

Luke's Gospel: Chapter 2

The birth of Jesus

The birth of Jesus, the shepherds and the angels (Luke 2 verses 1 to 21)

“A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (verse 1) – the story of Jesus’ birth begins during the reign of one of the most remarkable men of ancient history. For decades, the world of the Mediterranean basin was wracked by wars, brutality and economic instability.

But Caesar Augustus brought three things that turned the tide:

1. He brought peace because he had defeated all his rivals
2. He brought political stability and administrative skill
3. He brought wealth from Egypt to strengthen the Roman economy.

This internal peace and order, the *Pax Romana*, endured, with occasional interruptions, for about 200 years. The ‘registration’ or census wasn’t for statistical purposes: it was to efficiently tax everyone in the Roman Empire.

“And all went to be registered” (verse 3) – one man, in the ivory palaces of Rome, gives a command, and the whole world responds! It may be that up to that point in history, there had never been a man with power over more lives than Caesar Augustus...

- Why did Joseph and Mary make the tough journey to Bethlehem? Why was the inn full?
- The angel brought “good news of great joy” (verse 10). Who was the news for? Why was it good news?
- How did the shepherds respond? What did they do? Did they take their time?
- Why did God announce the birth of Jesus, complete with glorious sound and light, to unimportant shepherds?

As Augustus issued his decree, he thought it was the supreme exercise of his will, yet he was just a tool in God’s hand. God had promised that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5 v 2), and that promise would be fulfilled.

How else do you get a young couple from Nazareth to Bethlehem when they might not be inclined to travel?

The contrast between the angelic glory and the humble Jesus must have seemed extreme. God loves to put his glory in unlikely places so that his glory is more clearly displayed (2 Corinthians 4 v 7).

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Jesus presented at the Temple (Luke 2 verses 22 to 40)

Jesus, as Mary's firstborn son, was consecrated to the Lord, as commanded in Exodus 13 v 2 and 12, with the sacrifice specified for poor people (i.e. a pair of doves or pigeons) in Leviticus 12 v 8.

- What did Jesus' appearance mean to Simeon, and to Anna? What was "the consolation of Israel" (verse 25) and "the redemption of Jerusalem" (verse 38)? According to Simeon's prophecies, what effect would Jesus' coming have on different classes of people (e.g. Gentiles or non-Jews, and the people of Israel)?
- What do you think would really be the cause of people's "falling and rising" (verse 34)? What did Simeon mean by the "sword" that would one day pierce Mary's soul (verse 35)?

We do not know in what capacity Anna was a prophetess. Perhaps it was in the way that she brought forth this specific word about Jesus. This godly woman served God with total devotion. Anna's close walk with God is shown by her love for Jesus, and her desire to tell others about him (verse 38).

The boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2 verses 41 to 52)

Attendance at the major feasts was commanded in Exodus 23 v 17 and Deuteronomy 16 v 16. It was customary for the faithful of Galilee to make these pilgrimages at feast time in large groups. It would not be difficult to lose track of a young boy with such a large group of travellers.

- Mary and Joseph were understandably distressed (verse 48) – how did Jesus respond (verse 49)? Did he treat his parents fairly? What were his priorities?

In that day, there was nothing more natural than a son taking up his father's business. Jesus did follow in Joseph's footsteps as a carpenter (see Mark 6 v 2, 3), but his words here show that he is at least beginning to understand his unique relationship to the Father...