

ST JOSEPH THE WORKER  
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



## Luke 2

### The Birth of Jesus

**1** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was **the first census that took place** while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to their own town to register.

**4** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

**8** And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

**13** Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

**14** “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

**2:1–7** “In those days” links the following account of Jesus’ birth with the preceding events surrounding John’s birth. The events surrounding Jesus’ birth are emphasized with angelic announcements, while his naming and circumcision are passed over briefly. The source of the imperial decree is Caesar Augustus (i.e., Octavian, Roman emperor from 31 BC–AD 14, who was given the title Augustus in 27 BC). **The census, or registration, includes the entire Roman Empire and is for the purpose of registering individuals so they can be taxed.** The census is described in relation to the administration of Quirinius in Syria. The reference to the “first” census indicates Luke’s awareness of other censuses (including a census in AD 6; Ac 5:37). “**Own town**” in Luke 2:3 **refers to a person’s ancestral town.** Bethlehem is the town David was from (1Sa 17:12,58) and is called “the City of David” (2Sa 5:7,9). **Joseph travels to the City of David because he is a descendant of David** (Lk 1:27; cf. 2Sa 7:16).

Jesus is Mary’s son. He is wrapped and placed in a manger (a term found only in Lk 2:7,12,16; 13:15 [stall] in the New Testament). There was no space for them in the “guest room.” Though this lodging place could refer to public accommodations in the town, a different Greek term, translated “inn,” is used in Luke 10:34 to refer to public lodging. **Thus Luke 2:7 is referring to the location of a “manger” and “guest room” within a first-century house.**

**2:8–21** In this night setting, the brightness of the glory of the Lord shines around the shepherds, and they are afraid. But the shepherds shouldn’t fear, because the angel is announcing good news that will cause “great joy.” This joy is for all the people, a group that will be clarified as the narrative proceeds (cf. vv. 14,32; 24:47). Notes of joy resound throughout these opening chapters, and they frame Luke’s Gospel (1:14,44,47,58; 2:10;

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

**21** On the **eighth day**, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

### Jesus Presented in the Temple

**22** When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord” [b]), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”[c]

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss[d] your servant in peace.  
30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.”

24:52). The good news of great joy concerns what has happened “today” in Bethlehem. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah from the line of David, the anointed Davidic king. He is also the Lord who has come to save his people.

The results of Jesus’ birth are declared with angelic praise. “Glory” in this context means giving honor to God. The praise emphasizes God’s initiative and purpose in salvation rather than salvation by human merit. In Luke 2:15 the angel’s message is seen to be from God. Whereas the crowds marveled at the news, Mary’s personal response is one of ongoing reflection (though this doesn’t mean she has complete understanding). To give glory to God in praise is a regular response in Luke (often with reference to Jesus; cf. 5:25–26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43; 23:47). Again, what the shepherds have heard and seen has taken place just as it had been told to them. Praise fittingly concludes this account. Mary and Joseph obey God’s instructions by naming the child Jesus, and they fulfill the old covenant law by circumcising Jesus on the eighth day (2:21; cf. 1:31; Lev 12:3).

**2:22–35** Shifting the focus from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, the setting is again in the temple, where Luke’s Gospel began and where it will conclude (24:53). The purification probably includes both Joseph and Mary because Joseph will participate in the sacrifice for the dedication of a firstborn, which Luke 2:23 indicates (see Ex 13:2,12; Lev 12:3–4). Mary and Joseph obey the law of the Lord and dedicate Jesus to the service of the Lord. Echoing the praise of Mary and Zechariah in Luke 1, Simeon and Anna also praise God for this child. The focus here turns to the fulfillment in Jesus of the long-awaited hopes of the godly in Israel. Similar hopes conclude Luke’s Gospel in Luke 23–24. In this setting the righteous wait for the consolation of Israel, and some wait for the redemption of Jerusalem (2:25,38). Likewise, in Luke 23–24 the righteous wait for the kingdom of God, and some hope that Jesus will redeem Israel (23:50–51; 24:21). The word “now” in Luke 2:29 emphasizes this as the climactic moment of Simeon’s life. Simeon’s praise and readiness to depart now is because he has seen the Lord’s salvation, prepared for all peoples (including Gentiles; vv. 31–32). Simeon then turns to bless Joseph and Mary. The focus, however, is on Mary and the heart-wrenching times ahead. The “falling and rising of many” probably refers to the division that will take place in Israel as some accept Jesus and others reject him, thus anticipating opposition to Jesus.

33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, **35** so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

**36** There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. **38** Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

**39** When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. **40** And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

### The Boy Jesus at the Temple

**41** Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. **42** When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.

**43** After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

**44** Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

**45** When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

**46** After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

**47** Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

**48** When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

**49** "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know **I had to be in my father's house**?" [f]

**50** But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

**2:36–40** Luke continues the themes of expectation and temple activity. The emphasis on Anna's old age and persistence in worshiping at the temple heightens her thankfulness at the arrival of Jesus. Simeon praised God and spoke to the parents; similarly, Anna thanks God and speaks to all the faithful people of God about Jesus. As has been emphasized throughout, Joseph and Mary have obeyed the law of the Lord. They return home, where Jesus grows physically and in wisdom and in favor with God (cf. vv. 41–52; 7:35).

**2:41–52** These verses are linked to the infancy narratives by way of the concluding summary statement (v. 52) that recalls verse 40 and Luke 1:80. **Jesus is now 12 years old and speaks for the first time in Luke's Gospel.** This episode prepares for the beginning of Jesus' public ministry by showing his awareness of his unique relationship with the Father. This passage continues the focus on Jerusalem and the dedication of Jesus' parents to obeying God and his law. With the large number of travelers returning to Galilee from the Passover in Jerusalem, Jesus' parents did not notice that Jesus had stayed behind. When they return to Jerusalem, they find him in the temple courts with the teachers. Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel, Jesus' questions seek to engage his listeners in order to draw out a lesson for them (6:9; 9:18; 18:40–41). But the emphasis here is on Jesus' wisdom. He is not sitting at the feet of these teachers; he is "among" them as a teacher. The cause of their amazement is his intelligent answers. Jesus' first words in Luke's Gospel indicate an early awareness of his unique relationship with God ("**my Father's house**"). In light of Luke 1:35, the uses of "Lord" (1:43; 2:11) and "Savior" (1:47; 2:11)—and the use of "your father" to refer to Joseph in Luke 2:48—the reference to "my Father" in verse 49 appears to offer a specific confirmation concerning **Jesus' divine sonship. Jesus' role as the authoritative instructor of God's will is being introduced here.** Jesus' parents do not understand what he has said to them. This is a further indication of the magnitude of Jesus' words. It will take some time for his parents to put all this together. Jesus' continued obedience to his parents is set in the context of his obedience to God, his Father.

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Footnotes

Luke 2:2 Or This census took place before

Luke 2:23 Exodus 13:2,12

Luke 2:24 Lev. 12:8

Luke 2:29 Or promised, / now dismiss

Luke 2:37 Or then had been a widow for eighty-four years.

Luke 2:49 Or be about my Father's business