

Bible Study Class
Clayton Presbyterian Church
Lesson 2 Jesus
Christ's Life Prior to His Ministry II

Dear Lord, We seek to learn more about Jesus so that we may follow Him more closely. In Jesus' name Amen.

Read Luke 2:1-20

The Birth of Jesus

The first verse tells us that we are placing this event in history. Augustus was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. His birth name was Octavian. For decades, the whole Mediterranean world was filled with wars and violence. There were years of bloody, brutal fighting for power and money in Rome and the province. Octavian defeated the combined forces of Antony and Queen Cleopatra of Egypt at the battle of Actium. Now Octavian was the sole ruler of the Roman world, and took the title Caesar Augustus. It seemed that the authority of this man changed the chaos of that time in a dramatic way. He brought three things that turned the tide miraculously. First, he brought peace because he had defeated all his rivals. Second, he brought political and administrative skill, perhaps even brilliance. Third, he brought vast sums of money from Egypt to pay the soldiers and to help the Roman economy. This says something important about the world Jesus was born into. It was a world hungry for a savior, and a world that was living in the reign of a political savior - Caesar Augustus - but that wasn't enough.

Q. 1 Caesar Augustus The census or enrollment was to efficiently and effectively tax everyone in the Roman Empire. They went to the city of their forefathers that had been assigned by Joshua when he assigned land to the tribes.

Q 2. The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem (just outside of Jerusalem) is about 80 miles. This was not a short distance in those days. It was a significant undertaking, costing time and money. We often think that Mary was close to delivery when they made this journey, but this may not have been the case at all. Joseph may have been anxious to get her out of Nazareth to avoid the pressure of scandal.

Q 3. Luke tells us that it was while they were in Bethlehem. We are not told that anyone assisted Mary in the birth, though someone may have. One way or another, this young woman was completely separated from all her family and supporting friends, who lived back in Nazareth. There was no room in the inn so he was born in a stable.

Q 4.

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Bethlehem's shepherds were known to care for the temple flock. These men may have also protected and cared for the lambs used in temple sacrifice. An angel of the Lord stood before them: Interrupting this quiet, dark night was the shining presence of an angel and the glory of the Lord. This first angel brought good tidings to these shepherds, who were regarded as social outcasts. They announced the birth of a Savior, which was and is exactly the need of mankind. We don't need another advisor, a reformer, or a committee, but a Savior. You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." You wouldn't usually find a baby in a manger.

Q 5. The shepherds spread the news of Jesus' birth. The combination of the angelic announcement and the sign of a child in a feeding trough inspired the shepherds to tell as many as they could of what they heard and experienced.

Read Luke 2:21-39

Q 6. When he was eight days old, he was circumcised, probably by Joseph. This was done so Jesus might fulfill every aspect of the law as commanded in Leviticus. It also shows that Joseph and Mary were truly devout, obedient parents. They obeyed God's command in Leviticus 12, so Jesus obeyed it also.

Q 7. They went to Jerusalem after 40 days, Mary was considered unclean for this period of time after the birth of a male child. They had to present him as the first born son and redeem him with a sacrifice. Leviticus 12 commands that at the birth of a son a *lamb* be offered as part of the purification and dedication ceremony. Yet it allowed for two birds to be offered if the family could not afford to present a lamb. This all occurs before the visit of the Wise Men.

Q 8. Simeon may have known that there were rumors regarding the coming of the Messiah. The news of John the Baptist's birth and its meaning was widely publicized, and the shepherds who heard the angelic announcement may have kept temple flocks, and they may have reported what happened among the people of the temple. But the Spirit who led him into the temple on that day. Simeon was a man who knew how to be led by the Holy Spirit, both in hearing God's promise to him and being prompted to go to the temple at the right time. Simeon now had the peace of seeing God's promise fulfilled in his life. Sign is literally "a target that people shoot at." Jesus would be the target of great evil.

Q 9. We don't 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

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served God with total devotion. Anna's close walk with God was shown by her love for Jesus, and her desire to tell others about Jesus. Anna was a remarkable woman. As a widow she knew pain and loss, but had not become bitter. As an elderly woman she had not lost hope. Perhaps it was because she was a woman of worship and a woman of prayer.

Read Matthew 2:1-12

Q 10. Bethlehem was the ancestral home of David, the great king of Israel and founder of their royal dynasty; however, it was not a large or significant town. "Bethlehem was quite a little town six miles to the south of Jerusalem. Herod the Great was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects including the temple, begun 20 b.c. were admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates." These travelers are called wise men, which in the ancient Greek is magoi. Misconceptions and legends abound about these wise men. They were not kings but wise men, which means they were astronomers. There were not only three, but probably a great company. They seem to have come not on the birth night, but probably several months later. Being from the East, they would have been among Jews who were exiled from Judah and Israel centuries before. "That many Jews were mixed with this people there is little doubt; and that these eastern *magi*, or philosophers, astrologers, or whatever else they were, might have been *originally* of that class, there is room to believe. One of the commentators states that they may have been like Daniel in their interpretations. We do know that they were interested in astrology.

Q 11. They expected that the leaders and people of Jerusalem would be even more interested than they were. Matthew does not tell us specifically that the star guided them to Jerusalem. Rome recognized him as a vassal king over Judea. The Jews tempered their great hatred of him with admiration for his building projects, such as the magnificent improvements made to the second temple. Herod was constantly on guard against threats to his rule, especially from his own family. He assassinated many family members whom he suspected of disloyalty. His

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being troubled is completely in character. The fact that all Jerusalem was troubled with Herod is significant. This was due either to the fact that the people of Jerusalem rightly feared what sort of paranoid outburst might come from Herod upon hearing of a rival king being born, or because of the size and dignity of this caravan from the East. True to character, Herod attempts to use wise men to find the child that he may kill Him.

Q 12. When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

They traveled this great distance to honor a King; yet there is a little irony in their great effort to honor the King of the Jews. At that time the Jewish people were often despised and dishonored because of their unique customs and beliefs, and also often because of their success and prosperity. They were often thought of as a low, troublesome, and conquered race. It was remarkable that they would trouble themselves so much to honor an infant King, but even more so a King of the Jews.

We notice that Jesus here is called a young Child, likely being between 6 and 18 months old. We also notice that against custom the Child is mentioned before the mother. They presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh: It was common - especially in the East - that one would never appear before royalty or a person of importance without bringing gifts. Considering who these wise men believed the young Child to be, it is not surprising that they gave such lavish gifts. We may say that gold speaks of royalty, incense speaks of divinity, and myrrh speaks of death. Yet it is almost certain that the Magi did this unawares; they simply wanted to honor the King of the Jews. More important than their gifts is the fact that they worshipped Jesus. It must have been a curious sight to see these impressive dignitaries bowing before a young child. Their worship is also manifested in obedience. They are obedient to the heavenly dream and leave without serving as Herod's informants. They left by another route.

We should learn from the wisdom of these wise men.

- They were not satisfied with looking at the star and admiring it; they did something about the star, and set out and followed it.
- They persevered in their search and in following after the star.
- They were not discouraged in the search by clergy and doubtful religious leaders.
- They rejoiced at the star.
- When they arrived at the destination the star led them to, they entered in.

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- When they entered in, they worshipped.
- They sensed an urgency to worship Him *now* and not wait until later.
- When they worshipped, it was to give something - not empty-handed adoration.

Read Matthew 2:13-23

Q 13. The command was urgent, and came right when the wise men had departed. It would not have sounded completely strange to Joseph that they should find refuge in Egypt. There was a large Jewish community as many as a million in Egypt. It wasn't strange that the Holy Spirit would guide Joseph to take the family there. Joseph's rapid and complete obedience is impressive. It is unlikely that Joseph ever imagined such events when he first was betrothed to Mary of Nazareth. Poole says, "We are not told into what part of Egypt Joseph went, nor how long he stayed there: some say six or seven years; others but three or four months."

Q 14. In the process, another prophecy was fulfilled. At first glance, we might wonder how this prophecy from Hosea 11:1 is fulfilled in Jesus. But Matthew makes it clear that even as Israel as a nation came out from Egypt, so would the Son of God.

Hosea 11:1 1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Especially in his last years Herod was cruel and suspicious. When he knew that his death was approaching, Herod had many Jewish leaders of Jerusalem arrested on false charges. He ordered that as soon as he died, they should all be killed - he knew well no one would mourn his own death, so he was determined that some tears be shed when he died. He even had members of his own family murdered so that there would be grief.

Q 15. God spoke to Joseph again in a dream, through an angel of the Lord. We also notice Joseph's quick obedience.

Q 16. Again receiving guidance by a divine dream, Joseph settled outside of the much more religious region of Jerusalem and Judea, and into the populous region of Galilee, which had a much more significant Gentile population than Judea or Jerusalem. Joseph had good reason to be cautious regarding Archelaus. This son of Herod proved to be such an incompetent and violent ruler that, at the plea of the Jews of Judea, the Romans deposed him for misrule and replaced him with a governor appointed by Rome in A.D. 6.

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Read Luke 2:40-52

Q 17. We know little of Jesus' life from the time He was one month old to the time when He was twelve, except for the general statement in Luke 2:40. We may be curious about the details of His childhood, but there isn't anything we need to know except what we are told by the Holy Spirit in the Word. Attendance at the major feasts was commanded in Exodus 23:17 and Deuteronomy 16:16. It was customary for the faithful of Galilee to make these pilgrimages at feast time in large groups. The requirement was for men but the High Priest Hiliel had suggested that women accompany the men.

Q 18. For three days, a twelve year-old Jesus discussed God's Word and astonished His listeners with His understanding and answers. When we realize the impressive intellectual insight and analysis of Jewish Rabbis, this is impressive. This is something like a middle-school child discussing physics with a rocket scientist. Jesus did have a unique advantage, having a special relationship with the writer of God's Word. I think that it deserves comment as to how Jews counted days. Any part of a day was counted so if they discovered that he wasn't with friends in the evening, that would be the first day. They may have not started back to Jerusalem until the next morning, they searched that day and may have found Jesus the following morning, making three days. Remember that Jesus hadn't attended Rabbi school.

Q 19. His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." 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, but His words here show that He was at least beginning to understand His unique relationship to His Father. These first recorded words of Jesus are significant. The surprise implied by these words of Jesus means that He knew that Mary and Joseph did know of His special relationship with God His Father. It means that it must have been an item of discussion and perhaps instruction in the upbringing of Jesus in their home. Jesus' statement told them something about His identity as a unique Son of God the Father, though they did not understand it. In Judaism of that day, a boy began to learn his father's trade at about 12 years of age. Jesus fulfilled this by instructing the teachers in the temple.

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Q 20. Growing up in Nazareth, Jesus would mature in boyhood and then in His young adulthood. He would fulfill the responsibilities expected of an eldest son; and then at some time Joseph disappeared from the scene and Jesus became the "man of the family." He worked His trade, supported His family, loved His God, and proved Himself utterly faithful in a thousand small things before He formally entered His appointed ministry. One writer says that we must remember that Jesus spent about 9/10ths of his life in Nazerath. The development described first in Luke 2:40 continued. Not only did He become bigger physically He also became a bigger person. He grew in a close, personal relationship with His heavenly Father, and He also grew in His human friendships and relationships.

Lord, Help us to grow in wisdom, we have our statue, but we need Your favor and the favor of our neighbors. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Luke 2:1-20	Matthew 2:1-12
Luke 2:21-39	Matthew 2:13-23
Luke 2:40-52	

Next Sunday: Matthew 3:17-4:11, Mark 1:1-13, Luke 3-1-22, 4:1-13 and John 1:19-34