

Luke 2

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 18 March 2013 10:17

The account of the birth of Christ is so well known – and yet I love to read it, because of its truth, simplicity and power. The book of Luke is not written as a devotional piece, but as historical narrative, something that actually happened. Yet, devotion is what it brings about. As usual, Luke is both concise and accurate. For those who like historical narrative, there is plenty here to enjoy and, as I always tell others – look out for tiny clues; clues that add information to our store of knowledge about the time Christ lived on earth, and which bring the account to life. Look, too, for the ‘strands’ of God’s plan that bring everything together into the space of just 33 years...

Verses 1-7

1.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2.

([And] this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3.

And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

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:)

5.

To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

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7.

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.

“in those days” refers to the time of Mary’s pregnancy. The Roman ruler, Caesar Augustus, sent a proclamation to his governors, to tax everyone who was under Roman rule. The taxation was of great magnitude, and certainly not confined to Israel and the Jews. It was designed to swell the coffers of Rome, and was demanded of every country Rome had annexed: Britain, Gaul, Spain, Italy, Thrace, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Armenia, Syria, Israel, Egypt, North Africa, and more. The main aim was to list every person who lived in those countries for future taxation... an event that dwarfs modern day totalitarianism!

In every country, people were forced to go back to the region and town of their ancestors. Thus, millions migrated temporarily to their homelands and clans, where specially appointed tax gatherers took their money and documented their clans and places of habitation; it was the most thorough census of any age.

Augustus was the very first Roman emperor (63 BC to 14 AD) and ruled from 27 BC until he died in 14 AD, appointed after Julius Caesar, his great-uncle, was assassinated. Augustus, together with Mark Antony and Marcus Lepidus, formed a ‘Triumvirate’, dividing up Roman lands between themselves, becoming military dictators.

But, the tripartite rule of Rome’s territories was torn apart when Lepidus was stripped of all honours and Antony committed suicide after Augustus beat him (and Cleopatra) in battle in 31 BC. (From 44 BC to 27 BC, Augustus was known as Octavian and called himself ‘son of the divine’ – referring to Julius Caesar. He added various titles to himself, and finally adopted the name ‘Augustus’ in 27 BC).

This left Augustus free to form a pretend ‘free Republic’, ruled in a fashion he himself had devised, making it a totalitarian regime ruled by a military dictator. It is fascinating to note that president Obama of the USA is currently fashioning a similar rule for himself, with the same powers of supreme military commander, tribune, and censor. These are the same attributes found in Stalin and Hitler.

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In them we therefore see modern twists to the ancient rule of Augustus, a sole ruler with no regard for the people or even those he elected to rule under him. Though he did not call himself 'emperor', Augustus did elect to have himself called "Princeps Civitas" or 'First Citizen'... note how USA wives of presidents are often called by this ancient title, as 'First Ladies'! It is the same kind of arrogance.

Soon after Augustus created his dictatorship, there was a period of relative peace. Not the peace of harmony but the 'peace' brought about by fear of punishment – another characteristic of today's Western totalitarian rules. Augustus deposed Herod Archelaus and added Judea to the province of Syria and both were ruled by a 'high prefect' from the same equestrian class as Augustus. He also married off his son to the daughter of Agrippa, which is why Agrippa had such a strong interest in keeping his powers under Rome, becoming himself a sub-dictator.

Augustine certainly had favourites, and was a literary man, much admired by historians, but he was also brutal. An historian contemporary with Augustus (Tacitus) wrote that the emperor had reduced the Roman Republic to slavery. By the time of the taxation of Israel, Rome had brought in annual taxation throughout its acquired lands. Part of the hatred for tax collectors displayed in scripture was caused by the habit of private tax officers taking more taxes than was required, and bringing in new taxes when they felt like it, all approved by Rome.

By the time of Jesus' birth, this system was replaced by salaried chief tax officers appointed by Roman officials. But, even this 'official' status did not stop theft on a grand scale. In a sense they were the forerunners of today's greedy and unscrupulous MPs and governments.

In Jesus' time, tax collectors, usually Jews ('publicans'; They worked under Chief Publicans, or 'tax farmers'), could approach any man in the street and tax him for what he was carrying. These men were much hated because they taxed fellow Jews and worked for the foreigners in Rome. Yet, the same taxes were used to build roads, and provide religious freedoms and self-governance. Each Jew had to pay 1% of his income to Rome. There were also other taxes, for crops grown, import and export, taxes on sales, property, 'emergencies', and so on.

All this was governed by a single Roman official, the 'censor', who sold the rights to tax others to the highest bidders, who were, as one might expect, unscrupulous and scandalous. These chief tax gatherers or 'farmers' employed rank-and-file local tax gatherers, who regularly

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handed-over taxes they had collected, keeping back any extra amounts they had extorted, for themselves. Though they were Jews, for this reason they were called 'Gentiles' and considered to be no better than prostitutes and the most vile of sinners.

It is with this background that we must view the census active at the time of Jesus' birth and the hatred with which Jews regarded the new taxation and information-gathering by Rome. At that time, Cyrenius/Quirinius was the governor of Syria (and therefore also of Israel at this time), and friend of Augustus. He took over from the banished Herod Archelaus in 6 AD, and was thus commanded to assess Judea for future tax purposes. This is why the census of names was required.

But, censuses were forbidden by Jewish law; only the intervention of the High Priest, Joazar, prevented wide scale revolt. Even so, an underground movement of Zealots was formed, and revolts became commonplace. This coincided with a prophecy of Jacob, that the sceptre would depart from Judah. God ensured that the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, documented in a Roman ledger, proved He was of the line of David.

Luke's account puts the birth of Christ at about 6-7 AD, whereas Matthew puts it at about 4 BC, ten years before this census. For this reason some suggest Luke's account is wrong. Whatever the reason for this difference (outside the scope of this study), Luke cannot be wrong! Different, but not wrong, for we are looking at scripture!

For example, it is not unreasonable to assume that the governor in Luke's account was elected for a second term – hence his mention by Luke. The main point is that scripture is cohesive and accurate; unsaved men have a tendency to look for contradictions, while saved men accept everything in scripture to be 100% accurate, with no contradictions... deep study usually reveals an answer.

Thus it was that Joseph and his intended wife, Mary, travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, to be in the city of David. Mary was, at that time, very close to giving birth. While they were there, she gave birth to her first child, Jesus, placing him in a manger or cattle feeding trough, because the inn had no rooms.

She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, or a long length of cloth or bandages. This was also

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known as 'podding' and had a practical use – to soak up blood, fluids, etc., after the birth. This had ritual-cleanliness significance, for the mother's blood was ceremonially unclean at that time. Swaddling also prevented the infant from rolling over and harming itself.

Verses 8-12

1.

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

2.

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.

3.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

4.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

5.

And this [shall be] a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

At the time of the birth, shepherds were watching their flock at night in the hills around Bethlehem. Immediately, this tells us that the birth was NOT in winter, for shepherds would not be able to withstand the intense cold of winter. Sheep were, then, allowed to graze freely in either autumn or spring, and Jesus was therefore born in one of these seasons, not in December.

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While watching the sheep, the shepherds were terrified by the sudden appearance of an angel from God. Though dark, the place where the shepherds sat was brightly lit by God's divine glory. The angel told them not to be afraid, because he brought amazing news: καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ ἄγγελος, μὴ φοβεῖσθε, ἰδοὺ γὰρ εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν χαρὰν μεγάλην ἣτις ἔσται παντὶ τῷ λαῷ.

These are probably some of the most famous words in the world! The angel told them he brought "good tidings of great joy". In direct Greek – the angel was "well messagizing" or "bringing a well message" to "all the people".

If we link verse 10 to verse 14, there is much confusion over the translation! Indeed, there is continual debate over their meanings. Does "all people" and "good will toward men" ONLY apply to 'men of good will', or, as some say: 'peace to men if His gracious will', or, 'men in whom he is well pleased'?

I can put it this way: if the angelic message is to 'all men' regardless of who they are, then it simply means that though most men will go to hell because they are both unelected and unsaved, they will all, nevertheless, receive news that is glorious. As all glory is due to God, and not to men, this is an adequate logic.

But, if the message really is only to 'men of good will', it means they have good will because they believe the Lord and so are blessed by the coming of Christ. Either way the message is one pointing to God's glory, whether or not those who hear it believe, or are saved!

Of course, the coming of the Messiah would not bring joy to 'all' men, just as the Gospel and salvation do not bring joy to 'all' men. To the majority, Christ would be a stumblingblock; to the few, He would be their Saviour. But, as we note in texts such as John 3:16, Christ came to the 'world', meaning 'those who are elect' and NOT 'all' men, where the word 'all' is general and not literally 'all', as the context proves.

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The angel told the shepherds that Christ was born that very day in Bethlehem. The angel specifically used words that defined the Christ as God Himself, the promised Messiah. More than that, the angel told them they could find him in a feeding trough, wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Thus, they knew the baby was born in a cattle stall or cellar – a cave or rough shed – or even a lower room in a clan house, and was newly born. All they had to do was find a stall that probably belonged to a family member, though there were many caves around the village. (Note: At that time Bethlehem is said to have had about 2000-3000 inhabitants). Of course, it might also have been the case that God directed them Himself.

It is possible that Mary had been in the village for several weeks before giving birth. And some scholars claim Joseph had gone to his clan home, to be with relatives, but that giving birth in the usual guest room would be inappropriate, so Mary gave birth in a cellar-type room below the house. We cannot be sure, but it does not alter the event that occurred.

Verses 13-20

1.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

2.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

3.

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.

4.

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

5.

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And when they had seen [it], they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

6.

And all they that heard [it] wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

7.

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered [them] in her heart.

8.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

When the angel finished his message, the shepherds heard a mighty sound of many angels praising God, probably using the spoken word rather than singing. Evidently, others in the area could not have heard them, for such a phenomenon would have rocked the population with wonder. The shepherds, then, heard the angels in the same way as Paul heard Christ, when his companions did not.

The angels proclaimed glory to God in Heaven, the blessing of the Messiah bringing peace with God and, as a consequence, good will to men. We can say that as peace with God is only compatible with being saved, that the 'good will' is really towards those who have such peace because they are elect and saved. This is most reasonable in light of the whole of scripture, and the New Testament teaching on salvation and who is given peace.

The angels left the men on their hillside, and the brilliant light disappeared. The shepherds were still struck with awe, and they decided to leave their sheep to find the baby in the manger. NO shepherd left his sheep alone except for very good reason! But, they had been visited by an angel of God, and they had to find the Christ! They made their way into the village, and found Mary and Joseph in the cattle stall/lower room.

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The shepherds were amazed to find the Messiah, and soon were knocking on doors, telling everyone what had happened and Who they had seen. And so it was that the whole of Bethlehem wondered at the full meaning of it.

Mary simply kept quiet, pondering on everything that had happened to her, while the shepherds returned to their flocks, praising God and excitedly going over and over their night's divine events. Are WE excited by it? We should be! Does this account only sound like a 'story' to you? Why should it sound that way, when it is an historical account of an actual event? Lose sight of this and you will lose sight of your faith!

Verses 21-24

1.

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.

2.

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;

3.

(As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

4.

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.

Just as with John, so Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. He was attended to by local elders/priests, and given the name 'Jesus', as commanded by Gabriel. This was the culmination of fifteen months of wonder and glorious godly presence, accompanied by angelic hosts and archangels. It was as if the Lord's power was concentrated in one short span of time, proving just how wondrous the events were.

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Mary had to remain where she was, either in the stall or, by that time, in an inn or clan house, for forty days, to satisfy the days of purification. Then, when all was ready, Joseph, Mary and Jesus travelled the short distance to Jerusalem (about five miles). This was the Messiah, Son of God, and no other place would do! Jesus had to be dedicated to His Father in the Temple. This was in addition to the fact that every male child was dedicated to God simply for being male.

The young couple sacrificed two birds – either turtledoves or pigeons, the cheapest offering for people who were poor – as a sign of their thankfulness to the Lord. How do we thank God for everything He has given us? Or do we just shrug and carry on as usual in life, as if our salvation meant nothing?

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Verses 25-32

1.

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.

2.

And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

3.

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,

4.

Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

5.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

6.

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

7.

Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

8.

A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

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Do you suppose that, as a Christian, anything you do is always random or 'just one of those things'? If so, you have a wrong idea of what happens in your life. God guides us personally and individually, and, even when things appear to go wrong, God's will is done. I have seen this time and again in my own life.

When Jesus was taken to the Temple by His parents, unknown to them there was a man who had waited all his life to see the Messiah. The Holy Spirit had told him he would not die until he had seen "the Lord's Christ". On the day Mary took her son to the Temple, the Holy Spirit led the man, Simeon, to also attend the Temple. Very often, God moves people to do or say certain things, which, together with events and activities, combine to bring about God's will.

Simeon was "*just and devout*" so, again, we find someone who stood out from the usual 'religious' Jews. It is often thought by modern believers that the Jews at the time of Jesus were all apostate or irreligious unbelievers. This is an error, for in any age God has His true disciples. Simeon was just one of them. His whole being waited for the "con
solation of Israel"

– the Messiah, and now he was of great age. It is possible that he did not know why he attended the Temple that day, and at that time, but, he was a man who obeyed the Lord and loved to be in His Temple. The text tells us that he came because the Spirit led him.

Then, God brought together two things – Mary carrying the baby, and Simeon. Suddenly, a promise made to an individual believer joined with a fulfilment of prophecy. For Mary, this was a keeping of God's law: presenting a male baby to God at the age of 40 days. This was a rite going back to the killing of the Egyptian first-borns, when Jewish first-borns were protected by God. Of course, this was God being presented to God! Yet, it was necessary, because Christ came as a babe and had to undergo growing up as an human child. And Simeon had his lifelong dream come to life.

Hebrew scholars speak of a man named Simeon, who was called *Rabban* – the most prestigious title given to Jewish scholars/doctors; and a title given to only seven others. He was leader of the rabbinical college of the Sanhedrim.

As soon as Simeon saw the baby, probably one of many that day, his heart was overjoyed, for he immediately recognised Who the tiny baby really was. He went over to Mary and took Jesus

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into his arms, holding Him close. This was the Christ He had waited all those years to see! Simeon praised God for this privilege, and prayed to the Lord to let him die, for he had finally seen God made flesh. Now, he said, he had seen the One Who was come with salvation, as prophesied and made manifest to all people.

This baby would grow up to save the chosen people of God (those who were elect), and, as this Jewish scholar strikingly mentioned, He would also save the Gentiles. This statement would have shocked anyone who stood nearby, for no Jew wanted to even think of God saving Gentiles! But, it was prophetic truth from an holy man.

Elizabeth did not ever think she would bear a child at her advanced age, yet she did! Though he often prayed for a child, Zacharias did not really think God would give him that child. Yet He did. Having a baby at such a young age, without knowing a man, was certainly not top of Mary's 'wish list' – yet it happened. Her world was suddenly turned upside down in an instant, because God broke into her ordinary life and chose her as the earthly mother of the Son of God!

Joseph was betrothed to Mary, and expected to have a normal life after he finally married her; he did not ever think she would come to him with news of being pregnant before they married. Yet, God did this. Simeon prayed to see the Messiah before he died – and the Holy Spirit promised it would be so.

For us in our modern days, nothing has changed! God still leads and guides, fulfilling His own plan for our lives, and, at the same time, making sure that all the strands of His plan come together when the time is right. At this moment many strands of God are coming together, with many different purposes. Do not think that the life of a saved person rests solely on his or her own actions.

When we obey, or even when we fail, His plan carries on regardless! Many times we do not realise this is going on, but it does, all the time. Even so, we pray for this or that, and our hearts and mind burst as we plead with God for answers. But, God is already bringing about those answers, in His own way, dynamically and always. There is no need to worry or plead hard – if it is in God's will, it will happen!

As we go about our daily business, the strands of God's plan fly their courses, heading for their

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eternally-decided results. At times we see the results gloriously manifest before our very eyes, but the plan never ends there - it continues to flourish, because the elements of His plan belong to a 'bigger picture'.

Do you see all this? Or, do you truly think your life is not known to God, and that He does not listen to your earnest prayers? Like Simeon, we must trust God's will in our lives concerning our deepest holy desires, and wait to see their conclusion. We must always have in mind that God is moving many elements to bring about everything in our sojourn on this earth.

Verses 33-35

1.

And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

2.

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;

3.

(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Though both Joseph and Mary were told by Gabriel of wondrous things accompanying their child, Simeon's words made them think hard, for their content was new to them. God was revealing knowledge to them bit at a time. They kept Simeon's words in their hearts, amazed at what God was about to do, but not really understanding just how vast and eternally significant Jesus' life would be.

Having held the Messiah, Simeon blessed the parents and told Mary something interesting. He told her that Jesus would cause many in Israel to rise, but would also cause many to fall. As such, His name would be both praised and hated. This shows just how true the saying is – that, to the majority, the Gospel and Christ would be a stumblingblock, but to the few, He would be their Saviour, leading them to eternal life.

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He warned Mary that at some time in her life these facts would drive like a sword deep into her heart. She had yet to see her own holy Son's suffering and death at the hands of state-murderers and, like any other mother, this would cut into her soul like a sword, as if killing her, too. In this the true thoughts of His tormentors and killers would be revealed.

Even on a minor scale, I have known great torment and sadness when those who claim Christ have gone off the rails. As they enjoy their lives of sin, so I feel the hurt, as if stabbed through the heart. To add to this suffering I have sometimes had to discipline those same brethren, receiving their hatred in return. So, how much more did Mary feel the pain of her Son's murder, though it was all in God's plan?

Verses 36-38

1.

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;

2.

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.

3.

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.

Yet another believer, another strand in this account, is mentioned – a very old prophetess named Anna. We know she was daughter of Phanuel 'of the tribe of Aser'. 'Anna means 'grace' and is of Hebrew origin, Hannah/Channah, with several root meanings. The tribe of Aser (Asher) was founded by the eighth son of Jacob.

Anna's husband died only seven years after they were married, and so she devoted her life to

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service in the Temple. Now, 84 years later (making her about 100 years old), she was still serving God with prayers and fasting “night and day”. How many can testify to such service in their own lives?

In my own life people refer to my study-room as the ‘pit’ from which I rarely emerge! They think I can just come out and ‘relax’ and follow leisurely activities at will. This is to misunderstand the calling of God. Really, the only time I can NOT do what God requires of me in my ‘pit’ is to go away, to a caravan or on holiday! And when I do this it is because the Spirit allows and proposes it. If I could just simply divide my day with a few hours at my computer, then a few hours walking or reading, then what I do is NOT a calling or a ministry, but just another activity equal to any other.

My day is determined by God Himself, not by me. I must do what He says, and if that means staying in my ‘pit’ all day and all night, then so be it. I do not choose what I do – God does. And Anna knew exactly what this meant. Is what YOU do the will of God? Or, is it the way YOU want it to be, sub-dividing the day at your convenience? One clue is that ‘everything else’ takes priority, and God is just ‘tacked on’.

Like Simeon, when Jesus entered the room where she was, Anna immediately recognised Who He was, by the direction of the Holy Spirit. Instantly, she gave thanks to God for the baby Christ and prophesied to all who were around her of Jesus’ future role as their redeemer.

So, another strand from God joined with the coming of Christ to the Temple. And many more strands were being drawn by the Spirit from that time to the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection, with all forces of the Lord gathering at one point in time, the 33 years of Christ’s life on earth.

Verses 39&40

1.

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

2.

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was

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upon him.

Mary and Joseph completed every rite in the Temple, and then returned to Nazareth, their minds racing with all that had happened. From the initial fears they both had, of a young girl being pregnant and unmarried, they had been visited by God in many ways – Gabriel, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna... It went from anxiety to glory, with the promise of an amazing future for, and in, Jesus. Their lives were no longer their own; they were to bring up the growing Messiah, Son of God!

And in Nazareth, Jesus grew like any other child physically, but mentally and spiritually He was unique. As a child He was Man, but He was also God, and this had a marked effect on his psyche. He “waxed strong in spirit”. And was “filled with wisdom”, because “the grace of God was upon him.”

Note that the uncial or lower case ‘s’ is used for ‘spirit’. This is because the reference is NOT to the Holy Spirit but to His spirit as an human being. That is, his whole mental and emotional being was balanced and superb. Already, as a child, He was full of wisdom. And His every day exuded the grace of God... the grace He gave Himself, because He WAS God!

What we have is God living in an human body. Therefore, everything about His mind, heart and spirit HAD to be perfect. There could be no chink or crack in Him, to be infected by sin or any imperfection! It would be impossible for Him to have sinned in any way, even as a child; He was conceived sinless and grew sinlessly. Without this sinless nature, He could not have saved us.

Verses 41-45

1.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover.

2.

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

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3.

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].

4.

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among [their] kinsfolk and acquaintance.

5.

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

Over a decade after seeing Anna and Simeon in the Temple, when Jesus was 12, Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem, as they did every year, for the feast of the Passover. Such a visit, for the same reason, just 21 years' later, would lead to Jesus' death after His last Passover meal.

The three made their way to Jerusalem, as they usually did, along with many others from Nazareth and countless other places. When the feast days were over, Mary and Joseph started back to Nazareth, with their companions from the village. As they chatted to each other, they assumed Jesus was with some of the other children or adults in the large party wending its way back home. They did not know that Jesus had, in fact, remained in the Temple!

His parents did not realise Jesus was missing until they had travelled a full day! We all know the panic parents feel when a child is missing, and Mary and Joseph were no exception. They urgently searched amongst their travelling companions for the child, and, panic mounting, made their way back to Jerusalem. We KNOW they felt panic, because that is what any concerned parent would be like.

It is very possible, too, that the very early promises and prophecies did not 'connect' in their minds at this time, especially as Jesus was still a child, just below the age of His Bar Mitzvah at 13. How easily we lose sight of the need for godly lives as we tackle our human fears and woes on this earth! We must not let familiarity with salvation cause us to lose this realisation of 'God

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Monday, 18 March 2013 10:17

with us'.

Verses 46-52

1.

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.

2.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

3.

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.

4.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

5.

And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

6.

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.

7.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

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Mary and Joseph, with mounting concern, took a day to get back to Jerusalem, and another two days searching the city, at a time of much overcrowding during a national Feast time. Eventually, they searched the Temple and, at last, with immense relief, they found Him. He was not in danger, but, rather, was doing something they had not seen in any child of that age! He was sitting amongst the doctors. In Hebrew this term is explained by their function – *didaskalos*, teacher. He was politely listening to their teachings on the Hebrew scriptures, and then asking them questions.

I suggest that even at that age, Jesus KNEW what the doctors were talking about, for He had the mind of God! That is probably why everyone who heard Him speak in the huddle of doctors, were “*astonished at his understanding and answers*”. This was no mere human child with growing knowledge... here was God as Man, with all the right answers and knowledge, already a part of His mind and heart. He did not ask questions to learn – He already had the answers; His queries were to allow the *doctors and rabbis* to learn!

Though we are by no stretch of the imagination of the same power and intellectual might, everyone who is saved should cause others to look on in amazement at our knowledge and perception. No, I am not joking or exaggerating! We should be growing in power and knowledge from the moment of our salvation, ever learning and applying what the Spirit teaches us. Do YOU amaze others?

We were NOT saved to repeat traditional vagaries and imported second-hand ‘wisdom’ that is no wisdom. We SHOULD astonish others with true wisdom and godly power. Instead, most of us are content to totter along, fat on everyone else’s supposed wisdom, and lean on the spiritual truth and power of others. Jesus was the *doctors’* teacher, rather than the other way around!

Mary and Joseph, by now much relieved, and no doubt annoyed, nevertheless were astonished at what they saw and heard. Their parental dismay showed through – they asked Jesus why He had treated them so shabbily, making them so fearful! Jesus’ answer is a reminder to us all – when we are about the Father’s business no other issue matters. It means that when we are thus employed it is by divine command and so any other consideration is of no consequence.

In His answer Jesus made a solid godly point, reminding His earthly guardians of a truth they should have remembered for the past 12 years. But, they had forgotten, and so their earthly lives impinged upon the plan God had for them all along. No matter how many times we

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experience the things of God, we continue to forget! Jesus reminded his parents that they had forgotten the most vital fact of all of created time... the essence of life is Christ, not anything else we THINK is important.

With gentleness and understanding, Jesus asked them a probing question, but Mary and Joseph did not understand why He said it. He asked them WHY they had worried and come looking for Him. He was no ordinary youngster. He was God incarnate, and they KNEW this.

What this appears to tell us is that both Mary and Joseph, though righteous, had forgotten why Jesus had come to this earth. They had forgotten Who He was. Or, rather, they knew Who He was, but did not fully understand the implications. And so, as He did later at the wedding at Cana, Jesus gently chided His mother.

Jesus reminded them that He *"must be about (his) Father's business"*. Even at age 12... and even at His birth... Jesus was doing what His Father required of Him. Even if that meant causing His earthly parents concern. But, when we are attuned to God and live by His Holy Spirit, we should anticipate godly experiences. Do not forget!

We might not know exactly what is to come, but we must expect God to act in our lives for His own advantage and glory, not for our own comfort. And He can do this swiftly, without warning! Is this how we see our lives? This is why our every move should be God's and not our own, there being no real difference between what is 'holy' and what is earthly (such as work or play).

At an early age, then, Jesus was reminding His parents WHY He was on this earth. Perhaps this jolted them into thinking more deeply and pondering on the circumstances of His birth... but, at least at the time, Mary and Joseph were perplexed by what the young Jesus told them. They might even have remained angry that He did not apologise to them for going missing.

We do not know how they truly felt, but we DO know that even though they were Jesus' earthly parents, they did not fully understand His true mission. Which is one very good reason not to give Mary more glory than she was given by God, as the human carrier of Jesus in the womb.

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Despite His gentle rebuke, Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, and was a model earthly son. As He continued to grow, Mary kept everything stored in her heart and mind, wondering just what was to come with this wondrous person known as Jesus.

As He grew older so everyone looked upon Him approvingly, for His person was the very epitome of what a good man should be. He was full of wisdom and goodness... which He had to be, being God. He already was full of godly wisdom, but it increased in the sense that it was shown in more adult form, and more openly.

At every stage of His life, Jesus portrayed godliness in a form appropriate to His age. It had to be that way, otherwise, rather than showing Himself to be a man like all others, He would have been treated like a freak of nature, someone to be feared or isolated. To avoid this He grew as any other child, but with perfect stature, mind and action.

Thus, we see the 'strands' of God's plan weaving in and out of every life on earth, bringing His own self to fruition. And He only lived a short while compared to others. Yet, His life was 100% perfect at all times, and what He packed into His very short preaching time did more for mankind than any long life of anyone else. Indeed, what He said and did was for the salvation of mankind. None of us, no matter how wise and full of knowledge, or how brave, could ever save anyone.

In each of our lives there are many, many strands, as God pulls them together to bring about His will, not just in our lives but in the lives of many others. In this way, my life touches and mingles with yours, and yours mingles with mine, maybe in ways neither of us knows about or understands.

This is because God is the Master, and He does not necessarily reveal to us everything He does, or why. The reason is that our lives are for His glory, not only for our own enjoyment! And none of us knows just how great we might be, or how much influence our salvation and righteousness will affect many others. That is why we must live as if great, and act as if we will affect many.

© July 2012

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