

LESSON SIX

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

TEXT: Matthew chapter 1 and 2 & Luke chapter 1 and 2.

A. THE ANNUNCIATION:

God ordained that His Son be born of a human mother in order that He might live a complete human life. *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* (Genesis 3:15). *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law"* (Galatians 4:4).

Mary, a virgin of Nazareth, was chosen for the honor of becoming the mother of the Son of God. Six months after the angelic announcement foretelling John the Baptist's birth, an angel informed Mary that she was to be the mother of the Redeemer. The Holy Ghost would overshadow her and the child to be born would be the Son of God. Mary had been favored of God with the privilege earnestly desired by Jewish mothers - the honor of giving birth to the Messiah.

Mary was betrothed to a godly man named Joseph. When Joseph found that Mary was with child, he planned to put her away, but learned from an angel that the child was begotten of the Holy Ghost, and was to be virgin born.

The student should note that "virgin birth" is not the same as the "immaculate conception" which is the dogma of the Roman Catholic church to the effect that Mary was born without the taint of original sin.

B. THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR:

1. DATE:

The birthdate of our Lord was timed perfectly. Paul wrote that Jesus was born in "fulness of time" (Galatians 4:4). God is never late nor early; He is always right on time.

God apparently planned that the exact day should not be known because of the tendency to worship holy days and places. However, it is possible to have an idea of the approximate time of Christ's birth. Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was scheduled for 8 BC but it is known that this census was taken in Egypt in 6 BC, and very likely was taken in Palestine in the following year of 5 BC. Herod died in 4 BC and Herod was still living when Jesus was born. John began his reign in the fifteenth year of Tiberius at the age of thirty, making his birth fall in the year 5 BC. Very likely John was born in the spring of 5 BC and Jesus was born six months later in the fall of the same year.

We do not know the day and the month of His birth. It took place while the flocks were still in open pasture. Therefore it had to be in late summer or early fall, not later than October.

The 25th of December was the date of the Roman pagan feast of Saturnalia. It was a time of great revelry and debauchery. It was a time of good will when no criminal was executed and friends gave gifts to one another. For this whole day the slaves enjoyed their freedom. The Christians took advantage of this holiday to spend the day celebrating the birth of our Lord.

2. PLACE:

In taking the census it was commanded that the Jews should enroll in their native towns. Joseph and Mary were both of Davidic descent, whose native city was Bethlehem. This was in fulfillment of prophecy. *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler of Israel"* (Micah 5:2).

Bethlehem is located six miles south of Jerusalem. It was a beautiful town surrounded by terraces covered with vines and fruit trees. It was the native town of King David. Near this town Rachel had died in childbirth. It also was the town of Ruth and Boaz.

When they reached Bethlehem, they found the town crowded with the many that had come for the enrollment. There were no accommodations to be found so they were forced to spend the night in the open courtyard where the animals were housed.

3. THE PRAISE OF ANGELS:

On the plains east of Bethlehem there were humble Judean shepherds who were watching their flocks. It was to these most humble men that God revealed His best and highest.

An angel suddenly stood before them and a great light shone around them. The angel calmed their fears with the joyful news. *"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."*

Hastening into Bethlehem the shepherds found Mary and Joseph, with the newborn babe lying in the manger, just as the angel had said. Mary had had no one to minister to her. She herself had wrapped the child in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger. The shepherds made known what had been spoken to them about the child. All were astonished at these things, but Mary treasured what she heard and meditated on them.

C. CIRCUMCISION AND PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE:

When eight days passed Jesus was circumcised according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:3). At that time He was named. The parents usually selected the names of their children but God through Gabriel named Jesus (Jehovah-Saviour).

The purification of the parents and redemption of the first born son took place according to the law forty-one days after the birth (Leviticus 12:6). In the presentation in the Temple the rich were to bring a lamb, the poor were to bring two young pigeons. Mary's gift would indicate their humble circumstances.

There was in Jerusalem a godly man named Simeon. To this aged man it had been revealed that he would not die until he should have seen the Lord's Anointed. When Joseph and Mary entered to present Jesus to the priest, Simeon took Jesus into his arms and blessed God.

Simeon gave utterance to his praise to God in Poetic prophecy. The years of his prayers and patient waiting were at last rewarded. His years of study of the prophecies had permitted Him to see the suffering Redeemer where others sought only a temporal King.

Simeon's hymn may be divided into three stanzas:

1. Recognition of the approaching end of his life with thanksgiving and prayer for a peaceful end (Luke 2:29-30).
2. Declaration of the infant Saviour, a Universal Light for all nations and the true glory of Israel.
3. Prophecy of the suffering at Calvary and the personal sorrow of Mary.

The prophetess, Anna, of the tribe of Aser and of a prominent family, had been a widow for eighty-four years after being married seven years. This meant that she was over one hundred years old. Deeply moved by the words of Simeon, she burst into thanks and praise to God, and spoke about the infant Jesus.

D. COMING OF THE WISE MEN:

There came to Jerusalem Gentile scholars who enquired where they might find the King of the Jews, whose birth had been announced to them by a strange star. These men were students of science, especially of astrology and religion. They came from the East, very likely from Persia, Arabia and Babylon.

When the Wise Men enquired concerning the place of Messiah's birth, King Herod called a meeting of the priests and scholars, who informed him that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the King. Herod immediately planned to destroy Him and instructed the Wise Men to bring word when they had found him. However, they were warned in a dream and returned to their own country by another way. The parents of Jesus were warned by an angel and fled to Egypt.

Joseph and Mary were no longer in the stable but were living in a house. When the wise men left Herod, they again saw the star, which guided them to the house. They entered, saw the babe with His mother, fell down and worshipped. They then opened their treasure chests and presented gold and costly spices. Frankincense was an odorous gum, and myrrh was a gum used in the orient as perfume and also as spice, medicine and for embalming.

When the Wise Men failed to return, Herod was angry and ordered that all the children of Bethlehem from the age of two and under should be killed.

Joseph and Mary remained in Egypt unto the death of Herod. They then returned to Galilee and settled in Nazareth.

E. THE VISIT TO JERUSALEM:

We are told very little about the boyhood days of Jesus. There are two verses that tell us of His growth and development. *"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him"* (Luke 2:40). *"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"* (Luke 2:52).

The Jewish child's education began in the home. As soon as the child could talk, the mother taught him the SHEMA (Deuteronomy 6:4, 9; Numbers 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41). The father was responsible to teach his son the Torah. We can be certain that Joseph and Mary

were diligent in their responsibility. The formal education began at the age of six in the local synagogue. From six to ten years of age the chief textbook was the Old Testament.

Only once are we given a glimpse of his boyhood days. This was an occasion when He accompanied His parents to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. He was twelve years of age. When His parents started back to Nazareth they traveled one whole day before they discovered that He had been left behind. They hastened back and found Him on the third day in the temple sitting at the feet of the learned Doctors. Everyone was amazed at the wisdom and knowledge of this twelve-year-old boy.

The reply He gave His mother revealed that even then He was conscious of His identity and mission. *"Wish ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).*

It should be noted that He submitted to His parents and obeyed them (verse 51).

