

Focus #1: The Nativity and Childhood

I. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. . ."

(The first advent of Jesus: His birth, infancy, and boyhood)

A. The birth of the forerunner, John the Baptist

Note: The ministry of a divinely appointed forerunner, to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, had been clearly prophesied in the OT (Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1; 4:5,6), and at the time of Jesus' incarnation the Jewish people eagerly awaited the appearance of this herald.

1. The announcement of the birth of John (Luke 1:5-25) #1

a. Concerning the parents of John (Luke 1:5-7)

- John was born in the days of Herod

"Herod was not only an Idumean in race and a Jew in religion, but he was a heathen in practice and a monster in character. During his administration as king he evidenced himself to be exceedingly crafty, jealous, cruel, and revengeful. He exercised his kingly power with the disposition of a very despot." --Unger, *Bible Dictionary*

- John's father, Zacharias, was a priest

1) All the sons of the tribe of Levi were to be workers in the temple, but only the sons of Aaron {family} were to function as priests, ministering in the Levitical rituals.

2) The historic lineage of the priestly family:

3) From Aaron's 2 surviving sons had come 24 families; David distributed the temple duties among these families and when Israel returned from Babylon, the priests divided themselves into orders alternating in performing the priestly office at Jerusalem, functioning in that capacity approximately twice a year. The balance of the year, they lived in locations scattered around the land.

- The character of the parents of John (Luke 1:6) {Notice both were righteous}

"Such a household as that of Zacharias and Elizabeth would have all that was beautiful in the religion of the time, devotion towards God; a home of affection and purity; reverence towards all that was sacred in things divine and human; ungrudging, self denying, loving charity to the poor; the tenderest regard for the feelings of others, so as not to raise a blush, nor to wound their hearts; above all, intense faith and hope in the higher and better future of Israel." --Edersheim, I:136

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- The reproach of John's parents--they were childless (Luke 1:7) they were aged (Luke 1:7)
- b. *The angelic announcement to Zacharias* (Luke 1 :8-17)
 - Zacharias was fulfilling his duties as a priest, pouring the oblation over the altar of incense in the holy place.
 - An angel appeared and announced the birth of a son to Zacharias and Elizabeth; because of his incredulity, Zacharias was rebuked and struck dumb until the birth of his child.
 - Notice the substance of the angel's announcement concerning the character and work of the promised son (Luke 1: 15-17)

He was to be a life-time Nazarite (Luke 1 :15)

The Nazarite Vow amounted to: {Numbers 6:1-21}

1-he shall abstain from wine and strong drink. (Numbers 6:2-4)

2-no razor shall pass over his head. (Numbers 6:5)

3-he should not come into contact with the dead. (cf. Numbers 6:6-8)

Other Lifetime Nazarites mentioned in Scripture:

1-Samson: {Judges 16:17}

2-Samuel: (I Samuel 1:11)

He was to turn many Israelites to God (1: 16) {A deliberate reference to Malachi 4:6}

He was the fulfillment of the promise made by Malachi re: the forerunner of Messiah (1: 17) {A clear reference to Malachi 4:5}

2. The birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-80) #2

a. *The birth results in great rejoicing among Elizabeth and her friends* 1:57-58.

b. *The naming of the child* 1:59-66.

c. *Zacharias' song of praise* 1:67-79,--called: "The Benedictus".

d. *The maturing years of John are surveyed only briefly* 1:80.

(he lived in deserted places specifically in the wilderness by the Dead Sea)

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B. Angelic announcements of the Messiah's coming

1. The announcement to Mary (Luke 1:26-56) #3

a. The Time- The sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist.

b. The Place- Nazareth of Galilee {located on a ridge which overlooked the valley of Jezreel}.

- A busy town southwest of the Sea of Galilee.
- One of the most despised towns in Israel, in the minds of the Judeans, for two reasons:
 - 1) Galilee was generally held in contempt by Judeans: -Galileans were more working class while Judeans were the elite. -It was easier to make a living in Galilee.
 - 2) The Romans garrisoned troops just outside of Nazareth because it overlooked the highway.

c. Concerning Mary:

- Her age and social status-- likely in early teens (14-16); very poor as noted by her sacrifice of 2 turtledoves
- She was betrothed (KJV, espoused, NASB, engaged) to Joseph.
 - * Note: They were legally married. There was no courtship like we know it today and marriages were arranged by the parents. As of the Betrothal ceremony, they were legally considered man and wife. This betrothal could last up to a year and was used for the husband to prepare a home and the wife to prepare her wedding garments.

2. The announcement to Joseph (Mt 1:18-25) #4

a. The dilemma faced by Joseph (1:18,19)

b. The dream of Joseph (Mt 1:20,21)

- "thou son of David... "
- "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit..."
- "thou shalt call His name Jesus..."
- Joseph is reassured by an appeal to Old Testament prophecy (Mt 1:22,23)

c. The obedience of Joseph (1:24,25)

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C. The genealogies of Jesus (Mt 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-28) #5

1. The PURPOSE of these genealogies--to connect Jesus by LEGAL and PHYSICAL descent with three ideas of Old Testament promise, and thus validate His claim to be the promised Messiah.

Those three ideas of OT promise:

- Messiah must be the SEED OF WOMAN--(Genesis 3:15)
- Messiah must be the SEED OF ABRAHAM--(Genesis 12:1-3)
- Messiah must be the SEED OF DAVID-- (2 Samuel 7)

2. The DISTINCTION between the two genealogies

a. MATTHEW'S Genealogy--the legal lineage of Jesus, establishing His right to the throne of David

- Jesus was NOT the physical son of Joseph, but when Joseph married Mary, Jesus became the legal son of Joseph, and thus the possessor of all that belonged to Joseph's offspring
- The word "begat" in this genealogy does not necessarily signifies the 1st generation offspring; it has the connotation "became the ancestor of...", so that it can signify more than one generation.

b. LUKE'S Genealogy--the physical lineage of Jesus, establishing His relationship to the house of David

Note: concerning Luke 3:23--is this the line of Joseph or of Mary?

3. Taken together: these genealogies prove Jesus' right to be the Messiah

D. The parents' journey to Bethlehem: the nativity of the God-man (Luke 2 :1-7) #6

1. Why did Joseph take Mary to Bethlehem? Because they were of the house of David.

2. How long was this Journey? About three days and 90 miles.

3. What was the purpose of the enrollment described in Luke 2:1-3? Tax purposes for the Roman Government.

E. The worship of the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20) #7

"The white shining cloud of intolerable brightness, known among the Jews as the Shechinah, the visible token of the presence of the Eternal, in the bush, in the pillar of fire and cloud which guided the desert-wanderings, in the tabernacle and in the temple. It shone around the Redeemer on the Mount of transfiguration. It robed him when risen, He appeared to the Pharisee Saul outside Damascus. The occasional presence of this visible glory was exceedingly precious to the chosen people. The terror felt by the shepherds was the natural

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awe ever felt by man when brought into visible communion with the dwellers in the so-called spirit world." --*Pulpit*

F. Note: Comments on Chronology and the Date of Christ's Birth:

- Early Christians were more concerned with the fact of Christ's birth than the date. In 525AD Pope John I asked a monk Dionysius to prepare a standard calendar for the western church. Because the calendar of the time was based off the reign of Diocletian a persecutor of the church.
- The commencement of the Christian Era was 1/01/754A.U.C. from the foundation of the city of Rome. It was thought that Christ's birth was on 12/25 immediately preceding 754 A.U.C. So 754A.U.C. became 1 A.D. in Dionysius' calendar.
- Later research has revealed that Herod's death occurred in the year 750 A.U.C. According to Matthew, Christ was born prior to Herod's death.
- The Year of Christ's Birth: Luke 2:1 says that Christ was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus, who reigned from 3/15/44 BC to 8/19/14 AD.
- Latest Limiting Point: Matthew 2:1 and Luke 1:5 indicate that Christ was indeed born before Herod's death. Herod reigned for 34 years from the time of his possession of the land in 37 BC. According to Josephus a Jewish Historian during New Testament times, an eclipse of the moon occurred just prior to Herod's death. This is the only eclipse ever mentioned by Josephus. According to astronomical research, this eclipse either occurred on March 12th or 13th of 4 BC. After Herod's death was the celebration of Passover, which began on April 11th of 4 BC. So Herod would have died after March 12th or 13th but prior to April 11th. Since Herod was in his 34th year of reign and according to the historical record that 34th year began on March 29th of 4 BC, then he likely died between March 29th and April 11th of 4 BC. This means that Christ was born no later than March/April of 4 BC.
- Earliest Limiting Point: Regarding Luke 2:2, Quirinius was governor of Syria from 3-2 BC and from 6-7 AD. A well known census took place in 6 AD as mentioned in Acts 5:37. There exists some confusion as to how the Greek should be translated in Luke 2:2. Harold Hoehner comes to the conclusion that it is best to translate this verse. "This census took place before Quirinius was governor... Thus Hoehner comes to the conclusion that the census was likely around 6-4 BC. For other Chronological considerations see Hoehner's Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ.
- The Best Conclusion Regarding the Date of Christ's Birth: Sometime around the winter of 5/4 BC.

G. The circumcision of Jesus (Luke 2:21) #8

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H. Presentation of the Child in the Temple; homage paid by Anna and Simeon (Luke 2:22-39) #9

1. The ritual of purification and redemption (2:22-24)
2. The encounter with Simeon (2:25-35)
3. The encounter with Anna (2:36-39)

I. The visit of the wise-men (Matthew 2:1-12) #10

1. There are a number of problems here to wit:

a. Who were these "wise men"? They were Magi, not astrologers, but counselors to a king like Daniel was. They were likely powerful Gentiles of a kingly court.

b. From what country had they come? They were from the East, likely from Mesopotamia, the region of Babylon.

c. How many "wise men" were there? There were probably many of them. There were likely more than 3 as they usually traveled in a great host. The number 3 is associated with the number of gifts.

d. When did they come to Bethlehem? They came to Bethlehem before Herod's death, while Mary and Joseph were still in Bethlehem. The chronology suggests that it was while Jesus was still a baby. It was possibly around February or March of 4 BC.

e. How did they know that a king had been born? They had likely read the Messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17 and would have understood it from Daniel's past influence in the region

f. What was the star that had alerted and then guided them? Cf. J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words & Works of Jesus Christ*, pp. 66-67.

J. The family's flight to Egypt; the children of Bethlehem slaughtered; the family returns to settle in Nazareth (Matthew 2:13-23) #11

1. Warned by God in a dream, Joseph flees with the family to Egypt (2:13-15)
2. Herod devises another, more sinister scheme to destroy this "rival" king (Mt 2: 16-18)
3. At Herod's death, Joseph is instructed to return; he settles in Galilee, in the city of Nazareth (2:19-23)

K. Jesus' childhood in Nazareth (Mathew 2:23; Luke 2:39, 40) #12

1. These are called "the silent years," because there is no mention of any events during these years except Luke 2:41-52, the visit to the Temple at the age of 12.

"But how different is the boy Christ of the New Testament Apocrypha! He is mischievous, petulant, forward, revengeful. Some of the marvels told of Him are simply aimless and puerile--as when He

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carries split water in His hand to make them fly; or throws all the cloths into the dyer's vat, and then draws them out each stained the requisite color. But some are, on the contrary, simply distasteful and inconsiderate, as when He vexes and shames and silences those who wish to teach Him; or rebukes Joseph; or turns His playmates into kids, and others are simply cruel and blasphemous, as when He strikes dead with a curse the boys who offend or run against Him until at last there is a storm of popular indignation, and Mary is afraid to let Him leave the house." --Farrar

- He had a normal childhood with the exception of being sinless.
- He was NOT running around performing miracles.
- His birth was Judean but His growth was Galilean.

2. The land of Jesus' youth--Galilee:

- It was located south and west of the Sea of Galilee in very fertile yet thickly populated land.
- The people of Galilee were intensely patriotic, more liberal in spirit than the Judeans to the south.

3. The home life of Jesus

- The earthly family of Jesus
 - Joseph--hard working; of noble character and disposition; provided a comfortable life for his family, though they were certainly poor by the standards of the community
 - Mary--very godly, humble, with a loving character and disposition; a student of the Scriptures; a fond and sensitive mother
 - Jesus' brothers and sisters --four (half-)brothers (Luke 2:7) --several (half-)sisters (Mt 13 :SS,56) --Jesus' brothers rejected Him until after His resurrection
- His boyhood: happy, comfortable, busy; normal, but unique
- Jesus' education
 - The importance of education among the Jews (
 - R. Salome: "A father had as well bury his son as neglect his instruction."
 - Josephus: "Our ground is good, and we work it to the utmost; but our chief ambition is for the nurture of our children."
 - this was in obedience to the injunction of Deuteronomy 6:4-6 2d.

Early education in the home --the education of a Jewish lad began very young, at the knee of his mother

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--3 chief means of teaching in the home:

- 1) careful, personal instruction
- 2) ornaments/decoration of the home
- 3) feast seasons

"...the festive illumination of a house during a week in midwinter in commemoration of the Dedication of the Temple by Judas the Maccabee; the feast of Purim, in celebration of the deliverance through Esther, the feast of the Passover, setting forth the visit of the Death Angel and Israel's going out from Egypt; followed by the Feast of the Day of Atonement and the feast of Tabernacles, with its strange leafy booth; all were calculated to impress the childish mind." (Shepherd, 49)

- At the age of 5 or 6, Jesus would have begun his formal training at the "house of the book"
- Jesus was also trained in a trade that of the carpenter

4. The end of Jesus' childhood; years at Nazareth (Luke 2:41-52) #13

a. The significance of this event in the life of Jesus

- At about the age of 12 a Jewish boy becomes a "son of the law" and is admitted to the privileges of adulthood in the religion and society of Israel.
- One very important privilege vouchsafed him at this time:

"It was probably AD 8 that Jesus, twelve years old the previous summer, joined with Joseph and Mary the train of pilgrims travelling southward to Jerusalem to keep that sacred feast which year by year in the month of April was celebrated in commemoration of Israel's deliverance from her bondage in Egypt... He had longed for the day when He should go thither and see it with his own eyes; and now at length his desire is fulfilled. The week of sacred solemnity was like a wondrous dream to the Holy Child. He would feast His eyes on impressive pageant and drink in all that He heard." (Smith, 22)

Edersheim describes the approach to the temple in Jesus' day:

"As the pilgrim ascended the Mount, crested by that symmetrically proportioned building which could hold within its gigantic girdle not fewer not fewer than 210,000 people his wonder might well increase at every step. The mount itself seemed like an island, abruptly rising out of deep valleys, surrounded by a sea of walls, palaces, streets, and houses, and crowned by a mass of snowy marble and glittering gold, rising terrace upon terrace. Altogether it measured a square of about 1000 feet..."

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b. Jesus' interview with the Rabbis

- Jesus is left behind in the city
- His parents return to find Him
- Jesus communes with the rabbis

"It was not strange that Jesus should ask questions; but it was extraordinary that His questions should show such insight as to attract the special attention of the learned doctors; and that he should manifest such facility in answering the questions which were put to Him. Zeal for knowledge was strong in Jesus. He had made good use of the years of his childhood and stored up much knowledge of the Old Testament in a retentive memory." (Shepherd, 53)

Mary rebukes her child

c. Jesus returns with His parents to Nazareth, and there lives in quiet seclusion and subjection for some 20 years.