



## **THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST**

### **Reading: Luke 1 & 2**

The events associated with the birth of Jesus Christ are recorded in two of the Gospel records. They are found in Matthew 1 and 2, and Luke 1 and 2. Luke tells us that these events took place in the reign of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-2), which enables us to fairly accurately establish that Jesus was born about BC 4. Luke's gospel also records the birth of John the Baptist and his appearance to the nation, putting this in its historical setting as well (Luke 3:1).

As we consider these events we are impressed with the exact details drawn from the prophets that foretell God's purpose in raising up Jesus and the work he would accomplish.

### **Isaiah's Prophecies of the Birth of Jesus**

It was Isaiah who had delivered a specific message to the royal house of David, saying: "*Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel* (meaning 'God with us') (Isaiah 7: 14). This was fulfilled when Mary, of the line of King David, gave birth to her firstborn son Jesus, as foretold in Matthew 1:21-23.

Isaiah also foretold the future work of this one who would be born saying:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder...of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

From these prophecies we cannot fail to be impressed with the fact that Jesus was born to reign over the kingdom of David at a time when that kingdom will be set up on earth for ever.

### **The Message of the Angel Gabriel to Mary**

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he told her of the special work that Jesus was to do. His words identify Jesus as the promised seed of David foretold in 2 Samuel 7:12-16:

"And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

Let us consider the meaning of Gabriel's message to Mary:

**"Thou shalt call his name Jesus"** 'Jesus' is the Greek form of the Old Testament name 'Joshua' meaning "Yah (God) shall save". Through Jesus, God was providing salvation from sin and death for all mankind (cp Matthew 1:21).

**"He shall be called the Son of the Highest"** He was to be the "*Son of God*", the one promised to David in 2 Samuel 7:14 (cp Hebrews 1:5; Psalm 2:7).

**"The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David"** Jesus is "the seed" or descendant promised to David who will re-establish David's throne and kingdom on earth (2 Samuel 7:12-16; cp Isaiah 9:6-7).

**"Of his Kingdom there shall be no end"** The kingdom will have no end because Jesus Christ, who will be the King, is now immortal (2 Samuel 7:16; Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15).

In Gabriel's brief announcement we have a remarkably clear definition of the work to be accomplished in this child which was about to be born.

- 1 He would save mankind from sin and death
- 2 He would be the Son of God
- 3 He would be the Son of David and therefore:
  - a Sit upon David's throne in Jerusalem
  - b Rule over regathered Israel
  - c Establish God's everlasting Kingdom on earth.



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## EXPLORING THE BIBLE

### Lesson 18

Mary's response to Gabriel's message was one of humble submission to the will of God. She asked, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" Gabriel's answer was: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34-34). Through God's Holy Spirit power this child was to be born and would be called "the Son of God", in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7, see Acts 13:32-33; Genesis 3:15).

#### His Birth in Bethlehem

The fact that Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem had been foretold by the prophet Micah (Micah 5:1-2), but Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, over 110 kilometres north of Bethlehem. Mary was now close to giving birth and, humanly speaking, it would appear that he would be born in Nazareth. We see however, God's hand at work in the affairs of men to bring about His purpose (see Daniel 4:17), for at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all the world should be taxed (that is, enrolled or registered). This necessitated Joseph and Mary making the long journey to their ancestral town of Bethlehem for this purpose (Luke 2:1-6). What then appeared to be a decision of a far-off pagan Emperor was, in fact, influenced by the hand of God in human affairs, for Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7; Matthew 2:4-6). Micah also foretold the future work of Jesus saying that he would be "*ruler in Israel*". This will not be fulfilled until he returns to set up God's Kingdom on earth.

#### The Joyful News of his Birth

This event, so long anticipated by generations of God-fearing men and women, was proclaimed by the angel to shepherds on the slopes of Bethlehem:

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

#### Verse 10

"**Good tidings**" This is a translation of the same Greek word elsewhere rendered "gospel".

"**To all people**" The good news associated with the Lord Jesus Christ is not just for Jews, but for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. This good news is the message of salvation that God has offered through him (Mark 16:15-16; Galatians 3:26-27).

#### Verse 11

"**In the city of David**" That is, Bethlehem, the city where David had been born (1 Samuel 16:1). It was from this city that Israel looked for the coming ruler (Micah 5:1-2).

"**A Saviour**" Man is mortal and sinful and needs saving out of death. Through Jesus Christ God has offered forgiveness of sin and the hope of sharing immortality with Christ at his return to the earth (2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:21-23, 51-54). Therefore Jesus is "God's salvation" for man.

#### The Wise Men from the East

Among those who had read the prophets and anticipated the birth of Messiah at this time were "wise men from the east". As soon as they arrived in Jerusalem they began to ask, "*Where is he that is born **King of the Jews?***" (Matthew 2:2). They understood from the prophets that the destiny of this newborn child was to be king of the Jews sitting on the throne of David (2 Samuel 7:12-14; Isaiah 9:6-7).

On hearing of the wise men's enquiry, Herod was troubled and summoned the chief priests and scribes and "*demande*d of them where **Christ** should be born" (Matthew 2:4). They knew the answer at once from the prophet Micah and replied: "*In Bethlehem of Judaea* (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:5-6).

From this we see that the Jews understood that

- Christ would be born
- in Bethlehem
- and would "*rule my people Israel*".



**Jesus—Both “Son of God” and “Son of Man”**

These two titles—“Son of God” and “Son of Man”—are used throughout the gospel records. They very clearly reveal that God was his Father, and yet at the same time, being a descendant of Adam, he was associated with mankind, whom he came to save. We see this dual parentage declared by Gabriel in his words to Mary. He was to be **“the Son of the Highest”** that is, of God, **and** he would sit on **“the throne of his father David”** (Luke 1:32; 2 Samuel 7:12-14; Acts 2:30).

Paul says: *“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law”* (Galatians 4:4). Of His Son, God could say: *“Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee”* (Psalm 2:7, Hebrews 1:5, 5:5).

Although the birth of Jesus was long foretold in the prophets, his existence only commenced when God, through His Holy Spirit power, caused Mary to conceive 2000 years ago (Luke 1:35).

The prophet Isaiah expresses the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in these terms: *“And he [God] saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him”* (Isaiah 59:16). God, looking upon the sinful state of humanity and realising that there was not one who could render perfect obedience or deliver mankind from the bondage of sin and death, acted to provide one through whom salvation would come. He strengthened one born of the human race so that he might overcome sin and death, thus opening the way to salvation and life for himself and for all who would come to God through him. The work of “the Son of man” is described in Hebrews 2:6-18.

The necessity for God to be so involved in the deliverance of man from sin was foreshadowed from the beginning when He said that *“the seed of the woman”* would bruise the head of *“the serpent”*, indicating that God would overshadow the woman to give birth to a son who would destroy the ‘serpent power’ of sin (Genesis 3:15; Hebrews 2:14; Galatians 4:4).

**The Relationship of Jesus to His Father**

Jesus carefully defined his relationship to his Father, always acknowledging his subordination to Him in everything. Jesus said: *“My Father is greater than I”* (John 14:28; cp John 5:19, 30). This Father-Son relationship revealed a ‘oneness’ or unity of purpose between the Father and His Son (John 10:30). He came to do his Father’s will (John 5:30; Hebrews 10:7), and wonderfully revealed the character of his Father (John 14:9).

This remarkable relationship was clearly understood and stated by Jesus in his first recorded words at the age of twelve: *“Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”* (Luke 2:49). He realised that his Father had raised him up for a specific work and he was determined to do this. His life was one of dedication and obedience to his Father’s will, ending in suffering and death upon the cross, whereby men might be delivered from sin and death.

Throughout his life he could say: *“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work”* (John 4:34). Thus in those last agonising hours leading up to his crucifixion, he prayed for strength in the Garden of Gethsemane with these words: *“O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt”* (Matthew 26:39). His Father’s will was paramount and must be done. As the awful ordeal came to an end on the cross, he cried out with satisfaction and relief, *“It is finished”* and bowed his head and died, knowing that his work was now accomplished (John 19:30). He could say, *“I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4).

As we consider the wonderful love and obedience which the Son rendered to his Father at all times, we can appreciate why God proclaimed on two occasions, *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

In reverence let us appreciate that Jesus, though a man born of our human nature was also the Son of God, who through his victory over sin and death was raised from the dead and elevated to his Father’s right hand in heaven.

It is important that we clearly understand the relationship of the Father with His Son to correctly appreciate the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Misunderstanding has resulted in the false concept of the Trinity—that Jesus *was* God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Such teaching is not found in the Bible. There is ample evidence to prove that this doctrine, which has become so



# CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE MISSION

## EXPLORING THE BIBLE

### Lesson 18

central to 'Christian' belief today, was not even formulated until 300 years after Christ. Expressions which are commonly used by those who adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity, such as "God the Son", "co-equal" and "co-eternal", and even the "Trinity", are **nowhere to be found in the Bible**. Even eminent churchmen acknowledge that the teaching is not found in the Bible. It was developed as dogma by men who were influenced by pagan Greek philosophy, and imposed on the plain teaching of the Bible. Because it is readily accepted that it cannot be understood, it has been dubbed a "mystery", and this has discouraged many from searching for the truth of the matter. Jesus himself, on the other hand, said it is a matter of life eternal to know God: *"This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent"* (John 17:3).

The apostle Paul puts the matter quite clearly: "There is **one God**, and **one mediator** between God and men, **the man Christ Jesus** (1 Timothy 2:5).

#### Jesus—The Word Made Flesh

God declared to Moses and the children of Israel: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and **will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them** all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto **my words which he shall speak in my name**, I will require it of him." (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). God here foretells of the day when He would intervene in world affairs and raise up a Son whom He would instruct to speak His words to the nation. As these verses speak in the future tense, Jesus, though in the purpose and plan of God, did not exist at that time.

Because God instructed His Son and placed His words in his mouth, Jesus was also called "the Word made flesh". We read: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The word of God was not just an academic fact to him, but had a moral influence upon him so that he reflected the complete character of his Father, being full of grace and truth. Thus Jesus could say to Philip, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:9). Jesus is certainly not saying that he is the Father. What he is saying is, "I am doing exactly what God has asked me to do and I am speaking exactly what God has asked me to speak. If you have watched me you will have seen that I have revealed the character of the Father to you for I am His Son and always do His will". Just before he was crucified he prayed to his Father saying, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world" (John 17:6).

Jesus always acknowledged that the words he spoke were not his own but those which God had taught him: "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:49-50; 7:17; 8:28). Jesus was always emphatic that he was the Son of God and subordinate to his Father. Thus he insisted, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). When the Jews said Jesus was "making himself equal with God" Jesus replied, "The Son can do nothing of himself", and again "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:18-19, 30).

This wonderful relationship between God and His Son is a fundamental to be understood if we are to believe the truth. Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee **the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent**" (John 17:3).

#### The Early Life of Jesus

The gospel records tell us very little of the life of Jesus in the period from his birth until he was about 30 years of age, when he was introduced to the nation at his baptism by John the Baptist (Luke 3:23). The only incident recorded was when he accompanied Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover when he was twelve years old. Here we read: "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:41-52).



**Summary Points**

1. The birth of Christ had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah (**Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7**).
2. The word “Jesus” means “God (Yah) shall save”. It is God who has provided His Son for the salvation of mankind from sin and death (**Matthew 1:21; cp Isaiah 45:21-22**).
3. The Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, telling her that she would bear the Son of God, who would also be the son of David (**Luke 1:31-33; 2 Samuel 7:12-14**).
4. Jesus was born as the one promised to sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem when it is restored, and will reign for ever (**Luke 1:31-33; 2 Samuel 7:12-16**).
5. Bethlehem was the city where Christ was to be born (**Micah 5:2; cp Matthew 2:4-6; Luke 2:4-11**).
6. God’s character was manifest or revealed in the life of his Son (**John 14:9; 17:6**). Because he always spoke the words of God he was called “the Word made flesh” (**John 1:14; Deuteronomy 18:18-19; John 12:49-50; 7:17; 8:28**).
7. Jesus is spoken of as the “Son of God”. Nowhere in the Bible is he called “God the Son”, nor does he claim to be “co-equal” or “co-eternal” with God, as Trinitarian teaching claims. He always acknowledged that his Father was greater than he was (**John 14:28; cp 5:18-19, 30**).

**Lesson 18 - Questions**

1. What does the name “Jesus” mean?
2. What did the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary foretell concerning the work of Jesus Christ?
3. When will these words be completely fulfilled?
4. In which town in Israel was Jesus born?
5. Why is Jesus called “the Son of man”?
6. God said of Jesus: “*I will be his Father and he shall be my son*” (2 Samuel 7:12-14 and Hebrews 1:5). Did Jesus exist before he was born of Mary in Bethlehem?
7. How did Jesus manifest God’s name in his life?
8. Jesus never claimed equality with God, his Father. Give a quotation in which Jesus says that his Father is greater than himself.
9. The doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the Bible. How long after the death of Christ did it take for some “Church Fathers” to start teaching this false idea?