the golden light of a rising sun. The sun is positioned centrally behind a line of trees, creating a bright lens flare effect. The background consists of rugged, forested mountains under a clear, light blue sky. The overall mood is peaceful and majestic.

# MESSIAH IS BORN

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LUKE 2:1-20



# THE BIRTH OF MESSIAH (2:1-7)

Approximately six months have now passed since the birth of John and the delivery of that wonderful Psalm of his father Zacharias. We now arrive at the pivotal moment in time when the Messiah is about to be born.

World events would be framed around this (humanly-speaking) inconspicuous occasion. The grand census which Caesar Augustus had planned for the organization and prosperity of his empire would actually serves to fulfil Bible prophecy in a fascinating way. And quite out of the limelight, in a humble manger, a little child would be born - a child who would change the world.

**1-3** *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.*

World Gk. *oikoumene* G3625 = 'the inhabited earth; the Roman empire, and all the subjects of the empire' (Thay).

Taxed Gk. *apographo* G583 = 'to write off, or copy; to enter in a register or records, specifically, to enter in public records the names of men, their property and income; to enrol' (Thay).

## **This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria**

BBE (v1-2): *'Now it came about in those days that an order went out from Caesar Augustus that there was to be a numbering of all the world. This was **the first numbering**, which was made when Quirinius was ruler of Syria.'*

These verses record a census taken by Cyrenius. There has been much study and speculation regarding the historical details of this account for the reasons outlined in the box below:

### **CYRENIUS AND THE CENSUS**

Cyrenius is known historically as *Publius Sulpicius Quirinius*, who lived from 51BC to 21AD. He was around 47 years of age when Jesus was born in around 5BC.

Cyrenius held the office of Legate, or Governor, of Syria from about 6AD to 11AD. Soon after taking up this role, history records that he supervised a census in conjunction with taxing the population.<sup>27</sup> This date is far too late for it to have been the census mentioned in Luke's Gospel, as by 6AD Jesus would have been around ten years old. This is most probably the census mentioned by Luke in Acts 5:37. Thus, given he was aware of this later census, Luke describes the one at Jesus' birth as the 'first' one.

Although Cyrenius was officially Legate of Syria in 6AD, he may have been governing in some capacity in Syria around the time of Christ's birth (5BC) and conducted an earlier registration. In his autobiography,<sup>28</sup> Caesar Augustus records a census that began in 8 BC and another registration in 2BC.

<sup>27</sup> Bryan Windle, 2019, Quirinius: An Archaeological Biography

<https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/12/19/quirinius-an-archaeological-biography/>

<sup>28</sup> Livius.org 1995-2001, Augustus, Res Gestae <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/augustus-res-gestae/>

It is worth considering how long it would take to complete an empire wide census. For comparison, David's census of Israel alone took over nine months (2Sam 24:9). It may be that the difficulty in matching the census of Luke 2 with the historical dates available is explained by the fact that it would have taken many years, so Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of this process, and it was recorded in history as having been *completed* some years later.

### All the world

Gk *'oikoumene'*, the inhabited earth, ie. the Roman Empire. See the use of this same word in Acts 11:28, 19:27. This was not the entire globe.

### To be taxed

Gk *'apographo'*, to write a list or enrol. Mg, *'enrolled'*. Only other occurrence in the NT is Heb 12:23 *'to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are **written** in heaven.'* This was not a monetary taxation, but a census. It is possible, however, that the census was conducted to prepare for later taxation of the empire.

### Every one into his own city

The portion of the census in the land of Israel was not carried out in the ordinary Roman manner at each person's current place of residence, but according to Jewish custom, at the town to which their family originally belonged. The Jews still clung to their genealogies and though the journey was a weary and distasteful one, it is not surprising that the Jews found it so important.

**4** *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)*

Bethlehem Gk. *Bethleem* G965 = 'House of Bread' (Thay)

House Gk. *oikos* G3624 = 'a dwelling (by implication a family)' (Str)

Lineage Gk. *patria* G3965 = 'of paternal descent' (Str)

## CHARACTER SKETCH

### JOSEPH: The Lord's Protector

<b>Age:</b>	Unknown (Unmarried young man)	
<b>Status:</b>	Betrothed	Lk 1:27
<b>Hometown:</b>	Nazareth, Galilee	Lk 2:4
<b>Tribe:</b>	Judah, house and lineage of David	Lk 2:4
<b>Relatives:</b>	Not known	Lk 1:36
<b>Income &amp; Assets:</b>	Minimal	Lk 2:24, cf. Lev 12:8
<b>Name meaning:</b>	Increaser	

## Went up from Galilee

Whilst he went 'down' in terms of our modern maps, Joseph 'went up' in two senses. Firstly, the lake of Galilee is below sea-level, and from Galilee you would travel down the Jordan Valley then ascend a long, winding road to the region of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Secondly - and more importantly - it didn't matter where in Israel you came from, when you approached Jerusalem, you 'went up'. Jerusalem was seen as the crown of the nation (cp Lk 2:42; 18:31).

### THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

The historian and scholar, Farrar, who spent many years in the Land of Israel, writes a graphic account of the journey to Bethlehem and birth of Jesus Christ in his book, *The Life of Christ* (p 6-10).

*'From their northern home at Nazareth, at the mountains of Zebulon, Joseph, the village carpenter, had made his way along the dusty roads with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child. Fallen as were their fortunes, they were both of the house and lineage of David, and they were traversing a journey of 130 kilometres (around five days) to the village which had been the home of their great ancestor while he was still a ruddy shepherd lad, tending to his flock upon the lonely hills. The object of this toilsome journey, which could not but be disagreeable to the settled habits of Oriental life, was to enrol their names as members of the house of David in a census which had been ordered by the Emperor Augustus.*

*Travelling in the East is a very slow and leisurely affair, and was likely to be still more so if, as is probable, the country was at that time agitated by political strife. Beeroth, which is 24 kilometres (about a day's journey) distant from Bethlehem, or even possibly Jerusalem, which is only 9 kilometres off, may have been the resting place of Mary and Joseph before this last stage of their journey. But the tiredness, or even the commencing pangs of travail, must necessarily have slowed the progress of the young mother. Others who were traveling on the same errand would easily have passed them on the road.*

*Distant but a few miles, on the plateau of the abrupt and singular hill now called Jebel Fureidis, or 'Little Paradise Mountain' towered the palace-fortress of the Great Herod. The magnificent houses of his friends and courtiers crowded around its base. The humble wayfarers, as they passed near it, might have heard the opulent music with which its feasts were celebrated, or the shouting of the rough mercenaries whose arms enforced obedience to its tyrannical lord. But the true King of the Jews - the rightful Lord of the Universe - was not to be found in palace or fortress. The cattle-stables were a more fitting birthplace for him who came to reveal that the soul of the greatest monarch was no dearer in God's sight than the soul of the meanest slave; for him who had not where to lay his head; for him who, from his cross of shame, was to rule the world.'*

## Nazareth

Mary and Joseph dwelt in Nazareth, a secluded town in Galilee. Never mentioned in the Old Testament or anywhere in the writings of Josephus, Nazareth was an obscure and inconsequential country village. The region of Galilee was scorned by the Jewish elite; amongst the influential there was nothing but contempt for country people, and in particular, for those born in Galilee (see p 38).



**Figure 3:** Journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem

Ancient Rabbinical writings refer to the town as one of the settlements where priests lived when not on duty in the Temple. This may explain how Mary, who was of the tribe of Judah (Lk 3:33<sup>29</sup>), could have a cousin, Elisabeth, who was of the tribe of Levi (Lk 1:5,36). Perhaps it also explains how the religious rulers in Jerusalem came to have such intimate knowledge of the allegations of illegitimacy surrounding the birth of Jesus, given that Mary spent some time with Elisabeth whilst pregnant (John 8:41).

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<sup>29</sup> Luke gives Mary's genealogy, naming Joseph as the 'son', or rather, son-in-law, of Heli. Joseph was actually begotten by Jacob, and was therefore his natural son (Mt 1:16). He could be the *legal* son of Heli only by marriage with Heli's daughter, Mary, and be reckoned so according to law (Greek. *nomizo*). It does not say "begat" in the case of Heli. (Cambridge Bible Commentary on Luke 3:23).

## The city of David, Bethlehem

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which fulfilled the prophecy of Micah 5:2:

*'But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.'*

But why was Jesus born in Bethlehem? Was it simply to fulfil a prophecy? It could equally be asked, why did Micah prophecy that Jesus would be born there in the first place?

Bethlehem, meaning *'House of Bread'*, had a rich history to the Israelites. It was the ancient town of Ephrath (*'fruitful'*), just outside of which Rachel died in Gen 35:16-19. The legendary king David was born and bred in this region of Bethlehem (1Sam 16:1), and his great-grandmother, Ruth, had gleaned in its fields (Ruth 2:2,4).

All these tales from the hills of Bethlehem bore relevance to the birth of the Messiah:

1. The first reference to Bethlehem is in connection to the death of Rachel and birth of Benjamin. This is a highly typical story, in which natural Israel (represented by Rachel) dies, and Jesus Christ (represented by Benjamin) is born. Benjamin's mother named him Ben-oni: *'Son of my sorrow,'* but his father changed his name to Ben-jamin: *'Son of my right hand.'* Christ is both (Isa 53:4; Luke 2:35; Heb 1:3).
2. The majority of the book of Ruth is set in the fields of Bethlehem. The first problem in the book was a famine which caused Elimelech to leave *'the house of bread'* (1:1). God then visited His people in giving them bread (1:6), causing Ruth and Naomi to return – again to Bethlehem (1:19). The entire parable of redemption is set within this context. Poetically, after 400 years of spiritual famine (Amos 8:11), God visited His people to redeem them, and He did so from this very town, giving them the bread of life (Jn 6:33-35).
3. It was upon the hills surrounding Bethlehem that David lived as a shepherd in his youth (1Sam 16:11), following the ewes great with young (Psa 78:70-71). It was here he learned to protect the vulnerable sheep (1Sam 17:34-35) and it was here that he was anointed king (1Sam 16:13) so that he could *'feed My people Israel'* (2Sam 7:7). How appropriate that centuries later it would be to *the shepherds* from this very same area that the angel would first appear to convey the news that the greater Son of David, the Messiah of Israel, was to be born in Bethlehem.

## House and lineage of David

Joseph was of the house, or family, of David. Through him would pass the right of kingship to Jesus, in fulfilment of the promises God made to him (2Sam 7:12-14). But the Lord was *literally* the son of David through his mother as well (Lk 3:23,31).

Luke makes an additional point here. He says that Jesus was of the *lineage* of David. The Greek *patria* indicates *'paternal descent.'* There are only two other occurrences of the word *patria* in the NT:

- Acts 3:25: *'Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the **kindreds** of the earth be blessed.'*
- Eph 3:14-15: *'For this cause, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole **family** of heaven and earth is named.'*

Both these references speak of a lineage by faith, not descent. Thus, Jesus was David's son in more sense than one, having taken on his characteristics (Mt 9:27; 15:22 etc.). David was a 'man after God's own heart' (1Sam 13:14); both Joseph and Jesus were his son in this regard (Mt 1:1,20). But the Lord in particular was so much a man after God's own heart, that he could say, 'he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' (John 14:9)

**5-7** *To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Espoused            Gk. *mnēsteuo* G3423 = 'to be promised in marriage, be betrothed' (Thay).

Accomplished    Gk. *pletho* G4130 = 'to be fulfilled, to be filled'

### **Espoused**

Mary was 'espoused', or 'betrothed' (ESV, NKJV, RSV, YLT), to Joseph. This word is used only three times in the NT, and always of Mary (Matt 1:18, Lk 1:27, 2:5).

Betrothal amongst the Jews was a very serious matter - held in higher importance than engagement commonly is today. It was considered the beginning of marriage, was as legally binding as marriage itself and could not be broken off except by a bill of divorce. There was usually at least a year between the betrothal and the marriage itself, during which time the young woman would prepare herself and her outfit, and the strictest purity was to be maintained between the couple. The bride remained in her father's house until the time of the marriage ceremony, when the bridegroom came to her. Jewish parents often promised their daughters in marriage whilst still infants, and it was considered the responsibility of every Israelite to marry as early in life as possible.<sup>30</sup>

It is likely that Mary was still in her teenage years when she was visited by Gabriel.

### **Days were accomplished**

Accomplished is the Gk *pletho* meaning 'to fulfil, fill up'. This is a key word in Luke's account of the birth of Christ, translated 'accomplished' in Lk 1:23, 2:6, 21, 22, and 'filled' in Lk 1:15, 41, 67, and together with Gk *chronos*, is translated 'full time came' in Lk 1:57.

'The fulness of time' had come in a literal sense for Mary, with the period of gestation for her son having come to its completion. But 'the fulness of time' had come in a much greater sense (Gal 4:4) and God was now sending His own Son into the world. The word 'fulness' in Gal 4 is Gk *pleroma*, a derivative of the word *pletho* used here. This was the event that had been awaited for millennia since the prophetic curse upon the serpent in Gen 3:15. At the 'appropriate season', when we were all helpless, God sent His Son (Rom 5:6).

<sup>30</sup> Freeman, James M 1972. *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p 330.

## THE FULNESS OF TIME

Finally, the fulness of time had come. But what, we might ask, did this really mean?

Was it that the nation had finally attained the necessary level of righteousness or virtue? Hardly! John described them as 'a generation of vipers' - the seed of the serpent (Mt 3:7)! And the Lord's assessment was no better (Mt 17:17). No, 'the fulness of time' had come in that the iniquity of the people of the Land had reached its zenith (Mt 23:32-35; 1Thes 2:14-16). In much the same way that it was the iniquity of the Amorites that paved the way for the invasion of the Israelites (Gen 15:16), so it was the wickedness of God's own people that highlighted the need for His Son (Isa 59:1-15).

We might ask, what is it that will mark 'the times of the Gentiles' being fulfilled (Lk 21:24), or the time when 'the fulness of the Gentiles be come in' (Rom 11:25)? Will it be that the Truth has spread across every part of the globe to the point where the Bride of Christ have reached the climax of their spiritual health and readiness for his return? Such a conclusion would both be inconsistent with the pattern outlined above, and in contravention to many a prophecy in God's word.

What will be the state of the World and the Ecclesia at the return of Christ? Acts 20:28-30; 1Tim 4:1-3; 2Tim 3; 2Pet 2:1-2 may inform our view a little!

But what does that mean for the Zacharias and Elisabeth's, the Joseph's and Mary's of the Last Days?

## Her firstborn son

This is the only time that Jesus is ever called *her* firstborn son. In all other references he is God's firstborn Son. See Heb 1:6 - he was '*first begotten*' son of God.

## CHARACTER SKETCH

<b>JESUS: The Saviour</b> (as a child)		
<b>Hometown:</b>	Nazareth, Galilee	Luke 2:39, 51
<b>Tribe:</b>	Judah,	Luke 1:31-32; Rev 5:5; Heb 7:4
<b>Relatives:</b>	Son of God; Mary (mother); John (second cousin); Elizabeth (mother's cousin)	Luke 1:31, 35
<b>Occupation:</b>	Carpenter	
<b>Wealth:</b>	Probably poor, if Joseph died	
<b>Name meaning:</b>	Yah shall save (Gk form of Heb 'Joshua')	Matt 1:21

## The inn

The inn near Bethlehem also relates to the house of David. In 2Sam 15:13-14, Absalom - who was also of the house and lineage of David - chased his father out of Jerusalem. When David fled, he was shown hospitality by Barzillai (2Sam 17:27-29). After the death of Absalom when David was returning home to Jerusalem, Barzillai conducted David and his men back across the Jordan, and in his gratitude, David asked Barzillai to return and dwell

with him in Jerusalem (2Sam 19:31-33). When Barzillai declined, David instead showed his appreciation to his servant Chimham, by instead establishing him in a little place outside Jerusalem. This place was to become known as ‘*the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem*’ (Jer 41:17) and it was commonly used as a rest place for people who were journeying down to Egypt. It is likely that this is the inn in which Joseph and Mary resided when Jesus was born.

### **INNS IN THE EAST**

*‘A village inn, or ‘khan’ was probably identical in its appearance and accommodation with those that exist in modern Israel. A khan is a low structure, built of rough stones, and generally only a single storey in height. It consists for the most part of a square enclosure, in which the cattle can be tied up in safety for the night, and arched recess for the accommodation of travellers. The ‘leewan’, or paved floor of the recess is raised a foot or two above the level of the courtyard. A large khan might contain a series of such recesses, which are, in fact, low small rooms with no front wall to them. They are public; everything that takes place in them is visible to every person in the khan. They are also totally devoid of even the most ordinary furniture. The traveller may bring his own carpet if he likes, may sit cross legged upon it for his meals, and may lie upon it at night. As a rule too, he must bring his own food, attend to his own cattle, and draw his own water from the neighbouring spring. He would neither expect or require attendance, and would pay only the merest trifle for the advantage of shelter, safety and a floor on which to lie.*

*But if he chanced to arrive late, and the leewans were all occupied by earlier guests, he would have no choice but to be content with such accommodation as he could find in the courtyard below, and secure for himself and his family such small amount of cleanliness and decency as are compatible with an unoccupied corner in the filthy area, which must be shared with horses, mules and camels. The litter, the closeness, the unpleasant smell of the crowded animals, the unwelcome intrusion of the stray dogs, the necessary society of the very lowest hangers-on at the inn, are additions to such a position which can only be realised by any traveller in the East who happens to have been placed in similar circumstances.’<sup>31</sup>*



**Figure 4:** Modern caravanserai. Bigger and more impressive than the one at Bethlehem but illustrates the concept of the raised leewans and a centre courtyard.

<sup>31</sup> F W Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, 1874, p 10.



## Swaddling clothes

This was a common practice in ancient times and is still sometimes done today. The baby was first washed and then wrapped tightly in strips of fabric. *'Swaddling... makes a baby feel like he's back inside the womb – or like he is being snuggled close.'*<sup>32</sup> It was therefore a way of calming the newborn child and formed the clothing for a baby until he was about a year old. A baby who was found not wrapped in swaddling clothes was considered abandoned by his mother (Ezek 16:4).

The swaddled baby in many ways resembled a mummy. He was bundled up in material, the same way a dead person was wrapped in graveclothes. It was an apt illustration of the mortality of Christ, with all its weaknesses and flaws. For example, when Lazarus was raised from the dead to continue his life of mortality, he came forth *'bound hand and foot with graveclothes'* (Jn 11:44). This is set in stark contrast, of course, with the Lord, who at his resurrection left the tokens of his mortality behind in the tomb (Jn 20:6).

The first creation is described in terms of birth: God swaddled or wrapped the earth in darkness after it had come out of the womb (Job 38:8-9). Mary now does the same for the beginning of the Spiritual Creation.

## Manger

Translated *'stall'* in Lk 13:15. Mangers were built in the shape of a feeding trough and were sometimes used as cradles in the East.<sup>33</sup> One might have thought that the future King and Saviour of the World should have been given more than a stall! But there was a certain poetry to the situation: The world that God was giving Christ to was as degrading as the feeding trough of an ox.

## No room in the inn

This illustrates the condition of the world at the birth of Christ. There was no room for him amongst his fellow countrymen: *'He came unto his own, and his own received him not'* (Jn 1:11). As Jesus himself later said, *'A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house'* (Mt 13:57). In general, his people shunned him, rejected his ministry, and eventually crucified him. Such was the experience of our Lord from the very outset.

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<sup>32</sup> McCarthy, C 2020. 'Should you swaddle your baby?' *Harvard Medical School*, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/should-you-swaddle-your-baby-201605249730>, [12/01/2022].

<sup>33</sup> Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, ii, 533

# THE VISIT OF THE SHEPHERDS (2:8-20)

**8** *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

Abiding      Gk *agrauleo* G63 = 'to camp out' (Str).

Keeping      Gk *phulasso* G5442 = 'to watch, to be on guard' (Str).

Watch        Gk *phulake* G5438 = 'guarding' (Str).

Of all those alive in Israel at the time, it was to these Jewish shepherds that God revealed the birth of the Messiah. Bypassing the chief priests and religious aristocracy, the ambitious King Herod and even those like Simeon and Anna who were faithfully waiting for a deliverer, the first angelic message heralding the birth of God's Son was to a small group of humble shepherds, who were faithfully watching over their sheep.

## THE ROLE OF A SHEPHERD

Shepherds in Scripture performed a humble but honourable profession. Their role was vital for the sheep over whom they watched. A lapse in concentration, a moment's sleep, leaving the flock unattended, or running away from fear could all be fatal for the flock. Abel (Gen 4:2), Moses (Ex 3:1), David (1Sam 16:11), and Amos (Amos 1:1) were all shepherds, and Isaiah writes of Christ, *'he shall feed his flock like a shepherd'* (Isa 40:11). To the diligent oversight and care of these men, both their flocks and the nation owed their lives. But sadly, this catalogue of faithful shepherds stood in stark contrast to the religious leaders of the day.

## FRAUDULENT SHEPHERDS

At the time of Christ, the religious affairs of the nation were controlled by the chief priests and the scribes (Mt 2:4). According to Josephus, the High Priest up until 4BC was Simeon ben Boethus; the father-in-law of Herod the Great.<sup>34</sup> The High Priest stood at the apex of an elaborate hierarchy of temple personnel. Directly beneath him in rank were the **chief priests**, an exclusive group of about 200 high-born Jews, who had the charge of the Temple treasury and the oversight of the weekly Temple services. Following the chief priests were the ordinary priests (men such as Zacharias) and the Levites, both of which ministered in the Temple's daily affairs. The **scribes**, although historically simply writers, at the time of Christ composed part of the Jewish aristocracy,

<sup>34</sup> Encyclopedia Judaica <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/simeon-ben-boethus>

and many were members of the Sanhedrin. In general, the scribes adhered to the teachings of the Pharisees and shared both their legalism and hypocrisy.<sup>35</sup>

These two groups of religious elders – together with the **Pharisees** and **Sadducees** – were those to whom a nation walking in darkness *should have* been able to appeal for spiritual guidance and preservation. However, instead of faithfully guarding the flock from threat, these egocentric elite were concerned solely with the upholding of their reputation amongst the Romans, maintaining their supremacy over the common people and persecuting any sincere follower of truth who might foil their aims.

Lord Acton, when writing of the Catholic Inquisition, famously penned, '*Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely... there is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.*'<sup>36</sup> This truly is an indictment upon such shepherds.

During Christ's ministry some thirty years later, he compassionately observed that '*the people were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*' (Mt 9:36, Mk 6:34). Their judges, who should have been shepherding the nation, were instead '*evening wolves*' (Zeph 3:3) who would attack the flock (cp. Mt 7:15). They devoured the sheep for personal gain, using the very sheep they were meant to care for to provide themselves food and wool (Ezek 34:1-3)! This was the religious world into which the Good Shepherd was born.

## THE TRUE SHEPHERDS

But not all were bad. '*There were in the same country shepherds **abiding** in the field, **keeping watch** over their flock by night.*' The word 'abiding' means 'to camp out'. These shepherds stayed out in the fields, and actively protected the sheep by watching out for danger. They were dedicated to preserving the safety of their flock during all hours of the day and night. Could there be a more fitting group of people to receive with joy the tidings of the arrival of the Good Shepherd?

Edersheim writes, 'This Migdal Edar (Tower of the Flock, cp Mic 4:8) was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks that pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but it lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage from the Mishnah (Shekelim 7:4) leads to the conclusion that the flocks which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices.'<sup>37</sup> So these were not just ordinary shepherds; they were looking after the flocks for Temple sacrifices. It was to these humble, dedicated shepherds that God first revealed the good tidings of the birth of His Son – the Lamb of God.

## 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

Glory Gk *doxa* G1391 = 'glory, splendour brightness' (Thay)

Shone round Gk *perilampo* G4034 = 'to illuminate all around' (Str)

<sup>35</sup> Bible History [https://www.bible-history.com/jesus/jesusChief\\_Priests\\_Priests\\_and\\_Levite.htm](https://www.bible-history.com/jesus/jesusChief_Priests_Priests_and_Levite.htm)

<sup>36</sup> Lord Acton, *Letter to Archbishop Mandell Creighton*, 1887

<https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/165acton.html>

<sup>37</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, Book 2, Ch 6.

Sore afraid Gk *megas phobeo phobos* G3173, G5399, G5401 = 'exceedingly terrified with fear or dread'

### The glory of the Lord shone round about them

This was not just a bright light. The effect on the shepherds was to terrify them, as v9 goes on to explain. The same Greek word '*doxa*' is used also of Stephen (Acts 7:55) and of the light that shone around Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:11). Imagine just how awe-inspiring were both of those events.

Historically, such displays of God's glory were given to those who were ministering near to the house of God:

- 'The glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle.' Ex 40:34. Cp Lev 9:23; Num 14:20.
- 'The glory of Yahweh had filled the house of God.' 1Ki 8:11. Cp Ezek 10:4.

And it was the High Priest who was privileged on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement, to enter into the Most Holy Place where the glory of Yahweh rested between the cherubim.

Yet here God's glory is openly revealed to these shepherds on the hills of Bethlehem! It was as if they were taken for one brief moment in time into the Most Holy Place, or elevated into heaven itself; an awe-inspiring privilege after 400 years of prophetic silence and spiritual darkness.

### Sore afraid

This phrase, in Greek *megas phobeo phobos*, occurs one other time in the NT (Mk 4:41), and the phrase '*megas phobos*' turns up a few more times (Lk 8:37; Acts 5:5,11; Rev 11:11). In all these circumstances it refers to the response of the onlookers to acts of God. Take, for example, Mk 4:41: 'And they **feared** (G5399) **exceedingly** (G5401, G3173), and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Is it common for men to be afraid at the appearance of the glory of God, often in the form of an angel, for example:

- 'Fear not Abram.' Gen 15:1.
- 'And Yahweh said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be dismayed...' Josh 8:1.
- 'And Yahweh said unto him [Gideon], fear not: thou shalt not die.' Jud 6:23

To the shepherds who were unsuspectingly keeping their sheep, as they did every night, this sight was not only awe-inspiring, but terrifying.

## **10** And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Good tidings Gk *euaggelizo* G2097 = 'to announce good news, especially the Gospel' (Str.) s/w 1:19.

Great joy Gk *megas chara* G3173, G5479 = 'exceeding delight'

## Good tidings

The phrase *'glad tidings'* is used twice in Luke's account of the birth and childhood of the Lord (Lk 1:19; 2:10), and is picked up from the OT Prophets, where it is used a number of times (Isa 40:9; 52:7, 61:1). That these prophetic glad tidings related to the Lord Jesus and his work is affirmed by the Lord himself in Luke 4:18-21.

All believers have been offered these glad tidings and have a duty to go out to all the world and spread the Gospel (Mk 16:15-16) – the glad tidings concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12).

Here the angel announces to the shepherds the good tidings, the first proclamation of the good news of Messiah's birth to the Jews. Is it interesting to note that in the brief narrative of the visit of the Magi (Mt 2:1-11) we also have the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.

## Great joy

i.e. *Mega joy!!* The good news of the coming of Messiah brought inexpressible delight to a people that walked in darkness, dwelling in the land of the shadow of death (Isa 9:2). After centuries of despondency, suddenly there was a message of hope. Their joy was like that which will be experienced at Christ's second coming: *'Arise, shine for thy light is come, and the glory of Yahweh is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but Yahweh shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.'* (Isaiah 60:1-2).

## To all people

i.e. *'To all **the** people'* (RV, YLT, ESV, etc.), that is, for all Israel. Jesus Christ came first and foremost to Israel (Rom 9:4-5; Mt 15:24).

But his mission was not limited to such. In Isa 49 God asks the rhetorical question, *Is it too small a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel? I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation (Yah-shua) unto the end of the earth.* (Isa 49:6). The good news associated with the Lord Jesus Christ would ultimately extend to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike (Mk 16:15-16, Gal 3:26-27), but we must always remember that we participate in *Israel's* hope (Acts 28:20), having been grafted in by faith (as Paul explains in Rom 11).

## **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Saviour      Gk *soter* G4990 = 'saviour, deliverer, preserver' (Thay)

## Unto you is born this day

Fulfilment of Isa 9:6. *'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.'*

## City of David

See note on Bethlehem, p 84.

## a Saviour

This is the meaning of the name JESUS (Heb. Joshua) *Yah shall save*. Matthew 1:21 expresses Jesus' mission at his birth: *'Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.'*

Although many in Israel were awaiting the Messiah, they had a very different idea of the type of Saviour he would be. The impassioned cry of *'Hosanna,'* meaning *'save now,'* (Mt 21:9, Mk 11:9-10) as Jesus entered Jerusalem on an ass was a tribute to their hope of a Saviour to lead them from the imprisonment of Roman bondage. But though Jesus did not come to save them from Roman rule in the first instance, he did come to save from imprisonment (Isa 42:7). He saved his people **from their sins** through his sacrifice, freeing them from the bondage to death (John 1:29, 3:17, 2 Cor 5:15-17, Rom 6:22).

The general level of, or rather *lack of,* Jewish appreciation of Christ's sacrifice was illustrative of their awareness of the seriousness of their own sins. In this is a lesson for us: If we are to truly value the sacrifice Christ gave, we first need to understand the gravity of sin and its damaging consequences upon our relationship with our God and with others. Only then will we come to appreciate the Saviour whom God sent. To put it another way, only a lost sheep can be found by its shepherd (Mt 15:24).

## Christ the Lord

Two titles of Jesus are mentioned by the angel:

- **Christ** is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*, meaning *'anointed.'*
- **The Lord** is the Greek *kurios*, a title meaning *'to be supreme in authority'* (Str).

In his speech on the day of Pentecost, Peter told the Jews in Jerusalem that *'God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ.'* (Acts 2:36, see also Php 2:11).

This is the first time *Messiah* or *Christ* is mentioned in Luke's Gospel. We might ask in what way he was *'anointed'*? In OT times, the roles of prophet, priest and king were all initiated by anointing oil. The same was true of the Lord Jesus, who was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Isa 61:1; Acts 10:38) to all three roles:

Roles requiring Anointing	Jesus Christ
'Elisha... shalt thou <b>anoint</b> to be <b>prophet</b> in thy room.' 1Ki 19:16	'Yahweh thy God will raise up unto thee a <b>Prophet</b> ... like unto me' Deut 18:15
'Thou shalt <b>anoint</b> Aaron and his sons... that they may minister unto me in the <b>priest's</b> office.' Ex 30:30	'Yahweh hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a <b>priest</b> for ever after the order of Melchizedek.' Psa 110:4.
'Yahweh sent me to <b>anoint</b> thee to be <b>king</b> over his people' 1 Sam 15:1	'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ...behold, thy <b>King</b> cometh unto thee' Zech 9:9.

**12** *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

Sign Gk *semeion* G4592 = 'sign, mark, token, unusual occurrence, miracle' (Thay)

### **A sign**

Albert Barnes, in his commentary, explains this nicely: *'The evidence by which you shall know the child is that you will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'* (Barnes, Lk 2:12).

It has been suggested that the sign was actually the fact that the baby was born by a virgin. This is based on the sign given to Ahaz, in Isa 7:14: *'Therefore the Lord himself shall give you (the house of David) a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.'*

Whilst the sign of the virgin birth spoken of by Isaiah would appear to be the 'sign' that Simeon spoke of (Lk 2:34), that is not the natural reading of this verse, and it would also be impossible for the shepherds to know if the baby was born of a virgin, particularly given Mary and Joseph had travelled to Bethlehem together as a married couple (Mt 1:24-25; Lk 2:5).

The shepherds, who were faithfully going about their daily work, were given a tangible sign. They were told that this baby was the Saviour and Messiah of Israel, and the sign that the angel's declaration was in fact true was that when they reached the afore-mentioned 'city of David', they would find the baby swaddled and lying in a stall - the most unlikely of birth-places for a king.

**13-14** *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

Host Gk *stratia* G4756 = 'an army' (Str)

Good will Gk *eudokia* G2107 = 'satisfaction or delight' (Str)

Highest Gk *hupsistos* G5310 = 'highest, most high'

### **A multitude of the heavenly host**

*'And immediately there was with the angel a multitude of the army of heaven praising God and saying...'* (Weymouth). It does us well to imagine the scene: thousands upon thousands of angels - most likely radiant in glory, clothed in white robes, riding horses or chariots of fire. The experiences of Elisha at Dothan (2Ki 6:17) and the women at the tomb (Mt 28:3) are but two of many quotes that illustrate the nature of God's army. This army would remain close to the Lord - only a call away - throughout his entire life (Mt 26:53).

At this first proclamation to the world of the newborn Saviour, the heavens were rent - the veil was removed from the shepherd's eyes and they saw the whole army of Heaven rejoicing and praising God (Psa 148:2). The child who was to become the 'Prince of Peace' was welcomed by an army! And 'the zeal of Yahweh of armies' would perform it (Isa 9:7).

## **Praising God**

This was a choir unlike any that had been heard on earth since the creation of the world: *'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth ...when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?'* (Job 38:4-7). As the angels sung at the physical creation; now they are rejoicing as the corner stone of the New Creation is laid (Rev 3:14). If angels rejoice over one sinner that repents (Lk 15:10), how much more over one who will save a multitude of sinners (Heb 1:6, Rev 5:11-12)!

## **Glory to God**

Glory to God is a prerequisite to peace on earth (Php 2:11).

## **In the highest**

The Hebrew term *elyon*, meaning *'most high'*, is a title often used of God, and first used in Gen 14:18,19,20,22. It refers to Him in His position of ruling over all from the highest of heavens (Psa 18:13), and acknowledges that He therefore has control over heaven and earth (Gen 14:19; Deut 32:8; Psa 47:2). The Greek word *hupsistos*, here translated *'highest'*, is the equivalent of the Heb *elyon*<sup>38</sup>, and is therefore an acknowledgement of His supreme status and position.

From His vantage point in heaven, Yahweh looked down upon the earth, saw that *'there was no man'* (Isa 41:28) and therefore sent His own Son *'to give for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles'* (Isa 42:7). The response is to give glory to our God and sing praise to Him (Isa 42:10,12).

Cp the notes on this term in the angel's words to Mary (1:32, p 43).

## **And on earth peace, good will toward men.**

A better translation of this phrase is, *'And on earth peace among men of good will.'* Other translations render it:

- *'And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased.'* ASV
- *'And on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'* ESV
- *'And on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!'* RSV
- *'And on earth peace among those whom he favours.'* CEB

Consider the condescension of God, to offer the gift of peace to mankind. The Biblical concept of *'peace'* is not simply the absence of war, but of being at peace with God. In this simple statement lies the essence of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ; to come and restore peace between God and man through baptism and forgiveness.

This *'peace'* is promised in Isaiah 57:19: *'I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith Yahweh, and I will heal him,'* and fulfilled in the work of Christ: *'that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh'* (see Eph 2:13-22).

The ancient Hebrew blessing which God gave to the priesthood, and which Zacharias was unable to utter, speaks of the same promise: *'Yahweh lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.'* (Num 6:26)

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<sup>38</sup> It is used in place of *elyon* when citing Gen 14:18 in Heb 7:1.



## Good will

Gk *eudokia*, satisfaction or delight. A very similar Greek word (*eudokeo*) is translated in the following speaking of the way that God viewed His Son: '*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*' (Mt 3:17; 17:5; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22).

The word 'good will' looks back to the Hebrew *ratzah* or *ratzon* which is very often associated with acceptable sacrifices. (Ex 28:38, Lev 7:18, 19:7, 22:21-23). Christ, as the perfect sacrifice, was acceptable before God in every way, and through association with his death we also can be found acceptable and be granted peace.

In contrast, there will never be any peace to the wicked (Isa 57:21) - this is not 'peace to *all men*', regardless of their morality or belief in God, as some Christmas stories would like to present it.

**15-16** *And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.*

Haste            Gk *speudo* G4692 = 'to speed, urge on' (Str)

Found           Gk *aneurisko* G429 = 'to find out by search' (Thay)

## Let us now go to Bethlehem

It was not with a spirit of disbelief that the shepherds arose to go and seek the Saviour. Notice that they say, '*and see this thing which **is** come to pass*', not '*and see **if** this thing has come to pass.*'

Those who had been keeping careful watch over the sheep rose with eagerness, ready to leave their ninety-nine in order to find for themselves the Lamb of God. Their thoughts may have echoed those of David's, many centuries earlier, when he wrote of God's ark and mercy seat: '*Lo, we have heard it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood. We will go into his tabernacle: we will worship at his footstool*' (Psa 132:6-7).

## Found

Gk '*aneurisko*', to find out by searching. The shepherds had to search diligently for the child and his mother because they were only one small group of many travelling parties, and an inconspicuous one at that. As Farrar puts it:

*'The fancy of poet and painter has revelled in the imaginary glories of the scene. They have sung of the 'bright harnessed angels' who hovered there, and of the stars lingering beyond their time to shed their sweet influences upon that smiling infancy. They have painted the radiation of light from his manger-cradle, illuminating all the place till the bystanders are forced to shade their eyes from that heavenly splendour. But all this is far from the reality. Such glories as the simple shepherds saw were seen only by the eye of faith; and all which met their gaze was a peasant of Galilee and a young mother, with an infant child, whom, since there was none to help her, her own hands had wrapped in swaddling clothes.'*

*The light that shined in the darkness was no physical, but a spiritual beam; the Dayspring from on high, which had now visited mankind, dawned only in a few and humble hearts.<sup>39</sup>*

**17** **And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.**

As the joyful shepherds left the inn, they were so filled with rejoicing at the birth of Messiah that they proclaimed abroad the message of good news, thus commencing the first proclamation of the gospel to the world.

**Made known abroad**

As the shepherds left the inn, they travelled over the mountains surrounding Bethlehem, preaching the glad tidings of peace to everyone they came across, once more in fulfilment of Isaiah 40:9 and 52:7-8: *'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace...'*

Compare the response of Zacharias (Lk 1:65) at the birth of John, the forerunner to Messiah. He praised God *'and the sayings were noised abroad through all the hill country of Judea.'* It was the humble residents of these insignificant villages that first heard the good news and believed. *'Hearken, my beloved brethren,'* wrote James, *'hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?'* (James 2:5)

We have also received the good news of salvation from sin and death. Are we joyfully proclaiming abroad these glad tidings? The shepherds were elated with the message they were preaching and spoke about it without restraint.

**The saying**

That is, the saying of v11: *'Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, that is Christ the Lord.'*

**18-20** **And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.**

Wondered Gk *thaumazo* G2296 = 'to wonder, admire' (Str)

Kept Gk *suntēreo* G4933 = 'to preserve, to keep within one's self or mind, lest it be forgotten' (Thay)

Pondered Gk *sumballo* G4820 = 'to bring together in one's mind, confer with one's self' (Thay)

<sup>39</sup> The Life of Christ, F W Farrar DD, 1874, pg 2-3

## Wondered

The response from those who heard the shepherd's news was the same as the multitudes who were astounded to witness Christ's miracles! (See Mt 9:8,33; 15:31)

## Kept

Gk *suntereo* is made up of two Greek words, *sun* (meaning 'union') and *tereo* ('to keep a watch, guard'). It carries the idea of keeping close guard. Cp Jacob in Gen 37:11.

## Pondered

Compare Mary's response here to her initial response to Gabriel's appearance: *'when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be'* (1:29).

It is interesting to note the progression in maturity in the life of Mary between these two records. Mary started out agitated and troubled at the news from Gabriel, thinking quickly as for an explanation about why he might have appeared to her like this, but now she is compiling a catalogue of these remarkable statements in an effort to comprehend - something which must have taken her entire lifetime. The example of Mary here is one of a deeply spiritually minded young woman.

### MARY'S EXAMPLE OF MEDITATION

It is the mark of a deeply faithful individual to be able to store the words of God in one's heart and to meditate upon them often. We live in a hectic world and too often rush from one thing to the next without ever making the time to sit quietly and ponder what God has told us. Mary had taken these words to heart:

- Psalm 40:8 *'I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.'*
- Psalm 119:11 *'Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.'*
- Psalm 119:97 *'O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day'*

What real-life changes can you make so that when you see Mary in the Kingdom you can tell her the effect of her example on your own life as we waited for her son to return?

## Glorifying and praising God

The shepherds returned home again, still full of joy and praise. Their attitude was much like the disciples' after the ascension of Jesus at the very end of the Gospel of Luke: *'they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God'* (Lk 24:52-53).

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, it was his command that his disciples went into all the world and preached the good news (Mk 16:15). Like the shepherds, they wholeheartedly went about proclaiming the gospel with a spirit full of enthusiasm; the words of Peter and John in Acts 4:20 are very appropriate: *'We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard.'*

A dirt path leads up a rocky, reddish-brown hillside. The path is composed of loose soil and small stones, winding through sparse, low-lying green and yellow shrubs. To the right, a large, layered rock formation rises, showing signs of erosion. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with a few wispy white clouds scattered across it. The overall scene is arid and rugged.

# VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

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LUKE 2:21-39

# THE NAMING AND DEDICATION OF JESUS (2:21-24)

**21-22** *And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;*

## **Eight days**

We know from Scripture that **eight** is the number of a new beginning:

- Only eight people were saved when God erased the old creation and began the new in the flood (1Pet 3:20). Noah is specifically noted as the eight person who was saved (2Pet 2:5).
- Circumcision occurred on the eighth day (Lev 12:3). This involved cutting off the foreskin, symbolic of leaving the flesh behind and commencing a life devoted to God (Deut 10:16).
- In Lev 14:2-11, it wasn't until the eighth day that a leper would be completely cleansed. This involved shaving off his hair - like a newborn child, a new birth.
- Christ was resurrected to new life on the eighth day (Mk 16:9), which, in NT times, was termed '*the first day of the week*'.
- After the Millennial Age of God's Kingdom, the eighth millennium will dawn in which there will be no more sin and death because all things will have been made new (Rev 20:3,14; 21:5).
- The eighth woman to be granted miraculous conception was Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Here the Lord was circumcised '*when eight days were accomplished.*' What a new beginning this was! Not only did it symbolize a life of *complete* dedication for this little boy; this was a new beginning for the entire world! This was the culmination of the purpose and the point of circumcision.

## **The circumcising of the child**

Circumcision was a token, or sign, of God's covenant He made with Abraham many centuries earlier, in Genesis 17:9-14. It involved literally cutting off the flesh to teach that we should remove carnal, or fleshly, thinking from our lives (Rom 2:28-29).

There is an interesting question that relates to circumcision under the Law: Why did God make it so that only males can be circumcised? Why couldn't females also be given a symbolic way to '*cut off the flesh*'?

The answer lies in what is typified by circumcision. Circumcision was mandatory for every male Israelite (Gen 17:10,14). Even a stranger who joined themselves to the nation had to be circumcised before partaking of the Passover (Ex 12:48). This is appropriate: For God to save the Israelites from the angel of death who passed over, the least we can expect is that they would have to cut off fleshly practices and thinking from their lives. Females had no way of doing this symbolically; they were to be represented by the males.

This is most appropriate when it comes to the type. There is only one man in history who has perfectly 'cut off the flesh' in his life, never once succumbing to sin (Heb 4:15). He is represented throughout Scripture as the Bridegroom, and we as his bride. What he did perfectly, we try to follow. He represented to us what needs to be done in our own lives, and if we believe in him, we can participate in his victory, as Col 2:10-13 explains:

*'Ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: **In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:** Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses'.*

As a young child, who came to 'fulfil the law' and confirm God's promises (Mt 5:17; Rom 15:8), it was appropriate that the Lord should submit to this ritual of circumcision – an illustration of what he would do throughout his entire life.

### **His name was called JESUS... named of the angel before he was conceived**

This was in fulfilment of Isaiah 49:1: *'Yahweh hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of my name.'* Both Mary (Lk 1:31) and Joseph (Mt 1:21) were informed of Jesus' name, and Matthew's Gospel explains that his name was indicative of his mission: *'Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins'.*

### **The days of her purification**

Leviticus 12 outlines the laws of purification following the birth of a child and differentiates between the purification rituals required for a son or a daughter.

- If a woman had a **son**, she was unclean and had to remain isolated from other people for 7 days, after which she was free to interact with the general population but had to remain away from the Tabernacle for a further 33 days – making a total of 40 days (v2-4).
- For a **daughter**, on the other hand, her isolation lasted 14 days and her abstinence from visiting the Tabernacle some 66 days, a total of 80 days (v5).

Following this time, she was to bring an offering to the Tabernacle which was the same regardless of the gender of the child (v6-8).

Why the difference? The distinction between the two time periods was due to the ability of the male to be circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day (v3). He could *'cut off the flesh'*, and therefore his period of uncleanness was half that of the female. Again, this is analogous to Christ, who was able to cut off the flesh that we, represented by the daughter, just never can.

## **According to the Law of Moses**

Joseph and Mary did everything *'according to the Law'*:

- v22 *'according to the law of Moses'*
- v23 *'as it is written in the Law of the Lord'*
- v24 *'according to that which is said in the Law of the Lord'*
- v27 *'to do for him after the custom of the Law'*
- v39 *'when they had performed all things according to the Law of the Lord'*
- v42 *'after the custom of the feast'*

This is a remarkable feature about the people God chose to welcome His Son into the world. They all had a deep respect for His commands. Zacharias and Elisabeth (Lk 1:5-6), Joseph (Mt 1:19), Mary (Lk 1:38) and Simeon (Lk 2:29) all treated God's word and law with the reverence it deserves. After all, they are the commands of the Most High God!

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE LAW OF MOSES?**

It has become fashionable in the churches to disregard the Law of Moses entirely, as though it is dangerous and harmful to our understanding of God's work in Christ. The truth of the matter is that these are laws that were given by God Himself, and God never makes mistakes. We simply have to understand the purpose for which they were given. The Law was first given to a nation of slaves, to teach them how to live Godly, fair and honest lives. The Law itself is holy, just and good (Rom 7:12), and whilst it cannot justify or save of itself (Gal 3:11) it was simply designed to bring us to an understanding of Christ (Gal 3:24).

Whilst we should therefore never trust in the Law or our works to save us, we should still delight in the wisdom contained in God's laws (Psa 119:97), just like the faithful group of people into whose care God entrusted His Son.

## **Brought him to Jerusalem**

i.e. Christ was taken to the temple at 40 days old, after the days of purification (Lev 12:2-4).

## **To present him to the Lord**

Mary presented to God His very own Son. We know from scripture that God had Jesus Christ in His mind from before the world began (Jn 1:2), and that He loved him before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:24). Psalm 22:9-10 prophetically speaks of God taking His Son out of the womb and giving him hope. What a special relationship God had with His Son ever since he was born.

**23-24** *(As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.*

**As it was written in the law of the Lord**

In Exod 13:2.

**And to offer a sacrifice according to... the Law**

In Leviticus 12:6-8. That laws states that as an offering, the woman had to bring either a lamb together with a pigeon or turtledove, or if she was poor, simply two turtledoves or pigeons. Mary's offering of two birds confirms her poor state that we might have presumed from the lowly circumstances of Jesus' birth in a manger.

There was a certain irony about the situation though. This impoverished young woman who was only able to produce two pigeons or turtledoves as an offering brought with her the most precious and spotless lamb that had ever entered the courts of Yahweh's house (Jn 1:29).



# SIMEON AND ANNA (2:25-39)

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

Simeon Gk *Sumeon* G4826 From Heb *shim'ôn* = 'hearing, heard' (Str, BDB)

Just Gk *dikaïos* G1342 = 'equitable, righteous' (Str, Thay)

Devout Gk *eulabeṣ* G2126 = 'taking well, that is circumspect' (Str)

Consolation Gk *paraklēsis* G3874 = 'a calling near, comfort or solace' (Thay)

## Simeon

Simeon is a Hebrew name which means to hear (also equivalent to Gk '*Simon*'). It is a fitting name for the one that was drawn and listened to the spirit to direct him in his life. This man not only heard the word of God obeyed, as we see in v26: '*He came by the spirit*'.

This very brief window we have into the life of Simeon shows him to be a man who studied the word of God, who listened to its message and developed a strong faith that endured many years (cp Rom 10:17). After decades of waiting, he is finally about to see the event for which he had longed.

## CHARACTER SKETCH

**SIMEON: Faithful Until Death**

Age:	Old	
Hometown:	Jerusalem	Luke 2:25
Name meaning:	Hear or hearken (Heb form of Gk ' <i>Simon</i> ')	

## Just

Gk *dikaïos* means equitable of character. He was a holy and a righteous man, just like Zacharias and Elisabeth (1:6) and Joseph (Mt 1:19). They were part of the same Godly community that was centred on worship of Yahweh.

## Devout

Simeon was a careful observer of God's laws and worshipped God in truth.

## The consolation of Israel

It cannot be overstated how desperately the nation was in need of their Messiah. We take Jesus' first advent for granted, given the historical nature of the fact; but for the Jews of this time it was a matter of hope and prospect. Israel had been repeatedly invaded in the inter-testament period; even now they lived under the shadow of an Edomite (Lk 1:5). The nation was craving the voice of comfort that had been prophesied by Isaiah, in Ch 40:1-2:

*'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins.'*

Simeon was awaiting this consolation in faith, knowing that it was tied up in the coming of 'the Lord's Christ' (v26). But whilst many only saw that Zion's warfare would be accomplished by Messiah, Simeon understood that so too would her iniquity be forgiven.

Jesus Christ is therefore the messenger of comfort and consolation to all who suffer. This idea is beautifully discussed by Paul in 2Cor 1:3-7.

### **The Holy Spirit was upon him**

Luke takes great pains to emphasise that God was with Simeon and that he acted under direction of the Holy Spirit:

- v25 *'The Holy Spirit was upon him'*
- v26 *'It was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit'*
- v27 *'He came by the Spirit into the Temple'*
- v29 *'According to Thy Word'*

### **26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.**

Revealed Gk *chrēmatizo* G5537 = 'to utter an oracle, Divinely intimate' (Str).

#### **Revealed**

*'It had been divinely told him by the Holy Spirit'* (YLT).

### **27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,**

#### **Parents**

For some reason Luke calls Joseph and Mary 'parents' here, whereas he later distinguishes between 'Joseph and his mother' (v33). Mary slipped up and Jesus picked her up for it when she called Joseph 'thy father' in v48-49.

#### **After the custom of the law**

Regarding this presentation ceremony, Edersheim writes,

*'The ceremony at the redemption of a firstborn son... consisted of the formal presentation of the child to the priest, accompanied by two short 'benedictions' [blessings] - the one for the law of redemption, the other for the gift of a firstborn son, after which the redemption-money was paid. Most solemn... must this rite have been.'*<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Edersheim, A 1906. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Bk 2, ch 7, p 195.

**28** *Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,*

### **Then took he him up in his arms**

This is amazing! We never read a word of the priest, but Simeon immediately takes up Christ in his arms and embraces him. He effectively steps in front of the priest and in v34 fulfils his duty of blessing the child and his family!

### **And said**

Cp what follows with Luke 1:67-79. The Prophecy of Zacharias would now be spread across the hill country of Judea. Many of the elements of this Prophecy are picked up in the coming verses.

**29** *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:*

### **Lettest thou thy servant depart in peace**

Simeon had finally reached the end of his long life of endurance. Much would occur while he rested in the dust of the earth, and his rising again would depend upon this child (v34). The coming of the Messiah brings peace for the weary and the end of a life of mortality.

In comparing with Zacharias' prophecy, note that Christ came into this world '*to guide our feet into the way of peace*' (1:79).

### **According to thy word**

Simeon shows absolute faith in the promises of God, as a righteous and careful observer of God's laws.

**30** *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,*

### **Mine eyes have seen**

Fulfilling God's promise that he would '*see the Lords Christ*' (v26).

### **Thy salvation**

Simeon was holding aloft '*the Salvation of Yahweh.*' He acknowledges that it is not in the power of man's hand to save, but rather salvation is of Yahweh.

In v31-35 Simeon goes on to quote from the book of Isaiah, fusing together different aspects of the work of the Messiah found in its pages. He particularly quotes from the four Servant Songs of Isaiah. The Servant Songs paint an amazing picture of the service, the suffering and finally the triumph of the servant of Yahweh, and ultimately refer to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup> In Acts 3:13 Peter identifies Christ as the servant of God: '*...the God of our fathers, glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate*' (ESV). Christ manifested the works of a good servant in the following ways: He always did the will of his Father (Jn 4:34, 6:38). He never sought to please himself but rather God (Jn 5:30). Jesus finished the work that he was sent to do (Jn 17:4). Christ came to glorify the Father (Jn 13:31; 17:4).

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<sup>41</sup> Although they do have initial or other applications, such as Isa 53 to the sick King Hezekiah, and Isa 49:6 to Paul on his missionary journeys (Acts 13:47).

## YAHWEH'S SERVANT

Have a brief read through of the Servant Songs of Isaiah and see if you can identify any of the themes that Simeon references. The Servant Songs are as follows:

- Song 1 - Isaiah 42:1-9
- Song 2 - Isaiah 49:1-13
- Song 3 - Isaiah 50:4-11
- Song 4 - Isaiah 52:13-53:12

### **31** Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

#### **Prepared before the face of all people**

Simeon here draws on an understanding of Isaiah 52:10, '*Yahweh hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God*'. God exhibited Christ before the face of all people of every background, and since the beginning of the world. He was prepared from time immemorial. We know that Christ existed from the beginning of the world. Not physically but as a sure and certain part of the purpose of God. 2Tim 1:9, Acts 3:20-22, Jn 1:1-14.

#### **All people**

Wey: '*of all nations.*' Extended in the next verse - a clear reference to who '*all people*' are. It is both Jew and Gentile, becoming as one through the redemptive work of Christ.

### **32** A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Lighten      Gk *apokalupsis* (G602) = 'lay bare, disclosure of truth, reveal, manifest' (Thay).

#### **A light to lighten the Gentiles**

'Lighten' is the Gk *apokalupsis*, meaning to reveal or enlighten. This child entering the world would be like turning a light on in a pitch-dark room:

- '*I am the light of the world*' (Jn 8:12)
- '*I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth*' (Isa 49:6).
- '*And will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles*' (Isa 42:6).

A little later after Jesus' birth, the wise men saw a star in the east, a literal light that guided the Gentiles to the Messiah (Mt 2:1-12).

#### **The glory of thy people Israel**

When Christ came, there was a veil of darkness over all nations (Isa 25:7). It was as if that covering was partially removed at the first advent of Christ, and now '*blindness in part is happened to Israel*' whilst the Gentiles have an opportunity (Rom 11:25). Ultimately that covering will be removed from off '*all people*' and at the same time Christ will take away the shame of his people (Isa 25:8) and be the glory in the midst of her (Zech 2:5).

**33** *And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.*

Marvelled Gk *thaumazo* G2296 = 'to wonder, to admire.' (Str)

**Joseph and his mother**

Luke notes that although Mary is the mother, Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus. Born of God not of man. Cp. v27.

**Marvelled**

S/w Lk 1:21,63; 2:18. The events leading up to and after this child's birth left those who saw them in awe. Such a reaction would follow Christ and his work throughout his life. This is particularly highlighted by Luke. The word *thaumazo* occurs frequently in the context of marvelling at Christ: Luke 4:22, 8:25, 9:43, 11:14, 11:38, 20:26, 24:12 and 24:41.

**34** *And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;*

Set Gk *keimai* G2749 = to lie, metaphorically to be set, destined (Thay).

Fall Gk *ptosis* G4431 = 'a crash, fall, downfall' (Str, Thay).

Rising again Gk *anastasis* G386 = 'a standing up again, a resurrection from death' (Str).

Having first given blessing to God in v28, Simeon now blesses Joseph, Mary and Jesus as would have been done by the priest. He then turns to Mary exclusively as the mother.

**Set**

Means to lie outstretched, and hence be laid down, appointed or destined. Christ was to be stretched out on the cross and then to lie outstretched in his grave after his death (s/w Mt 28:6 'Come, see the place where the Lord **lay**'). These events would polarise the nation.

**Fall and rising again**

**Fall:** Some would not be able to come to grips with Jesus Christ as their Messiah. They would stumble over him, and fall. Jesus later described himself as '*The stone which the builders rejected,*' and said, '*whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*' (Mt 22:42,44). The verse in between (v43) shows that it was largely the Jewish nation and her leaders who would fall.

**Rising again:** Gk *anastasis* = to stand again, i.e. the resurrection from the dead. This is the word most often translated as 'resurrection.'

These two aspects speak of two distinct groups. Simeon is describing the polarising work of Christ right throughout his life and even to our day. In the Gospel of John in particular, time and time again it states that there was division of the people because of him (Jn 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). They searched their hearts and either accepted Christ or rejected him. To some he truly was a '*stone of stumbling and a rock of offence*' (1Pet 2:6-8). For others he was their life (Gal 2:20) they were to rise in him and will be to be resurrected to live with him (Rom 6:8). There is no middle ground; you are for Christ, or you are against him. Let this be a lesson for us to always remember: with God there is no fence-sitting; we must show our allegiance. We will either rise or fall.

## A sign which shall be spoken against

ESV: *'and for a sign that is opposed'*. Certainly, there was much opposition to the message that Christ came to bring to the world. He was a sign in at least two ways, and in both ways he was *'spoken against'*:

- He was the virgin-born Immanuel, the sign promised to king Ahaz in Isa 7:14. But people would falsely claim he was an illegitimate child (see notes 1:39, p 49-50).
- He would live out the Sign of the Prophet Jonah, by spending three days and nights in the heart of the earth (Jn 12:39-40). But the Jews disowned Jonah (see notes 1:26, p 38), and lied about the resurrection of Christ (Mt 28:13).

**35** *(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

## A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also

This was to be a particularly hard experience for Mary. Her trials would be many and varied.

### THE SWORD THAT PIERCED MARY'S HEART

- Lived in poverty (Lk 2:7,24; 1:52-53).
- Fled her homeland with Joseph to protect their son (Mt 2:13-14)
- Suffered private suspicion of infidelity (Mt 1:18-20).
- Lifelong rumours that she had committed fornication with a Samaritan (Jn 8:48).
- Endured public rebuke from her son - twice (Jn 2:4; Mt 12:46-50).
- Lived in a divided family (Jn 7:5).
- Probably knew the loneliness of widowhood and the care of a large family.
- Saw her son hanging on the cross with none of her natural family there to support her (Jn 19:27).

## That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed

Mary, and all with whom the Lord came into contact, were to learn the truth of Heb 4:12:

*'The word of God [which was made flesh in her son - Jn 1:14] is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.'*

The thoughts of many hearts would be revealed, both during the lives of these people and at the judgement seat. *'For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad'* (Luke 8:17).

The word *'revealed'* is again *apokalupto* - uncovered. The Lord Jesus will 'lift the lid' off every memory we may want to hide; he will see straight through us, discerning our motive and our thoughts. Now is the time to uncover our sins ourselves. God can, and will, help us with them; but we need to resolve to confess and forsake them now - not when it's too late.

**36** And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

If ever there was a moment that Mary needed comfort it was *then* - after those confronting words of truth. And it is *in that instant*, in v38, that Anna enters the scene.

### Anna, a prophetess

Anna is the abbreviation of 'Hannah' and means 'favoured or gracious'. It is likely that Anna taught women in the temple courts as there were no other prophets at this time. She shares some amazing links to her namesake Hannah:

- Hannah was the mother of the founder of the Schools of the Prophets (1Sam 19:20). Anna was a prophetess at a time when we are told of no other prophets.
- Hannah was the first woman to use the title of Messiah (1Sam 2:10); Anna was the first woman to recognise the Messiah.

These are but a few of many little clues that tell us to go back to the events surrounding the birth and childhood of Samuel, and to compare Luke's account with Samuel's.<sup>42</sup>

### CHARACTER SKETCH

<b>ANNA: Commitment in Service</b>		
Age:	Approx. 110	Luke 2:36-37
Status:	Widow	Luke 2:37
Hometown:	Jerusalem (the Temple)	Luke 2:37
Tribe:	Asher	Luke 2:36
Relatives:	Daughter of Phanuel	Luke 2:36
Income & Assets:	Poor? Supported by Temple fund?	
Name meaning:	Grace (Gk form of Heb 'Hannah')	

### Daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser (Asher)

**Phanuel** is the Greek of the Hebrew word Peniel and means 'the Face of God'. It was here that Jacob wrestled with the angel and saw the faithfulness of the Creator (Gen 32:24-31).

**Asher** means happy or blessed. Anna is the only hero of faith to arise from this tribe that is named in Scripture! She is also one of the few people in the New Testament linked to a tribe. Asher were known for being rich and very prosperous (Deut 33:24, Gen 49:20). They failed to drive out the Canaanites (Jud 1:32) and refused to come to Deborah's aid (Jud 5:30). Yet there was one time, when Hezekiah invited the Northern tribes to join Judah for the Passover, when a few from Asher responded (2Chr 30:11). Here another one stood aside from the reputation of her tribe - her friends - her family, and gave her life to God.

From the names of Anna, Phanuel and Asher we can get a lovely picture: By grace (Hannah) she had now seen the face of God (Phanuel) in His Son, and is now happy (Asher).

<sup>42</sup> To chase this up further, we recommend 'Hannah and her Lord', in *Hannah - Handmaid of the Highest*, Bro Roger Lewis, *The Christadelphian*. pp 175-199.

**37** *And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*

### **A widow of fourscore and four years**

Anna had only been given 7 years of marriage to enjoy with her husband before it came to a tragic ending. If Anna was married at the age of 16, she was widowed by 23. It seems she chose to remain a widow voluntarily so that she could dedicate her life to God, dwelling in the Temple and awaiting the Messiah. Having now been widowed for 84 years, she would be about 110 years old at this time - truly 'a great age'!

### **Departed not from the Temple**

Anna is a wonderful exemplar of a number of Scriptures:

- She displays the characteristics of a true widow of 1Tim 5:2-5, continuing in supplications and prayers night and day. But in v6 '*she that lives in pleasure*' like the tribe of Asher that Anna was associated with, '*is dead while she lives.*' Anna forsook that life of pleasure to serve God. Are we prepared to make the sort of sacrifice Anna made for her God?
- Psalm 92:13-14: '*Those that be planted in the house of Yahweh shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.*' What better picture is there of the elderly faithful sister Anna?

Like Anna, we need to resolve to spend our days in the Temple of God. This is not necessarily a literal temple, but it is all of us joined together, the house and Ecclesia of God. See Psa 27:4 and 1Cor 3:16.

### **Fasting and prayers**

Anna gave up self-interests and went without for the sake of her relationship with God. These practices develop our faith (Mt 17:18-21), and therefore need to be regular (Rom 12:12, 1Thes 5:17).

### **Night and day**

See Psalm 1:2 '*His delight is in the Law of Yahweh; and in His Law doth he meditate day and night.*'

**38** *And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

Gave thanks      Gk *anthomologeomai* G437 = 'to confess in turn, respond in praise.'

### **Gave thanks**

The Greek word *anthomologeomai* means to confess in turn or to agree mutually in turn. Anna's words are in response to Simeon's.

The work of Simeon and Anna forms a beautiful cameo of Isaiah 52:7-10. Two elderly people, or in the eyes of the world 'waste places' of Jerusalem, break forth in joy and sing together. Isaiah 52:7 began with the acclamation, '*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings...*' Those good tidings had now reached Jerusalem in the person of Messiah:



<b>Isaiah 52</b>	<b>Luke 2</b>
v7 'Thy God reigneth'	v26 'The Lord's anointed'
v8 'Thy watchmen lift up the voice'	v28,38 The waiting Simeon and Anna
v8 'They shall see eye to eye'	v30 'Mine eyes have seen'
v9 'Break forth into joy, sing together'	v38 'Anna responded to Simeon in praise'
v9 'The Lord hath comforted His people'	v25 'Waiting for the consolation of Israel'
v9 'He hath redeemed Jerusalem'	v38 'Looked for redemption in Jerusalem'
v10 'In the eyes of all nations'	v31 'Before the face of all people'
v10 'Shall see the salvation of our God'	v30 'Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation'

Anna dedicated her life to God and His Temple. Because of this, she has a wonderful reward in store for her: *'These are they that have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them...'* Revelation 7:13-17.

Are we waiting in the house of God now? Ready and serving, fasting and praying? Because we know that if we abide in the house now, we will be for ever in God's house in the Kingdom.

### **To all them that looked for redemption**

Anna speaks about this babe to all those that are looking for redemption and the coming of the Messiah in Jerusalem (KJV mg: *'in Israel'*). Just as at the end of the Old Testament there was a faithful group that feared Yahweh and spoke often one to another (Malachi 3:16-17), so this faithful remnant looking for redemption and speaking to each other about their hope was still there 400 years later. What a comfort for us. Although it was a dark time for the nation of Israel on a national scale, there was a faithful remnant.

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

### **When they had performed all things**

This is the purification of Mary and circumcision of Christ as required by law, see Lev 12.

### **To their own city Nazareth**

Luke, in summary form, writes that Joseph, Mary and Jesus returned to Nazareth. In actual fact, they first returned to Bethlehem, and then fled to Egypt to escape the Slaughter of the Innocents by Herod the Great (recorded in Mt 2:13-16). From Egypt they returned to Israel, but this time settled in Nazareth (Mt 2:22-23; Lk 2:39).

A photograph of ancient stone steps leading up a hillside. The steps are made of large, weathered, light-colored stone blocks. In the background, there is a stone building with a small arched window and a cross on its wall. Large, leafy trees frame the scene, and the sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall atmosphere is historical and serene.

# THE EARLY YEARS

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LUKE 2:40-52

# THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS (2:40-52)

The story of Christ's visit to the temple is only given by Luke. Twelve years had passed since the infant Son of God had returned from the Temple in v39. The brief visit to Egypt and death of Herod the Great (in Mt 2) had been followed by the weak and evil 9 year reign of his son, Archelaus, from 4BC to AD6.

When King Archelaus was banished to Gaul, political control shifted from the Idumean Monarchs to direct Roman control. Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea were now incorporated into the Roman province of Syria, under its Governor, *Publius Sulpicius Quirinius* (AD6-11). One of the first measures of the new Governor, after confiscating the ill-gotten gains of Archelaus, was to order a census of Palestine with a view to rectifying the taxation of the country (mentioned in Acts 5:37). This census was now two years' past, as was the rebellion of Judas the Galilean that it triggered (again, referred to in Acts 5:37). Also, shortly after his accession of Galilee, Quirinius had deposed the then-High Priest Joazar, who had rather well-known nationalist leanings, and replaced him with the more politically minded Annas who would value the sympathy of the Romans. The direct oversight of Palestine was devolved by Quirinius upon Procurators, the first being Coponius, leading up to the well-known Pontius Pilate.

All these are events that Jesus would have observed at a distance during his childhood years. When he arrived on the Temple doorstep, little did the High Priest Annas know of the later interactions he would face with this boy!

(See Edersheim, A 1906. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Bk 2, Ch 10, p 235-242).

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

## The child grew

Cp. v52. In the same way that Samson paralleled John, the development of Christ mirrors that of Samuel:

Jesus Christ	Samuel
The child grew (Lk 2:40)	The child Samuel grew (1Sam 2:21)
Increased in wisdom and stature (2:52)	The child Samuel grew on (2:26)
In favour with God and man (2:52)	Favour with Yahweh and with man (2:26)
I must be about my Father (2:49)	The child... ministered unto Yahweh (3:1)

## Filled with wisdom

The Greek here implies the continuous process of being filled. A lot of knowledge would have been given to Christ from an early age for him to be able to so easily answer questions from the Scriptures. Isaiah 11:2-3 describes the process:

- First, God would speak to His Son, v2: *'The spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon him'*. Spirit = Heb *ruach* (noun) = *'breath, wind'*.
- Then Christ would take in those words, v3: *'And shall make him of quick understanding, ' i.e., Heb *ruach* (verb) = 'to smell, perceive. i.e., to breathe in'.*

Yahweh would breathe out *'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh'* each day (v2). Then the Lord would breathe in that same breath, learning from his Father *'morning by morning.'* This is what gave him wisdom, or *'the tongue of the learned'* (Isa 50:4-5). He had learned from his mother to hide God's word in his heart (Psa 119:9-11). It developed in him a character from a young age so that manifested God so perfectly that he could be called *'the Word made flesh'* (Jn 1:14).

The churches try desperately to make this 'filled with wisdom' a reference only to Jesus' *natural* human development and acquisition of knowledge, because if it denotes the attainment of *spiritual* knowledge, then it puts into question the Divinity of Christ (as the 'God' part of Christ should already have complete spiritual knowledge from his pre-existent state, or have received it miraculously after birth). Needless to say, this verse, along with v52, is indeed helpful in showing that Jesus was born of our nature and needed to develop spiritually.

### **In spirit**

*'In spirit'* is missing in many older manuscripts, therefore RV and ESV omit.

### **The grace of God was upon him**

The Greek word for grace, *charis*, carries the idea of both favour and delight. This is the meaning of Hannah's name, the mother of Samuel. Another little hint to look to their times.

## **41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover.**

### **His parents went to Jerusalem every year**

It was a requirement of the law for all males to go to Jerusalem for three feasts per year. This included the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which directly followed the Passover), the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 16:16, Ex 23:14-15,17-18, 34:23).

Due to the dispersion of the Jews throughout the empire and other factors, many Jews either only came to Jerusalem once a year for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread or not at all. We are not told how many times a year Joseph himself went to the Temple, but the phrase 'every year' would indicate that both Joseph and Mary went up to Jerusalem even when they lived in Egypt, a round trip that would take at least two weeks, besides the time spent at the Feast. This would indicate the very high importance they placed on attending the Feasts. All of their *'holidays'* were spent on God-focused events.

The Rabbinic School of Hillel held that the Passover was also compulsory for women, however there was no Biblical injunction stating this. Imagine how great an effort it would have been for Joseph and Mary to travel with at least six children (Mt 13:55-56) to the Temple 'every year' (Lk 2:41)! Evidently Joseph himself had a faithful role model: Elkanah (1Sam 1:3,19,21; 2:11,19,20).

**42** *And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.*

### **When he was twelve years old**

Jewish tradition stated that at the age of 13 a boy is to become 'a son of the law' and therefore is required to obey the commandments of the law.<sup>43</sup> Scripture makes no such ruling. Whilst the study of the Law, beginning at Leviticus, commenced around age 5 or 6 for the average Jewish boy, the understanding of this lad was shortly to be found to be superior to even the greatest rabbis!

### **They went up to Jerusalem**

We can gain a few insights into what this journey would have been like for Jesus: It would have been an exciting time of year for the young Jewish children. There would have been the overwhelming sense of the importance of the occasion as they noted the respect with which their parents approached the Passover. Generally the pilgrims attending a feast would travel as a large group, sometimes the whole village. The greater numbers would prevent robbers from taking advantage of the pilgrims, particularly as they navigated the steep ascent through the craggy hills from the Jordan plane to Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup>

It would have been a friendly, vibrant atmosphere, with the company made up of their friends and family (v44). As they journeyed, they would have sung Psalms together, particularly the Songs of Ascent (translated 'Degrees' in the KJV) - i.e. Psa 120-134. Even today it is not uncommon in Jewish Kibbutzim, or communities, for them to sit around in a circle, perhaps around a campfire, singing.

**43** *And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.*

### **Joseph and Mary knew not of it**

Mary and Joseph may not have realised Christ wasn't with them for a number of reasons. We have noted already the size of the traveling company, additionally, the sheer number of people who travelled to the feasts (Josephus estimated three million Jews travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover) would have meant a very large number of people were around, which would have made keeping track of children difficult, even for the most observant mother. Given the size of the group, Mary and Joseph must have assumed he was with the other boys in their travelling party and evidently gave it little thought until they went to send him to bed.

**44-45** *But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.*

### **They sought him**

Sought here carries the idea of anxiously and diligently seeking. Imagine the stress of losing the Son of God for three days!

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<sup>43</sup> Edersheim, A 1906. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Bk 2, Ch 10, p 235.

<sup>44</sup> Christ may have based his story of the Good Samaritan on journeys such as these (Lk 10:30).

**46-47** *And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.*

Astonished Gk *existēmi* G1839 = 'to be out of one's mind, to astound. People thought they were going crazy'.

Understanding Gk *sunesis* G4907 = 'a mental putting together'.

### **After three days they found him**

Mary and Joseph may have lost Jesus the day they left Jerusalem to travel to their first stop, where they discovered he was missing. Part of the second day would have been spent travelling back to Jerusalem (most likely checking villages and inns on the way), then the third in Jerusalem looking for him - making three days all up. It is hard to miss the parallel with the 'three days' during which Jesus' mother would again mourn the loss of her son.

### **Sitting in the midst of the doctors**

At the time of Christ, the doctors and rabbis would offer free lessons in the Law. They would often sit on benches and teach people who would sit on the ground. This may mean Christ was sitting among the doctors as their equals as they taught the people, but this is not certain.

### **Asking them questions**

It is interesting to note that among the doctors here there is a reasonable chance the following rabbis were present and conversing with Jesus, especially as it was during the time of Passover when they would have been especially present:

- **Gamaliel** (the teacher of Paul, head of the Sanhedrin (the Nasi) from 30AD to 50AD, and the grandson of Hillel).
- **Hillel** (head of the Sanhedrin (Nasi) 31BC to 9AD, and founder of school of Hillel).
- **Shammai** (Av Beit Din, second highest rank in the Sanhedrin) 10BC to 30AD, founder of the School of Shammai, and Hillel's great rival).
- **Jonathan** (writer of Chaldee Targum, one of the first translations of Hebrew bible).
- **Nicodemus** (a member of the Sanhedrin, and later a disciple)
- **Joseph of Arimathea** (a member of the Sanhedrin, and later a disciple)

It may have been in God's plan that the greatest Rabbis of Jewish history were alive when Christ was only twelve to demonstrate that Christ was clearly of a higher calibre than all of the Rabbis, as Mt 8:28-29 concurs. It appears that Christ's first coming was, in some respects, during the golden age of Judaism - and yet he was rejected.

It is probable that Annas, the High Priest from AD 6-15, observed the young boy and marked him. Annas and his family would be furnished with many an opportunity to come to know this young man in future years!

It is also possible Mary and Joseph found Christ in the Hall of Hewn Stones, a room in the Temple where the Sanhedrin met and where Christ was later judged. The Babylonian Talmud (in *Sanhedrin 88b*) indicates the Sanhedrin assembled in this room at Feasts from the morning sacrifice till the evening sacrifice. This room had seats allocated to pupils, and

it may be that this is where they found Jesus – sitting in front of part of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the day! Little wonder, in the next verse, they were ‘amazed’!

### **Astonished at his understanding and answers**

The Lord’s piecing together of Scripture to provide the most convincing answers left those who heard utterly astounded. Jesus had not been schooled in the religious schools of the day (Jn 7:14-16), which people like Saul were sent to (Acts 22:3), yet he showed more understanding than all his teachers and ‘the ancients’ (Psa 119:97-100).

**48** *And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.*

### **When they saw him, they were amazed**

It seems Mary and Joseph had become somewhat accustomed to the feeling of having God’s Son in the family. It also appears he did not frequently have the opportunity to discuss the Law with the scholars of the day. Imagine Mary and Joseph finding their little boy surrounded by the religious elite of the day!

Christ frequently left people astonished because of his teaching (Mt 7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33; Mk 1:22; 6:2; 10:26; 11:18; Lk 4:32). People did not expect such wisdom and knowledge from a man like him. Presumably they had a fixed image of what a spiritual person looked like; Christ defied that norm.

### **Why hast thou thus dealt with us?**

During the three days of searching Mary in her heightened state of anxiety would have thought over and over about how these events fitted in with what the angels had told her before Christ was born. When she met her son she must have been overflowing with all kinds of emotions.

### **Sought thee sorrowing**

After three days, Mary and possibly even Joseph must have been catastrophising. What if Jesus was injured? How long might he be lost for? What of their responsibilities towards God? He couldn’t be dead, could he?!

**49** *And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?*

### **How is it that ye sought me?**

Mary was wrong on two counts. (1) There was no need for such a protracted search; she ought to have known where he would be, and (2) Joseph was **not** his father.

### **I must be about my Father’s business**

Lit. ‘I must be about my Father’ or ‘the things of my Father’ (YLT). These are the first words of Christ we have on record. They demonstrate his acute awareness of his purpose and what is ahead of him. This clarity of purpose never changed. It began in early youth and lasted until his death (Jn 17:4). Cp Psa 40:6-8.

**50** *And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.*

### **They understood not the saying**

Mary and Joseph would have known well that Jesus had a very close relationship with God. But in the context of family life, it was easy for them to forget that, actually, his Father wasn't in their family. While faithful, Mary and Joseph struggled to understand Christ's purpose, and the fact that his spiritual family came before his natural (cp Lk 14:26). The fact that Jesus just didn't turn up with the family one day, and his explanation for why, was a rude awakening to the couple (though by no means a rude comment) of the true significance of the boy committed to their care.

Christ's sayings were often not fully understood: Lk 9:45; 18:34; Mk 9:32; Jn 10:6; 1:10-11.

**51** *And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.*

### **And he went down with them... and was subject to them**

There were many reasons for this. The first is that God's law required it (Ex 20:12). The second is that the house was Joseph's house, and it must have been an interesting demographic to have the eldest boy *always* knowing the right answer to life's questions.

### **His mother kept all these sayings in her heart**

Cp 1:29; 2:19. Little about Jesus being Messiah must have been making sense to Mary, but she remembered each event and thought over them often. It is probable she didn't understand the full import of Christ's mission until after his death, which would mean that his ministry, death and resurrection would have been a nonsensical rollercoaster to her at times, with times of horrific pain or despair, followed by times of elation and rejoicing.

**52** *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*

Stature Gk *he̅likia* G2244 = 'age, maturity or stature'

### **Increased in wisdom**

That is what the Proverbs encourage: *'Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.'* (Prov 4:5-7).

### **Stature**

This may be referring to Christ's age, maturity or height, although all would have increased together.

### **In favour with God and man**

As is often the case, men admire holiness in others until it affects them, as it did later in Christ's life.

This is what happens when a child submits to Godly parents (Prov 3:1-4). Cp 1Sam 2:26.



During the next 18 years, between Christ's visit to the temple and the start of his ministry, it appears Joseph died as he is no longer mentioned in the record after this point. If so, Christ would have had to both take over the family business and lead the family, as seems to be the case in Jn 2:5. Once again this may have been deliberate on God's part to give Christ hands-on experience in teaching and leading before beginning his ministry, with out the added complication of living in submission to his earthly 'father'. This may also have left the family in poverty, as was often the situation for the fatherless and the widow.

# **A P P E N D I C E S**

# Appendix 1: The Time of Jesus' Birth

## Historical Landmarks

It is difficult to ascertain an exact year in which Jesus was born upon which all historians and scholars agree. There are, however, several historical landmarks mentioned in the Gospels:

1. Death of Herod the Great (Lk 1:5) and the ascension of Archelaus (Mt 2:22)
2. The Course of Abia's turn in the Temple (Lk 1:5,8)
3. The four Passovers in the ministry of Jesus (Jn 2:13, 5:1; 6:4; 11:55)
4. The Census (Lk 2:1-2)

Whilst these clues these do not secure an undisputed estimate, the most likely proposition is that he was born in summer around the seventh month Tishri, in the year 5BC, as explored further below.

### 1. Death of Herod the Great and ascension of Archelaus

In looking for **the year of Christ's birth**, the death of Herod the Great is one of the most significant historical landmarks mentioned in the Gospels, given Jesus was born before Herod died. Two notable historians, Josephus and Jerome, state that Herod reigned for 37 years and although they disagree on the start and end dates, when comparing with other historians it seems most likely he died sometime around 4BC.<sup>45</sup> Scholars have gone into great lengths to reconcile the dating discrepancies between reputable historians, the lunar eclipse recorded around the death of Herod, the different dating mechanisms of Jews and Romans, and yet there is still debate as to the exact timing. *'The consensus view,'* however, *'is that Herod died in 4BC, meaning Jesus was born in 5-6BC.'*<sup>46</sup>

When Herod made the decree to kill all the babies under the age of two (Mt 2:16), it would be supposed that this was because Jesus could have been anywhere up to two years of age. If Herod died sometime in 4BC, it would be safe to assume that Jesus was born in 5BC. Most scholars accept a date of birth between 6 and 4BC, with his son Archelaus commencing his reign after his death in the year 4BC.

### 2. The Course of Abia's turn in the Temple

It is possible to arrive at a very reasonable estimate regarding the **time of the year** that Jesus was born based on the information we have around the birth of John the Baptist. It is recorded that Zacharias was of the priestly course of Abia, and it was at the time when this course was ministering in the Temple that the angel appeared to him (Luke 1:5,9).

David had set up the 24 priestly courses, each of which served for one week in the Temple, twice a year. The course of Abia was eighth in the list of priestly courses (1 Chron 24:10). When there was a feast, all the priests were on duty during that week. This meant that the course of Abia was scheduled to serve in week 10<sup>47</sup> (second week of the third month, Sivan) and week 35 (first week of the ninth month, Kislev). This gives us two occasions when Zacharias may have been in the Temple when he was visited by Gabriel.

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<sup>45</sup> Adam Augustyn, Managing Editor, Reference Content <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Herod-king-of-Judaea>

<sup>46</sup> <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/12/19/quirinius-an-archaeological-biography/>

<sup>47</sup> This fell on the tenth week of the year, as week three was the Passover and week nine was the Feast of Pentecost, when all priests served. (John J Parsons, Hebrew for Christians [https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Winter\\_Holidays/Christmas/christmas.html](https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Winter_Holidays/Christmas/christmas.html))

We know that Elisabeth was six months pregnant when Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she was with child by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:36), which means that Jesus was born six months after John the Baptist.

- If John was conceived after Zacharias ministered in the temple in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, Sivan 6BC, then Jesus would have been born nine months later - sometime around the 1<sup>st</sup> month, Nisan 5BC, and Jesus would have been born six months later, around the 7<sup>th</sup> month, Tishri, 5BC.
- If, on the other hand, John was conceived following Zacharias' ministry in the ninth month Kislev, then the whole timeline would be delayed by six months.

Nisan (1st month; 30 days)			Tishri (7th month; 30 days)		
course	name	week*	course	name	week*
1	Yehoyariv (יהוֹיָרִיב)	1 / 52	1	Yehoyariv (יהוֹיָרִיב)	27
2	Yedayah (יְדַיָּה)	2	2	Yedayah (יְדַיָּה)	28
-	Passover (all priests)	3	-	Sukkot (all priests)	29
3	Charim (חָרִים)	4	3	Charim (חָרִים)	30
Iyyar (2nd month; 29 days)			Cheshvan (8th month; 29 days)		
4	Seorim (שְׂעוּרִים)	5	4	Seorim (שְׂעוּרִים)	31
5	Malkiyah (מַלְכִּיָּה)	6	5	Malkiyah (מַלְכִּיָּה)	32
6	Miyamin (מִיָּמִין)	7	6	Miyamin (מִיָּמִין)	33
7	Hakkotz (הַקּוֹצֵץ)	8	7	Hakkotz (הַקּוֹצֵץ)	34
Sivan (3rd month; 30 days)			Kislev (9th month; 30 days*)		
-	Shavuot (all priests)	9	8	Aviyah (אַבְיָה)	35
8	Aviyah (אַבְיָה)	10	9	Yeshua (יֵשׁוּעַ)	36
9	Yeshua (יֵשׁוּעַ)	11	10	Shekhanyahu (שְׁכַנְיָהוּ)	37
10	Shekhanyahu (שְׁכַנְיָהוּ)	12	11	Elyashiv (אֱלִישִׁיב)	38
Tammuz (4th month; 29 days)			Tevet (10th month; 29 days)		
11	Elyashiv (אֱלִישִׁיב)	13	12	Yakim (יָקִים)	39
12	Yakim (יָקִים)	14	13	Chuppah (חֻפָּה)	40
13	Chuppah (חֻפָּה)	15	14	Yeshevav (יֵשֶׁבֶעַב)	41
14	Yeshevav (יֵשֶׁבֶעַב)	16	15	Bilgah (בִּלְגָה)	42
Av (5th month; 30 days)			Shevat (11th month; 30 days)		
15	Bilgah (בִּלְגָה)	17	16	Immer (אִמֶּר)	43
16	Immer (אִמֶּר)	18	17	Chezir (חֲזִיר)	44
17	Chezir (חֲזִיר)	19	18	Hapitzetz (הַפִּצֵּץ)	45
18	Hapitzetz (הַפִּצֵּץ)	20	19	Petachyah (פֶּתַחְיָה)	46
Elul (6th month; 29 days)			Adar (12th month; 29 days)*		
19	Petachyah (פֶּתַחְיָה)	21	20	Yechezkel (יְחֵזְקֵאל)	47
20	Yechezkel (יְחֵזְקֵאל)	22	21	Yachin (יָכִין)	48
21	Yachin (יָכִין)	23	22	Gamul (גַּמּוּל)	49
22	Gamul (גַּמּוּל)	24	23	Delayahu (דְּלַיָּהוּ)	50
23	Delayahu (דְּלַיָּהוּ)	25	24	Ma'azyahu (מַעֲזִיָּהוּ)	51
24	Ma'azyahu (מַעֲזִיָּהוּ)	26			

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Figure 5 - Calendar showing the 24 courses of the priests, with Babylonian month names.

Of the two options for the time of year in which Jesus was born, summer – the month Tishri – seems to be the more likely for the following reasons.

During this month the Feast of Tabernacles (or Sukkot) takes place. This would explain why all the accommodation at Bethlehem was filled. During feast days, the population of Jerusalem would swell from 120,000 to up to three million people. Bethlehem, around 9km away and a 'suburb' of Jerusalem, would quickly overflow with travellers and this combined with the timing of the census would indeed mean that there was no room at the inn.

Another reason that a summer birth is proposed is that it is bitterly cold around Bethlehem in winter and it often snows. As the Companion Bible (App. 179, p 199-200) observes,

*'Shepherds and their flocks would not be found 'abiding' (Gk 'agrauleo') in the open fields at night in December (Tebeth), for the paramount reason that there would be no pasturage at that time. It was the custom then (as now) to withdraw the flocks during the month Marchesven (October-November) from the open districts and house them for the winter.'*

It would also seem unlikely that the Roman authorities would impose travel for a census during the most inconvenient time for travelling of the year, when the roads were unsuited to traffic.

It is no surprise that the traditional 25<sup>th</sup> December celebrated by Christians originates from the pagan worship of the sun god on the Winter Solstice and was subsequently endorsed as a Christian festival by Emperor Constantine in his mission to unite the Roman Empire on the basis of Christianity. The first record of a Christmas celebration was in Rome in 336AD. Christmas does not even appear on the lists of festivals given by the early Christian writers Irenaeus and Tertullian (120-220AD).

#### **4. The Length of Jesus' Ministry - The Passovers**

Another way to arrive at the time of year in which the Lord was born is to jump to the end of his life on earth and then work backwards.

The Lord began his ministry '*at about thirty years of age*' (Luke 3:23). If we take this to be a rather accurate estimation, then we can say that the Lord began his ministry at about the same time of year in which he was born.

This was followed by a 3½-year ministry which ended at the time of Passover (Jn 13:1) in the 1<sup>st</sup> month, *Abib* (Deut 16:1), also known by its Babylonian name *Nisan* after the captivity (Neh 3:7).

So, if the Lord died in the 1<sup>st</sup> month, then 3½ years earlier, he would have commenced his ministry in the 7<sup>th</sup> month, as illustrated on the timeline on the next page. But how do we know Jesus' ministry was 3½ years? There are two reasons:

**Firstly**, we believe Christ's ministry was 3½ years based on the seventy-week prophecy in Dan 9:25-27.<sup>48</sup>

**Secondly**, this finding matches the four Passovers mentioned by John's Gospel, which took place during the ministry of Jesus:

1. '*And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*' Jn 2:13

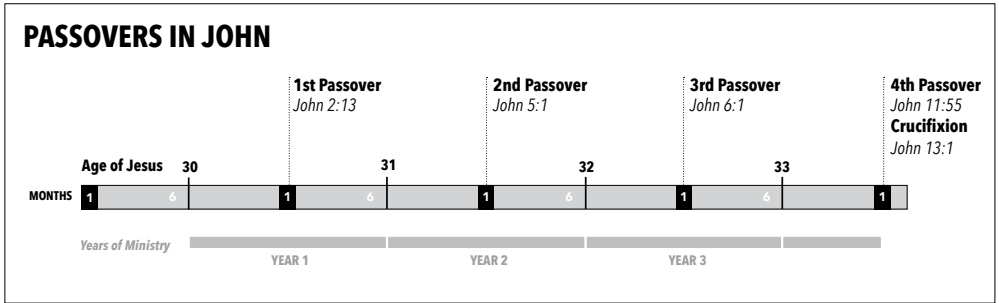
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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix 2 on 70 Weeks Prophecy.

2. 'After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.' Jn 5:1\*
3. 'And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.' Jn 6:4
4. 'And the Jews' Passover was nigh at hand.' Jn 11:55

\*Note: This is presumed to be the Passover given Jesus was killed at the time of Passover (Jn 13:1) and his ministry was 3½ years long (Dan 9:26-27). Four Passovers would require a ministry of 3 years' duration, in addition to the period before the first Passover in Jn 2:13.

The evidence for a 3½ year ministry ending at the time of Passover forms the most conclusive basis upon which to place Christ's birth in the middle of the year, rather than at the end.



## 5. The Census

In Luke 2:1-5, it is recorded that there was a census taken by Cyrenius, who lived 51BC - 21AD. Much work has been done in an attempt to credit or discredit Bible chronology on the basis of this census, and this is briefly discussed in these notes on Lk 2:1-2, p 80. However due to the lack of historical data on the census, it is of little use in pin-pointing exactly the year or time of year in which the Lord was born, and it will therefore be passed over for now.

## Conclusion

Whilst a number of dates have been put forward for the birth of Christ, the consensus is that he was born in the year 5-6 BC, just before the death of Herod the Great in 4BC.

## OUR CALENDAR

We may ask why the Gregorian Calendar, which we commonly use today, does not place the birth of Christ at the year 0, given that "Before Christ" and "Anno Domini" are clearly references to his birth. The answer lies in the fact that these two terms were coined in the year 525AD, but the calendar as we know it was not adopted until the year 1582AD. Along the way there have been a number of corrections to the calendar, leaving room for error in our calculations. The Scythian monk, Dionysius Exiguus, who was asked to produce a Roman calendar in the 6th century AD, omitted to include a year '0' - this is one such error.

## Appendix 2: The 70 Week Prophecy

The Prophet Daniel saw the captivity of Judah into Babylon and also witnessed her return. In his prayer in Dan 9, he pleads for God's forgiveness for the nation. The response to his prayer was the promise of the coming of Messiah, given by the angel Gabriel in the 70 Week Prophecy. This prophecy gave a major signpost of when the Jews should expect their Messiah. A concise explanation is provided below.

### Introduction

Dan 9 was given in the first year of Darius the Mede (v1) just after Cyrus captured the city, 539BC. The nation had been in captivity for nearly seventy yrs (v2) and Dan set about calculating the termination of Jeremiah's 70yr prophecy (Dan 9:2; Jer 25:11; 29:10). Dan likely expected that this would result in the forgiveness of the nation, return from captivity and development of a spiritual relationship with God (Jer 32:36-37, Ezek 36:24-33). But these prophecies are still future.

### The Seventy Weeks Prophecy

Gabriel's response to Daniel's prayer is the 70 Week Prophecy. The return from captivity Daniel prayed for would not be the solution to sin. Desolation (v18) would happen again (v26), as would temple and city destroyed (v17-18, 26), covenant confirmed (v4, 27, sin v5, 24). The 70 Week Prophecy begins with a decree to 'restore and build Jerusalem' (v25).

Four such decrees were given in history:

1. 538BC Ezra 1:1-4 Concerning rebuilding of temple
2. 520BC Ezra 6:1-12 Concerning rebuilding of temple
3. 458BC Ezra 7:11-26 Concerning restoration of temple worship and authority of Ezra
4. 445BC Neh 2:1-9 Concerning Nehemiah's travel and rebuilding of the city

The first two of these terminate in BC times when 490 years is added. The last of these was really a letter rather than a decree, therefore the third decree is intended. In fulfilment of Dan 9:25, Ezra was also given authority to rebuild the city (Ezra 9:9) at this time. The 70 weeks are divided into 7+62+1 weeks v25-27.

- The first 7 weeks (49 years) concerned the rebuilding of Jerusalem in adversity (Neh 2:19, 4:1-3, 6:1-2).
- Christ would come at the beginning of the last week and be killed in the midst of it (a half week or 3½ year ministry v27, AD30), but not for himself v26 (ie. not for anything he did Jn 19:6). He would confirm (Rom 15:8) the new covenant (Heb 8:7-13) for a week, AD26-33. AD33 is the death of Stephen, after which time the gospel spread to the Gentiles (Acts 8:4).
- Then the people of the prince (the Romans, Mt 22:7) would come (v26) and destroy the city (AD70) with a flood (a term used of armies Isa 8:7-8).
- Roman abominations v27 (Mt 24:15) were the cause of the sacrifices ceasing in Dan 8:13. Same here. The overspreading (v27 (mg = wings)) is a reference to the armies (Isa 8:8). The desolation would last until the desolator (mg) is removed at Christ's second coming.

Here is a summary timeline of the fulfilment of the 70-Weeks Prophecy:

458BC	Ezra 7:7	Decree: Return of Ezra, 7th of Artaxerxes
445BC	Neh 2:1	1st return of Neh, 20th of Artaxerxes
433BC	Neh 13:6	2nd return of Neh, 32nd of Artaxerxes
409BC	Dan 9:25	Jerusalem rebuilt, the end of the "troubulous times" (7 weeks)
26 AD	Dan 9:27	Start of last "week" (after 69 weeks, or 483 yrs from Decree)
30 AD	Dan 9:27	Christ killed in midst of last week

**Note:** As noted above, there is no year zero in our calendar. Our calendar goes from 1BC to 1AD without a year zero. Therefore adding 69.5 weeks (486.5 years) to 458BC will give 28.5AD which becomes 29.5AD (~30AD) when we add 1 for the absence of the year zero.