



THE LIFE OF JESUS

Reading: Luke 2

God's message to Mary

Luke 1:30-33 And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

What an amazing message the angel brought to the virgin Mary! She would give birth to the Son of God. The angel told her that God would use His power, the Holy Spirit, to bring about the conception of His Son. No man was to be involved. The baby was to be called Jesus, meaning 'God shall save', for he came to "*save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).

The birth of Jesus is recorded in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke. These chapters do not say that Jesus existed in heaven before his birth. Such an idea does not agree with what the Bible says about the conception and birth of Jesus.

The life and work of the Lord Jesus is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Very little is recorded of the time from his birth through to his baptism at 30 years of age. But we are told that as a child "*Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man*" (Luke 2:52). The Bible would not say this if Jesus had already existed as a perfect being in heaven before his birth, as some people wrongly believe.

The baptism of Jesus

Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. Baptism is not a sprinkling but a complete immersion in water. When Jesus "*came up out of the water*" he received the Holy Spirit and a voice from heaven said, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*" (Mark 1:10,11). In this way God showed His approval. By being baptized himself, Jesus shows us the importance of baptism.

After his baptism Jesus went into the wilderness, where he was "*tempted by the devil*" (Matthew 4:1).

Was Jesus really tempted by an all-powerful evil being?

The Bible tells us that temptation comes from our minds (James 1:13-15). There is no all-powerful wicked being that makes people do evil. So what really happened in the wilderness?

In the first of the three temptations recorded, Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:2-4). He was very hungry because he had not eaten for 40 days. Jesus did not need a wicked being to tempt him to make food! The Holy Spirit had just been given to him, so he would be tempted to try it out. But Jesus knew that God's power must only be used to do God's will. It would be wrong to use it to satisfy his own desires, even though he was very hungry.

A careful look at the other two temptations shows that there could not be an all-powerful evil being present. Problems arise if we try to understand them literally.

For example, in the temptation of Matthew 4:8,9:

- (a) There is no mountain from which the whole world can be seen – the world is round! Jesus could not have been literally taken to such a place.

Matthew 4:8,9 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'





- (b) Jesus knew his Bible: he understood that the world belongs to God and no one else was able to offer it to him. The Old Testament says that the “*earth is the LORD’S and the fullness thereof*” (Psalm 24:1) and “*the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will*” (Daniel 4:32).

In the Luke account of this temptation we read that Jesus was shown the kingdoms of the world “*in a moment of time*” (Luke 4:5). This suggests that the temptation took place in his mind. Jesus knew that in God’s future kingdom he would rule the whole world. In his mind he could picture the kingdoms of the world. It would be tempting to use the Holy Spirit to take at that time what was promised to him in the future, but Jesus knew that he should be obedient to his Father’s will, which was for him to overcome sin and die on the cross to bring salvation.

Luke 4:9-11 And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you’, and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ “

In the temptation of Luke 4:9-11 we are told that the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem. Would Jesus really follow a supernatural evil being all the way from the wilderness to Jerusalem, climb to the pinnacle of the temple, and only then

say, “*It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’*” (Luke 4:12)? If there were a literal devil, Jesus would have recognised him and refused to follow him.

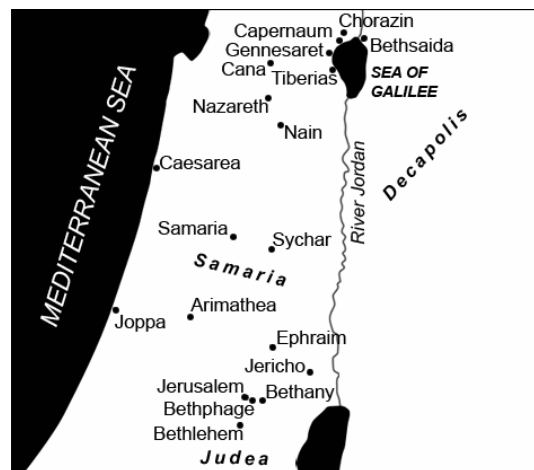
This temptation could have easily occurred in the mind of Jesus. Knowing that God’s angels would protect him, Jesus could have thought that throwing himself down from the temple would be a good way to attract attention and prove that he was God’s Son. That would make his work of preaching easier. But Jesus knew that it is wrong to take advantage of God’s care.

So we suggest that these temptations took place in the mind of Jesus while he was in the wilderness. The scriptures here use the idea of the devil (or satan) as a symbol to represent the powerful force of human nature, the temptations to sin that arise in all our minds. The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness show that he had human nature like us and was tempted as we are. But Jesus never gave in to temptation and so he did not sin.

Jesus answered each temptation with the words of Scripture (Matthew 4:4,7,10). We can learn a very important lesson from this – we must read the Bible and allow its message to influence us, to help us to make the right decisions when we are tempted.

The ministry of Jesus

After his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, Jesus travelled “*through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God*” (Luke 8:1). His public ministry covered a period of about three and a half years and ended with his death on the cross.



At first, Jesus attracted many disciples (‘disciple’ means ‘one who learns from a teacher’). He chose twelve of them to become his special disciples. Later, he sent them out to help him preach the Gospel and called them apostles (‘apostle’ means ‘one who is sent’).

The teaching of Jesus

1. Jesus taught the people directly – In Matthew chapters 5-7 the Sermon on the Mount is recorded, in which Jesus shows us how God wants us to live. The first lesson Jesus taught is about the need for us to be humble. He said,



“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

Because Jesus spoke of the kingdom **of** heaven, some people think that the kingdom is **in** heaven. But the Bible never talks about a kingdom **in** heaven. Verse 5 shows that the reward of the righteous is on earth: *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall **inherit the earth**”*. The phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’ only occurs in Matthew’s Gospel and refers to God’s kingdom (see Matthew 19:23,24; also compare Matthew 8:11 with Luke 13:28,29). God’s kingdom is described as a heavenly kingdom because it will be a time when God’s will is done on earth as it is always done in heaven.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also taught people that:

- they should love their enemies
- they should not judge others
- looking on a woman lustfully (with desire for sex) was as wrong as actually committing adultery
- when they gave money it should be done in secret
- they should live faithful lives which give God glory
- they should not worry about the things of this life but trust in God’s care
- seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness should be the most important thing in life.

In Matthew 7:13-23, Jesus warned:

- that only a few will enter God’s kingdom – those who do His will
- that many would be rejected from God’s kingdom (even though they claimed to have done wonderful things in His Name).

2. Jesus taught using parables – A parable is a simple story of everyday life with a deeper spiritual meaning. Matthew 13 has many parables about the future kingdom.

Jesus spoke in parables to separate between true disciples and those who were only attracted by his miracles. Those seeking God’s truth looked for the deeper spiritual lessons in Jesus’ parables. If we want to be among his true disciples, we need to carefully search the scriptures for ourselves.

3. Jesus taught by prophecy – Jesus warned about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jewish nation. He also spoke of signs that would happen in the world just before his return (see Lesson 8).

4. Jesus taught by the way he lived – The Son of God was born in a stable. He had no home of his own and did not live a life of luxury. He said,

“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

Jesus helped others, both by preaching the Gospel and by healing people who were sick. He showed us how to love our neighbour as ourselves, and how to love our enemies!

Just before his death, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. This task was usually done by a servant. Although he was the Son of the great Creator of the universe, Jesus was humble and served others.

Jesus spent much time in prayer to his Heavenly Father. Before he chose his twelve special disciples, he spent all night in prayer. He did not pray openly, to show people how good he was, and he condemned the way the religious leaders did this.

Jesus taught, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself”* (Matthew 22:37-39). This is what he did. Jesus is the example of how God wants us to live. He showed us the character of God Himself.





The miracles of Jesus

Jesus used the Holy Spirit to perform amazing miracles. He turned water into wine, walked on the sea, fed thousands of people from only a few loaves of bread and some fish. He used the Holy Spirit to help others and not himself. He never used it to impress people or show off. His miracles were a sign that he was sent by God. They showed that God was working through him and that he was teaching God's ways (Acts 2:22).

The Gospels are full of wonderful miracles of healing that Jesus performed. He had pity on those who were suffering and wanted to help them. He even raised the dead. These miracles were a sign that Jesus would bring salvation from sin and death (Mark 2:10).

Preparation for death

Jesus took with him three of his disciples and went up a mountain to pray (Matthew 17:1-13). As they watched while he prayed, he was "*transfigured*" (his appearance altered) – his face and clothes shone brightly. The Old Testament characters, Moses and Elijah, appeared. They talked with Jesus about his coming death on the cross. What the disciples saw was a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory. It was a picture of him in God's kingdom. It must have helped him to look forward to that kingdom, as he faced his coming death.

Jesus knew from Old Testament prophecies that he would die a cruel death (e.g. Psalms 22 and 69, and Isaiah 53). He warned his disciples that he would suffer and die, but he also told them that he would rise from the dead (Luke 9:22).

The religious leaders repeatedly tried to trick Jesus into doing wrong, so they could accuse him. Jesus knew they hated him. They tried to stone him twice, but "*his hour was not yet come*" – it was not the time for him to die. However, when "*the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:51).

Jesus accepted that he had to die. He knew that this was the only way people could be saved from their sins. But he could only help them in this way if he were sinless himself. Each day he battled against sin. He refused to do things that were selfish or would hurt others. He disciplined himself so that he always did God's will. He left us a wonderful example. And he told his disciples that they should follow him:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

This means that each day we should follow the example of the Lord Jesus by serving God rather than ourselves. Part of doing this is to help others in a self-sacrificing way. In his parable of Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus spoke about the future judgement. Those welcomed into God's kingdom had lovingly cared for others. It was as if they had cared for Jesus himself.

Summary

The Lord Jesus provided a wonderful example for us to follow in our lives. He showed us the character of God Himself.

A verse to learn: Luke 1:32

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.

Verses to read: Matthew 5, 6 and 7; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 9

