

Jesus's Birth

[Luke 2](#) describes the **birth** of Jesus. Luke emphasizes the **historicity** of Jesus's birth. He gives the timing and setting in great detail. There were eyewitnesses, which supports our confidence in those events.

One theological significance of Jesus's birth is that Jesus was born in a rather ordinary way. He had a normal birth; Jesus was truly human. Another theological significance of Jesus's birth is that although His birth was quite ordinary; He was very significant. He was truly human and truly God.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem

[Luke 2:1ff.](#) introduces the timing and setting of Jesus's birth.

[Luke 2:1-7](#) "1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

What world-wide event caused Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem? Caesar Augustus decreed that everyone should be registered. **Augustus** (Octavian) ruled the Roman Empire 31 BC - AD 14 (Coplen). It is difficult to determine what connection Luke is making to **Quirinius**, the governor of Syria. Based on Matthew's account, we know that Jesus was born **before 4 BC** ([Matt 2:1](#)). There are historical records of Quirinius leading a census in **AD 6**, but not during this time. There are two possibilities. First, "first" could be translated "**before**," meaning that this was not the well-known registration in AD 6. Second, this may be why Luke referred to the "**first** registration." The registration in AD 6 was well known because it incited a revolt; this first registration may have been **less known**.

*Why did they go to **Bethlehem**?* Joseph was a descendent of David. The decree was for everyone to return to their hometown for the census. Bethlehem was the city of **David**. This was God's providence. God foretold through Micah that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. [Micah 5:2](#) "2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." God used a Roman decree to send Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

Where did they lay Jesus when he was born? Jesus was placed in a **manger**, that is a feeding place for animals. Although we typically imagine Joseph and Mary being turned away from an inn and resorting to a manger, they were more likely staying with family. The word “**inn**” (κατάλυμα) **can** refer to an inn, but really means a “**lodging** place.” Luke uses a different word for “inn” (πανδοχεῖον) in [Luke 10:34](#) (Good Samaritan story). At the last supper Jesus and his disciples eat in a **guest room** (κατάλυμα) ([Luke 22:11](#); cf. [Mark 14:14](#)), which is probably the meaning in [Luke 2:7](#).

God told shepherds of Jesus’s birth

[Luke 2:8-12](#) “8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.””

To whom did God choose to reveal Jesus’s birth? God revealed Jesus’s birth to **shepherds** - insignificant men. *What does it mean that they were in the same region?* The shepherds were fields outside of Bethlehem, although this does not specify how close they were.

What response did the shepherds have to the angel’s appearance? They were filled with great fear. The glory of the Lord shone around them. When the glory of God filled the tabernacle and temple, the priests could not stay ([Exod 40:34-35](#); [1 Kgs 8:10-11](#)).

What three words did the angels use to describe Jesus? He was a Savior; that is, His purpose was to save people from their sins. He was the Christ; He was the Davidic king who would rule over God’s kingdom and God’s people forever. He was the Lord; although He was a baby, He also was God.

What was the sign for the shepherds to know the baby? The baby would be in a manger. There may have been other babies in Bethlehem, but it was unusual for a baby to be in a manger. This also highlights how ordinary Jesus was; there was nothing about His appearance to indicate that He was God in flesh.

[Luke 2:13-15](#) “13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.””

What appeared after the angel announced Jesus’s birth? A large number of angels appeared, praising God. *What did the angels say about God?* They glorified God. *What did the angels say about those with whom God is pleased?* They declared peace to those with whom God is

pleased. *With whom is God pleased?* God is pleased with those of faith. [Hebrews 11:6](#) “6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” The proclamation of Jesus, glorification of God, and peace to those of faith are all related. Jesus’s coming glorifies God and gives those of faith peace with God.

[Luke 2:16–20](#) “16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

What was the shepherds’ response to seeing Jesus? They glorified and praised God. *Why did they glorify and praise God?* This unassuming baby was the Savior, the Christ, the Lord, the One who would bring glory to God, and the One who would bring peace to men.

Jesus at the temple

The latter part of [Luke 2](#) focuses on Jesus in the temple. It describes two different events. Jesus in the temple as an infant and again as a twelve-year-old.

Jesus was presented at the temple

[Luke 2:21–24](#) “21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.””

When was Jesus circumcised? He was circumcised at eight days old. Jewish boys were circumcised on the eighth day according to [Genesis 17:12](#) and [Leviticus 12:3](#).

When did Jesus go to Jerusalem? They went to Jerusalem at the time of purification. After Jesus’s birth, Mary was ceremonially unclean for thirty-three days. [Leviticus 12:4](#) “4 Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying. She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed.” *If a girl was born, the mother was unclean for sixty-six days ([Lev 12:5](#)). After that time, Mary would need to travel to the temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices of purification ([Lev 12:6-8](#); cf. [Luke 2:24](#)).

Luke also mentions the firstborn male. In [Exodus 13](#), God commanded that every firstborn male should be redeemed with a sacrifice ([Exod 13:11-13](#)). This was to be a reminder for future generations of God bringing Israel out of Egypt. God killed the firstborn sons of Egypt, but **redeemed** the firstborn sons of Israel ([Exod 13:14-16](#)).

What did Mary offer for her purification? Mary offered two birds (turtledoves or pigeons). [Leviticus 12:6](#) "...she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering," Mary was supposed to offer a one-year-old lamb and a pigeon/turtledove. [Leviticus 12:8](#) "8 And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering..." Luke highlights Mary's offering to show that Jesus was born into a poor family.

Simeon celebrated Jesus's birth

[Luke 2:25-27](#) "25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,"

What was Simeon waiting for? He was waiting for the consolation (encouragement, comfort) of Israel. A few OT passages connected the Christ's coming with comfort. [Isaiah 40:1](#) "1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." This verse is followed by the promise of a forerunner of the Messiah, which the NT says was fulfilled by John ([Isa 40:3](#); [Matt 3:3](#); [Mark 1:3](#); [John 1:23](#)). [Isaiah 61:2](#) "2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;" Jesus quoted this passage in [Luke 4](#) and told the synagogue that the passage was fulfilled that day ([Luke 4:17-21](#)).

What had the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon? Simeon would see the Christ before he died. Under the leading of the Spirit, Simeon came to the temple when Jesus was brought there.

[Luke 2:28-35](#) "28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.""

In verses 30-31, who did Simeon say God had prepared salvation for? He had prepared salvation for **all peoples**, meaning all nations ([Gentiles](#), [Luke 2:32](#)). *If Simeon was waiting for*

the consolation of Israel, why does he mention “all peoples?” Jesus did not come just to save Israel; Jesus came those of faith of all nations (cf. [Isa 49:6](#)).

Notice that Jesus would also bring conflict. He was appointed for the fall and rise of many. He was a sign for those who opposed. He would cause the thoughts (intents) of hearts to be revealed. Jesus came for salvation and peace, but His coming naturally also brings judgment and division.

Anna celebrated Jesus’s birth

[Luke 2:36–38](#) “36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, 37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

How long had Anna been married? She had been married seven years. *How old was she when Jesus visited the temple?* She was eighty-four years old. She had remained a widow the entire time.

How did Anna spend her days? She worshipped in the temple every day with fasting and prayer. Luke does not record what Anna said, only that she spoke to those who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem, implying that she acknowledged Jesus as that Redeemer. As Simeon noted, although the people may have been waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem, Jesus came to redeem all nations.

Jesus growing up

[Luke 2:39–40](#) “39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”

Where did Jesus grow up? Jesus lived in Nazareth, in Galilee. Matthew records that Jesus’s family went to Egypt until the death of Herod the Great ([Matt 2:12-15](#)). After Herod died, they returned to Nazareth ([Matt 2:19-23](#)). Herod died very soon after Jesus’s birth, so they probably did not stay in Egypt very long.

[Luke 2:41–45](#) “41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day’s journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.”

Why did Jesus's family go to Jerusalem every year? They went to celebrate the Passover. The Passover was a reminder of God redeeming Israel out of Egypt ([Exod 12:43-50](#)).

How old was Jesus at this particular Passover? Jesus was twelve years old. When the family returned to Nazareth, Jesus remained in Jerusalem. When did His parents realize that He was not with them? They traveled for a day, assuming that He was with another relative in the group. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem.

[Luke 2:46-52](#) “46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” 49 And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”

How long did it take Joseph and Mary to find Jesus? They found Him after three days. What was He doing when they found Him? Jesus was in the temple, speaking with the teachers. What did people think about Jesus's understanding? They were amazed at His understanding and answers.

When Mary expressed her concern, what did Jesus say He needed to do? He said that He needed to be in His Father's house. I don't think this means that God revealed to Jesus that He should remain there; instead, Jesus desired to be in the temple to learn and grow. Jesus called the temple His Father's house on other occasions ([John 2:16](#); [14:2](#)). One thing that caused controversy for Jesus as an adult was referring to God as His Father. [John 5:17-18](#) “17 But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” 18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

In verse 51, what did Jesus do in response to Joseph and Mary coming back to Jerusalem? Jesus went back with them to Nazareth. Jesus was submissive to them. Consider the significance of that statement. Jesus told Mary that He needed to be in His Father's house (the temple). Yet because His parents brought Him back to Nazareth, He submitted to them. He did not sacrifice the command to honor His parents even in His pursuit of growing in God.

Notice that [Luke 2:40](#) and [Luke 2:52](#) refer to Jesus's growth. This parallels Scripture's description of Samuel. [1 Samuel 2:26](#) “26 Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.” Jesus grew as any boy would. He learned. He had human limitation.

Conclusion

[Luke 2](#) records unique details about Jesus's birth, details not included in the other gospels. Many of the stories we tell at Christmas come from the Gospel of Luke. Luke tells of Jesus being laid in a manger because there was no room in the "inn" (guest room). Luke tells the timing of the birth. Luke tells about the angels appearing to the shepherds. Luke tells about His temple visit as an infant, meeting Simeon and Anna. Luke tells of Jesus in the temple as a twelve-year-old.

One of the things that Luke highlights is that Jesus's birth was ordinary, His parents were ordinary, and those to whom God revealed His birth were ordinary. Even the city he lived in was ordinary. Yet angels, shepherds, Simeon, Anna, the teachers in the temple, Mary ... everyone knew that **Jesus was not ordinary**. He was the Savior, the Christ, the Lord.