

Study Two: Luke 2

This section is building up to the full arrival of Jesus who although is born in v.7 is yet to begin his ministry. The chapter continues to establish who this baby is; witnesses proclaim that this baby is very different from any other that has been born. The first witnesses are the angels (2:10-14) then the shepherds (2:17) Simeon (2:28-35) and finally Anna (2:38). Jesus himself reveals something about his identity by revealing his priorities as soon as he came of age (2:41-52). Great claims are made about Jesus but will his life stand up to the test?

Background Bits

Luke is careful to record the historical moment of Jesus' birth. Caesar Augustus reigned from 27 B.C. until A.D. 14. The date of the census is contested as historical records show that Quirinius had a census in 6AD after Herod had died (Matt 2:1). The most likely explanation is that a census took place before Quirinius was governor and Luke is referring to an earlier census. Indeed the translation of the Greek word 'prote' can be understood as 'former' or 'prior' which would mean that v.2 reads as 'this census was *before* that made when Quirinius was governor'. Luke's intention was to provide a clear record which he had carefully researched so that Theophilus could be certain about the things he had been taught. Luke placed this event into the known history of his day because he wanted to reinforce the accounts of his eyewitnesses.

Old Testament Language and ideas

• *The Town of David*

God was working in history so that the circumstances of Jesus' birth fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies. His birth in the town of David reveals that he is the one that Micah the prophet foretold (Micah 5:2). Bethlehem was the hometown of King David now it is the birthplace of Jesus 'one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old'.

• *Saviour*

This is the title given to Israel's deliverer (Judges 3:9) but more frequently used to describe God himself (Isaiah 12:2, 45:21). The angel declares that the child that Zechariah spoke of has been born. This child is the rescuing king (Luke 1:68-69).

• *Christ the Lord*

Christ is the Greek word, which means the same as messiah in Hebrew, which means 'anointed one'. The kings were anointed as a mark of their kingship (1 Sam 16:8-13); it was also used in priestly (Lev 4:3,5) and prophetic contexts (1 Kings 19:16). This title certainly refers to Jesus as the chosen Davidic king but it may also hint at his priestly and prophetic role. This figure was expected by Israel but the angel combines two titles 'Christ the Lord' which appears nowhere else in the New Testament. The word 'kyrios'- Lord most often refers to God himself (Luke 1:6, 9, 11, 15 etc.) although it has already been used for Jesus (Luke 1:43).

• *Jesus*

Jesus means Yahweh saves it is a derivative of Joshua (Yeshua/Yehoshua) in Hebrew. It is God's chosen name for the messiah. Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land that they were redeemed for. Jesus is the one came to save not only Israel but gentiles too (Luke 1:69, 2:30-32, 2:38).

•*Consolation of Israel*

The consolation of Israel is an idea found in the prophets but particularly in Isaiah. Isaiah 40 is a key chapter, which draws together many of the ideas that Luke has suggested, have been fulfilled. Simeon has been waiting for this day. The promise to Israel that God will come and rescue them, that Israel's sin will be dealt with.

•*A light for revelation to the gentiles*

Although Israel was waiting in eager expectation for their messiah the promise had always been that God's chosen servant would be a blessing for the gentiles (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 60:3). The baby presented in the temple has significance for the whole world, every people group; there is no one that Jesus has not come for.

•*Glory for Israel*

The arrival of the messiah brought glory to Israel (Isaiah 60:1-2). The imagery is that of a light arriving in the darkness. God was dwelling with his people, which was God's means of revealing himself to the whole world (John 1:14)

•*Redemption*

This is a huge concept in the Old Testament. It is used first to describe the way in which God rescues Israel from Egypt for the Promised Land in the first Exodus (Exodus 6:6). It is repeated in the prophets as a promise of a type of a second Exodus but this promise is one that will rescue Israel from sin (Isaiah 35, 43, 44:22-23). This is exactly what Zechariah rejoiced in – a rescue from enemies that enabled people to serve God with a knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sin (Luke 1:67-79).

Difficult bits

Why do the angels announce the news to Shepherds?

Luke does not tell us much about the Shepherds except that they were near by so it is not for us to make guesses about them. Luke repeatedly returns to highlight the geography surrounding Jesus' birth; the shepherds were near because it is sheep country (2:8). This is the countryside where David generations earlier had also tended his sheep. The prophecy in Micah 5.2 tells of another king that will come born in Bethlehem who will also be a shepherd (Micah 5:4).

Is Jesus being rebellious as a child?

Culturally we struggle with the idea that Jesus seems to have gone missing for three days which has implications on both Mary and Joseph as parents and Jesus as a son. However neither of these things seems to be of major concern to Luke. This episode is a linking story between the birth narrative and Jesus adult life and it is important because in it Jesus makes an amazing statement calling the living God 'my Father'. We take this statement for granted but this is a relationship that had not been conceived of or expressed before. Jesus is revealing the fact that he was fully aware of his mission and his real identity. Jesus is voicing personally all that had been told about him and is totally submitted to God the Father. He is described as being obedient to his parents so they did not view this event as an episode of rebellion. This story is here to confront us with the raw extreme of Jesus' claims – is this child an arrogant upstart or the royal son?

Reading this with a seeker

Reading this chapter with a seeker is a chance to present some the amazing claims about Jesus. He came as Saviour, Messiah and Lord. Jesus is given three titles that point to what he will do in the future. He was to become a rescuer who was a prophet, priest and king. He did not just come as a Jewish Messiah but for the whole world. How we respond to Jesus is important. There are those that will speak against him and others that will honour him. At this point in the story Mary is among those that do not fully understand - she has a long journey to go on. The Shepherds, Simeon and Anna are confident about who this baby is and are prepared to testify to all that they have seen.

Do we believe that this baby/boy is the one of whom the Old Testament speaks or do we need to see how he lived his life and examine these claims more closely?

We need to pray that those who read this book will treasure up these statements and God will reveal the truth about Jesus as they seek to know him through reading Luke's gospel. It is God who brings understanding (Luke 24:31-32, 45).