

The Life of Christ

*Sponsored by:
The Christadelphians*

*Learn to Read the Bible Effectively
Life of Christ Seminar
Week 2 - The Messiah is born*

SECTION 4

The Herald of a King

In Section 1, we referred to the promise given by God to the children of Israel through the prophet Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament. - A promise of future redemption. In the last few verses, God acknowledged that there was a remnant of His people who “esteemed His name” (Mal. 3:16).

The LORD promises that they will be His, and their names will be written in the Book of Remembrance. He will, indeed, remember all His promises throughout the centuries to those who love and cherish Him. (Bible echo - Rev. 21:26, 27)

He makes a declaration to such people, in the time of Malachi Chapter 4:2 – *“but for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”*

He is, of course, alluding to the fact that light will once again return to this dark world, and that a healing will take place. We can see this as a fore-shadowing, fulfilled and echoed in the birth of His Son, through whom sin would be overcome. The breach caused between God and man because of sin would be healed through the Saviour that He would provide.

In the first 4 verses of chapter 4, He indicates that there will also be a time of terrible judgment upon those who continue to reject Him so that “...all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze ...” (Bible echo - Rev. 20:15). Righteousness will prevail.

Then in verse 5, He declares that a sign would herald the coming of the Lord of righteousness and judgment:

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord” Malachi 4:5

The Promise Remembered

As we turn to the New Testament, we see in the Gospel records, that the Jews of Jesus’ day lived in expectation of great events. Most were only looking for relief from Roman oppression, but, true to the words in Malachi, some in the nation had true faith and looked for the coming of a Messiah, who would be their spiritual Saviour. In the early chapters of the Gospels, examples of such faithful are given, such as Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, Joseph, and Mary. (Luke 1:5; Matt. 1:18).

To such faithful hearts, would come the first stirrings of the Spirit, preparing them for the birth of the true Messiah, Jesus Christ. Of these, in this section, we will look at Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Both Zacharias and Elizabeth had significant names. Zacharias means “Yahweh has remembered” and Elizabeth means “the oath of El.” Together they signify that the time had come for God to remember His oath.

Luke, in chapter 1 of his Gospel, sets the time frame as in the days of Herod, King of Judea, and defines their family lines (verse 5). He then describes them:

“and they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in years.” Luke 1:6, 7.

A Bible Echo

To anyone who is familiar with the record regarding Abraham and Sarah, who were in the same state when Sarah bore Isaac, it is impossible to miss a very significant Bible echo here. But there is even greater significance to this echo. In a similar manner, throughout the history of His people, God has signified the birth of individuals for whom He had specific purposes. These were miraculous births that would leave no doubt that His plan and purpose were involved. This served a two-fold purpose in also foreshadowing the miraculous birth of His own Son.

The wonder of this echo becomes even more awesome, if we investigate the record of 1 Samuel, chapter 2, verse 1. Toward the end of the time of the Judges, a very devoted woman named Hannah was also barren, and longed for a child. God answered her prayers, and she bore Samuel, who was to become the last Judge. After the birth of her son, Hannah, unselfishly, dedicated the child’s life to the service of the Lord, and expresses her immense gratitude to God in a prayer of thanksgiving. During this prayer, she makes a statement: **“even the barren gives birth to seven...”** (1 Sam. 2:5)

In the Bible record, six barren women are specifically mentioned. Each of them ultimately gave birth, and their sons were all significant in the plan of God, as He carried out His purpose of deliverance. The names of these sons echo through the history of men, as it is unfolded in the Bible.

Consider these women and their children:

SARAH: Isaac	MANOAH’S WIFE: Samson
REBEKAH: Jacob and Esau	HANNAH: Samuel
RACHEL: Joseph	ELIZABETH: John the Baptist

Seven significant individuals in the history of God’s people were born by six barren women. The next one would be the most miraculous and most significant of all!!

A Prayer is Answered

It was about the year 6 or 7 B.C. when Zacharias, who was a priest, was officiating in the temple in Jerusalem. He was burning incense at the altar during the evening prayer. No sooner was the incense sprinkled on the hot coals in his censor, than there appeared a glorious angel of the Lord, as though coming from the Holy of Holies, from the Lord's right hand. Zacharias was mystified and very fearful, but immediately the angel reassured him.

“But the angel said to him, do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bare you a son, and you will give him the name, John.” Luke 1:13

The Silence Broken

True to the promise given in Malachi, God was presenting the sign that would herald the birth of the Messiah. The angel describes the type of person that John will be, and then, in verses 16 and 17 he confirms the sign:

“and he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn back the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:16, 17

The Angel Gabriel

Zacharias, as a devout and righteous priest, would undoubtedly have been familiar with the testaments, and, at this announcement, he would surely have thought of that very significant promise in Malachi and realized what this announcement meant.

He then questioned the identity of the angel, who replies that he is “... Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.”

Upon hearing the angel's name, would Zacharias' thoughts have raced back in time to the days of Daniel and his prophecy. In chapter 9 of the book of Daniel, we see Daniel speaking, praying, confessing his sins, and the sins of the people of Israel, before the Lord God. He was seeking understanding regarding the future of God's people as they lived in bondage in Babylon.

The angel, who then identifies himself as Gabriel, suddenly stands before him in response to his prayers. In verse 24, he states:

“70 weeks have been decreed for your people and your Holy City, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy place.”

He then defines the beginning of this time period and specifically relates it to the Messiah. (Daniel 9:25, 26) The following quote is taken from Nelson's Bible Encyclopedia:

“Daniel predicts the Messiah will redeem his people after 70 sets of 7 years (“weeks”), beginning with Nehemiah’s return to Jerusalem in 440 B.C. (Daniel 9:24). The Messiah is to be “cut off” at the end of 69 sets of sevens (Daniel 9:25, 26), or after 483 years starting with the proclamation of Artaxerxes, in 444 B.C. This turns out to be the very week that Jesus was crucified, taking into account all the necessary calculations.”

So, for those reading the scriptures and discerning the signs of the times, they would know that the coming of the Messiah was near!

The Birth of John the Baptist

In verse 18 of chapter 1 of Luke, Zacharias questioned the announcement of the angel, doubting the possibility of having a child due to his age and his wife's continued barrenness and old age. As a result, he was struck dumb and told that he would be unable to speak until after the birth, because he did not believe immediately.

The record in Chapter 1 of Luke, beginning at verse 57, confirms that on the eighth day after the birth of his son, Zacharias, who had been unable to speak since that announcement, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. Verses 68-79 provide a wonderful declaration of God's remembrance of His promise and the seed of the house of David through whom this promise would be fulfilled (Jesus). Zacharias states that his own son John will go forward before the Lord to prepare the way.

Luke concludes this record regarding John with the simple statement, in verse 80:

“and the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

And so John remained in the wilderness, out of the public eye, until years later, when he bursts upon the scene just prior to the beginning of Christ's ministry, preparing the way for Him. It was then he became known as John the Baptist.

LESSON FOR US

The Lord does answer the prayers of those who endeavour to walk in the commandments and requirements of His way. Faithful followers, who diligently search His word, will find the way enlightened and God will address their needs, in relationship to salvation.

“For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose ‘heart is completely His...” 2nd Chronicles 16:9

Bringing Israel to Repentance

This great work of pronouncing the need for repentance, was to make John a herald of the Messiah. As Elijah, the prophet, ran before the chariot of the King, Ahab, (1 Kings 18:46), so John would go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elias. (Elias is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Elijah.)

Without any preliminaries, like Elijah the Tishbite, the Scriptures suddenly and dramatically present John on the scene. Mark's Gospel graphically demonstrates this.

“The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.”

As it is written in Isaiah, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ready, the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.’

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan river, confessing their sins.

And John was clothed with camel's hair, and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey.

And he was preaching, and saying, After me one is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.” (Mark 1:1-7)

A Word Study

References to this man throughout the New Testament, refer to him as John the Baptist. This was because in his preaching to the children of Israel, who had lived in the darkness of sin for 400 years, he insisted upon baptism as a symbol of repentance.

This provides two significant echoes from the Old Testament. Passing through waters was consistently a symbol of God's children being drawn out of the heathen nations around them. We can think of Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, passing through the waters of the Red Sea.

Joshua led the next generation of the children of Israel, out of the wilderness, into the land of promise, by passing through the waters of the Jordan River. These are examples of the foreshadowing of being drawn out or crossing over, through water.

Christ reaffirmed the importance of baptism in His ministry, when He stated that unless one is born again of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

Throughout their ministries, the Apostles confirmed this need for baptism into the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, symbolic of repentance and forgiveness and re-birth. The act of baptism throughout the New Testament is a confirmation of understanding and desire for forgiveness, on the part of one who realizes what Christ's sacrifice means.

If we look in a Strong's concordance, the word "baptize," used throughout the New Testament, is the Greek word "baptizo" (Strong's #907), from which the English word obviously comes. The Greek word means: "to make whelmed, i.e., fully wet", hence the idea of baptism being a full immersion in water.

John Fulfills His Role

In due time, John's stern, authoritative message swept through the nation like a prairie fire, and he was well received by the people, with crowds flocking to him, accepting his call to repentance and return to the precepts of God.

He had made ready the way of the Lord, and the time had come for him to complete his role as herald, and introduce Jesus.

His dramatic statement, before the throngs that followed him, is recorded in John 1:29.

He declares: **"Behold the Lamb of God."**

This statement encompassed all the divine revelation that preceded the birth of Christ. John's work was then done and his decline began (John 3:30).

His Death

In his proclamation of a return to the ways of the Lord, John had made some enemies, especially among the leadership of Israel. Prominent among these enemies was Herod the Tetrarch, whom John condemned publicly for marrying Herodias, the wife of Herod's brother Philip. (Matt. 14:3). The wife plotted John's death, because of this, and eventually, when John was imprisoned, she succeeded in tricking her husband into having John beheaded.

Relationship to Elijah

The Jews were aware of the prophecy regarding the spirit of Elijah heralding the birth of the Messiah. In the early days of his preaching, they sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem to question John's identity, asking directly: "Are you Elijah?" (John 1:21)

Jesus' own disciples questioned Him regarding the coming of Elijah (Matt. 17:10).

Jesus clearly stated that Elijah had already come, and the disciples understood that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist. (Matt. 17:12, 13)

If we study the record of Elijah the Prophet in the Old Testament, we see the striking similarities that verify that John's life provided an unquestionable echo of this mighty prophet, and that he was, indeed, the Herald of the King.

In the same manner as John, Elijah, the Tishbite, appears suddenly and dramatically in the record of the Kings of Israel. Even his appearance foreshadows John the Baptist.

(2 Kings 1:8): “and they answered him, “he was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins.” And he said, it is Elijah the Tishbite.”

Elijah’s activities emphasized unconditional loyalties to God that were required of the nation of Israel. He was opposed to the accepted laxity of standards in his days. His views conflicted with those of King Ahab, who, contrary to Jewish law, married Jezebel, daughter of the King of Tyre. She was an idolater.

Ahab was strongly influenced by her and accepted her ways and her religion. Jezebel plotted against the life of Elijah, forcing him to flee for his life. (1 Kings 19:15).

When Elijah’s work was finished, he gave way to the prophet Elisha, a prophet whose life and work has been compared to that of the ministry of Jesus. Elisha’s name speaks of grace, “Yahweh my Saviour.” Jesus’ name means “Yah Saves”.

So, with Elijah, and in his eventual giving way to Elisha , we see the foreshadow of John the Baptist, who gave way to the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

A House that is Ready

John the Baptist had certainly performed his role well and the stage was set for the coming of Jesus. But sadly, the people slipped back into their old ways and eventually entered another period of darkness. - A time of dispersal. The children of Israel, in Jesus’ time, rejected the light that shone upon them. They rejected the Son of God, the sacrificial Lamb that the Father, Himself, had provided. - A promise made to Abraham.

Jesus used these events as a figure in a Parable regarding His position as master of His Father’s house. (Luke 11: 24-26) He speaks of a house, swept and tidy, ready for its new occupant. But when the rightful owner came to his own, his own received him not. So, the last state of that house became worse than the first, and consequently, the Jews were scattered. Then, nearly 2,000 years later, because God’s promises, Israel became a nation again in 1948, as God began drawing back His people out of the nations into which they had been dispersed, following the destruction of the temple by Rome in A.D. 70.

In our generation, we are privileged to witness the next stage in God’s plan, as we too, prepare for the coming of a King.

LESSON FOR US

As a Nazarite, dedicated to God from the womb, John kept himself from the ways of the world, awaiting his time to proclaim the coming of the King. He was committed to following the ways of God and boldly proclaiming the good news. We too, should endeavour to resist the grip of worldly influence as we await our Redeemer, and preach boldly the Gospel message of Christ’s coming Kingdom.

“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 3:2

SECTION 5

The Birth of a King

At the time of Jesus' birth, Divine Providence and prophecy had merged to make circumstances ideal for the presentation of the "Good News" from God. Rome had conquered the world. Roman law guaranteed peace, and well-made roads made travel possible. Greek culture and language had made their impact, and the translation of the Hebrew Scripture into Greek gave a wider audience to God's Word.

With the conditions of that time, those who watched and waited in faithful hope, would discern the hand of God. In the place required, and according to the time prophesied, Jesus was born, as Son of David and Son of God, the future King of Israel and of the whole world.

The Announcement

Three months before the birth of John the Baptist, to Elizabeth, (Luke 1:26), important events were taking place in Nazareth of Galilee, in the home of a young virgin girl related to Elizabeth. Mary belonged to the house of David and was betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter, who was also of the house of David.

The Angel Gabriel came to her home, to announce the wondrous privilege that was hers. She was to become mother to the heir of David's throne, the Son of God.

Gabriel began the announcement with the words: "**Hail, favoured one! The Lord is with you.**" (Luke 1:28).

A Sharp Contrast

The word, hail," is literally "rejoice." She is to be filled with joy in the favour that she has found with God and in the privilege of this birth.

We compare this with the first announcement regarding birth recorded in the Old Testament. As a result of sin, Eve was told: "***...I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children...***" *Gen. 3:16*

Now, at last, through the seed of this woman Mary, the way was to be opened to take away the dreadful effects of the sin in Eden. This rejoicing in the birth of Jesus would foreshadow the great rejoicing that will take place throughout the world as a result of Jesus' life and sacrifice. - His triumph over sin.

Mary's Reaction

Mary was frightened at the appearance of the Angel and his greeting, but he quickly assured her that she was not to be afraid. He told her that she would conceive and bear a son, whom she would call "Jesus."

A Bible Echo

The Bible echoes relating to the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are greatly beyond our ability to address in this course. The records of the Old Testament, almost all point forward toward God's redeeming work of grace, which alone could provide redemption to His creation despite sin. In this, they foreshadow His Son, Jesus, in whom, and through whom, this work would be culminated.

As a guide to personal study of the Life of Christ, as revealed in the Gospels, we will endeavour to address some of them, suggesting the way in which Bible aids, such as concordances, and especially cross references to associated Bible records, can bring alive to us the redeeming work that was, and will be, accomplished in the Son of God.

In this announcement to Mary, Gabriel provides her with a brief, but profound, description of this child.

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His Father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end." Luke 1: 32, 33

Consider the thoughts that must have come racing into Mary's mind at that moment, as these words echoed the prophecy of Isaiah, from many centuries before. God had promised just such a child. Let the wonderful announcement of this birth to Mary encourage you to remember God's faithfulness to keep His promises.

"For a child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forever more. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this." Isaiah 9:6-7

Mary then asks, "How this can be?", because she was a virgin. The angel's response and his choice of words demonstrate the foreshadowing in God's activities and association with His people throughout the ages.

The angel answers (verse 35): ***"...The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the Holy offspring shall be called the Son of God."***

The use of the word “overshadow” would clearly explain to this girl that she would conceive as a result of the action of God’s Holy Spirit, or through His power. Her knowledge of God’s word would eliminate the need for any further clarification. Just as we look for echoes in the Scriptures, those in Jesus’ time, who were watching and waiting, would immediately recognize echoes in the wonderful events that were beginning to happen.

This “overshadowing” is the same action of the Holy Spirit that was described when the cloud abode on the tent of the congregation as recorded in Exodus chapter 40, verse 34: ***“Then the cloud covered the tent of the meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”***

This cloud signified the presence of God in the midst of the people throughout their journeys in the wilderness. Now this overshadowing of Mary would signify the presence and activity of God in the conception of His Son. Just as the cloud manifested His presence in the tent, His Son would be a manifestation of Him and all His power.

The tent of the congregation in the wilderness was the meeting place between God and man. Now, in the child conceived by Mary, was another and better meeting place between God and man.

The same idea echoes from Genesis 1:2 **“And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”** The Hebrew word for ‘moved’ has the idea of hovering, brooding, or fluttering. This was at the first creation where God spoke and “it was so”. Now, centuries later God would begin a new creation, the Word would become flesh and His Holy Spirit power would ‘overshadow’ this young, faithful maiden.

The similarity in wording would have been uppermost in Mary’s mind as she quickly acquiesced to the will of God, and said: ***“...Be it done to me according to your word. ...” Luke 1:38***

The record in Matthew provides us with additional detail regarding the announcement of the birth of Jesus. In this case, the emphasis is on the announcement to Joseph, Mary’s betrothed.

Matthew, chapter 1, verses 18 and 19, shows that Joseph was facing a perplexing problem. Verse 18 discreetly records that she was found to be pregnant before they had “come together.” In verse 19, Joseph is described as her husband. This is not a contradiction, as among the Jews, betrothal was considered to be a legal tie between man and woman. From the moment of betrothal, or as we would call it, engagement, they were regarded as married, even though the marriage had not yet been consummated. The betrothal could not be dissolved except by divorce. The fact that Mary was pregnant would brand her as an adulteress. We see in verse 19, that Joseph was a righteous man, who did not want to publicly disgrace her, so he proposed to quietly dissolve the union.

He had come to this decision, but had not yet acted upon it, when an angel came to him in a dream, advising him that his betrothed had conceived miraculously through the power, or Holy Spirit, of God.

The next statement of the angel recorded in verse 21, leaves no doubt regarding the purpose for this conception. It stands today as an exciting expression of God's purpose to each one of us, who reads this record in faith. Verse 21: ***“And she shall bear a son. And you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”***

Matthew, in his record, then provides us with an unmistakable Bible echo: ***“Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, God with us.” Matt: 1: 22, 23,***

A Bible reference will immediately take you back to Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14: ***“Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”***

In referring to this promised son as Immanuel, (God with us), God is clearly identifying Jesus as His Son. This miraculous birth will signify that Jesus will manifest God's presence, and that He will be endowed with all His Father's attributes and authority, even though He is also the Son of Man.

A much earlier, Joseph, as a type, or foreshadowing of Jesus, demonstrated this relationship. Although a son of Israel, he was given all authority in Egypt, and was second only to Pharaoh. In all respects, he manifested Pharaoh in relationship to the people of Egypt.

The names and titles of God show the various aspects of His character, and His association with His people. Some of these names are applied to Jesus, especially in Messianic prophecies, because as the Son he represented His father to the people!

As “Immanuel,” Jesus is second only to His Father in authority and position. The Apostle John bears witness to this in John 3:33-36: ***“He who has received His witness has set His seal to this that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him.”***

Later in this same Gospel, in chapter 5, John states: ***“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; And He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”***

And yet, even though He was endowed with all this authority, and was, indeed, a manifestation of His Father on earth, Jesus acknowledged that He was still subject to the authority and power of His Father.

We need look no further than this same chapter in John and read Jesus' words: ***“Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. John 5:19***

“I can do nothing on my own initiative...” John 5:30

Coming back to the record regarding Joseph in Matthew chapter 1, we see his faith translated into action, as Matthew records that Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the angel commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, and had no sexual relations with her until after the birth of Jesus.

Mary’s Son

The angel’s words in the announcements to Mary and to Joseph in these two accounts in Luke and Matthew combine to provide clear statements about Jesus. They describe Mary’s son as:

1. **The Saviour from sin (Matt. 1:21)**
2. **Truly man (Luke 1:31,32)**
3. **Son of God (Luke 1:31,32)**
4. **King of Israel (Luke 1:31,32)**

Heritage of a King - The Throne of Israel

Genealogies of Jesus Christ are listed in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38.

The child born to Mary was to be the son promised to David. But he was also to be the seed promised to Abraham.

Mary was of the line of David. She was betrothed to one who stood in direct line to the throne of David. In Matthew, the genealogy given of Jesus is that of the kingly line. He is therefore shown to be the legal inheritor of the promises made to both Abraham and David because the inheritance belonged by descent to Joseph. As the son of Mary, through her marriage to Joseph, Jesus, was regarded as the first born of her husband. Thus, He held the legal right of Joseph to the inheritance, in this case the Throne!

But as Mary’s son, Jesus was also biologically and directly descended from Abraham and David, as shown in Luke. In every way, He was the promised seed - “the seed of Abraham” - and “the seed of David.” - “Heir to the throne.”

In these two records of Luke and Matthew, the great promise of God to David became flesh. David must have surely been perplexed by what seemed to be an inherent contradiction in the promise made to him in *2nd Samuel, chapter 7, verses 12-14: I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels...I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. I will be His Father and He shall be My Son.*”

These sections of the Gospel record resolve this in a way that David could hardly have foreseen. The genealogy established descent from David, but the circumstances of His birth show that the Messiah is, quite literally, the Son of God.

The miraculous birth of Jesus from a virgin was absolutely necessary. He had to have one human parent. Otherwise, He would not have been able to share our human feelings. In terms of Genesis 3:15, Jesus was the “seed of the woman”.

So, Jesus, through His mother, inherited our weak human nature. Consequently, as the New Testament says: ***“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*** ***Hebrews 4:15***

Without one human parent He would never have known what temptation was. But if He had two human parents, He could never have conquered every temptation. The last three words of the foregoing verse declare that He did conquer all temptations - ***yet without sin***. He had to have a divine parent to inherit enough strength to do that.

So, the virgin birth is not just a wonder story tacked into the Gospels. It was an absolute essential to the life and work of Jesus. Without it, He never could have fulfilled the purpose that he was divinely ordained to accomplish.

Through the two genealogies recorded in the Gospels, Jesus’ claim to the throne of David is established. As shown, Matthew’s Gospel establishes His legal position through Joseph and Luke’s Gospel establishes His natural position through Mary.

LESSON FOR US

As you read of, and remember, the announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Gospel records, recognizing all the signs and foreshadows that were brought together in His birth, think of His name, signifying what His birth means to you as an individual.

JESUS -	Yah is salvation
CHRIST -	The anointed One
IMMANUEL -	God with us

In Jesus, the anointed one of God, is to be found the salvation of God. Through Him, God is manifested, and is with us.

The Birth of a King

Matthew (chapter 1), and Luke (chapter 1:26-37; and chapter 2:1-30) are the two Gospel writers who provide details relative to the birth of Christ.

It is Luke who puts the birth of Jesus into a world perspective: *“Now it came about in those days, that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.” Luke 2:1*

This was part of a sequence of censuses taken every 14 years in the Roman provinces. Luke then adds a note which would cast doubt on his creditability from those who challenge the authenticity of the Bible, if his statement were not true.

He says, in verse 2: *“This was the first census taken while Quirinius was Governor of Syria.”*

Historical Challenge

Many modern critics have sought to challenge Luke on this ground, saying that the taxing which Luke referred to took place ten years later in A.D. 6, in order to correspond with Quirinius’ position as Governor. Subsequent discovery, however, has proven them to be wrong and Luke correct.

Quirinius (Cyrenius, in some translations), also held the position of Governor of Syria in B.C. 5 and 4, when he began his census. (See Story of the Bible, Volume 8, pages 21 and 22 and the work of historical researcher Sir. William Ramsey).

Bethlehem

It was necessary for all individuals to return to their own city to register for this census. So, Luke records that Joseph went up from Nazareth of Galilee to Judea into Bethlehem, the city of David. This was, of course, because he was of the house and family of David.

In an apparently natural manner, God was shaping events according to His will. Caesar Augustus wanted to gather in the fruits of the vast Empire won by Rome’s victorious legions. It would never have occurred to him that from this action would come the birth of the destined King of the World in exactly the manner prescribed by God through His Prophets.

When Joseph took his pregnant wife Mary on this journey south to Bethlehem, on the orders of a pagan Gentile ruler, prophecy was being fulfilled. *“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you one will go forth for Me to be a ruler in Israel...” Micah 5:2*

We all know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This is an established fact. Even the arch enemies of the Christian faith in Israel, the Pharisees and Sadducees, never denied it. But the faithful readers of God's word must recognize how unlikely it was for that prophecy to have been fulfilled by chance.

Bethlehem was, as the prophecy mentioned, a very small place. In Canada, today, if a follower of Canadian politics attempted to predict where the next Prime Minister of Canada would come from, he would stand a reasonable chance of being correct if he selected either Quebec or Ontario. But if he predicted correctly that the leader of the country 20 years from now would come from Bathurst Inlet, Nunavut, the odds against him having done so would be astronomical. He would be looked upon with great regard, as a political sage.

Consider the odds against Micah predicting hundreds of years in advance that the future King of Israel, King of the World, would be born in the remote town of Bethlehem. Only under the power and inspiration of God could Micah prophesy with such accuracy.

No Room

Mary and Joseph arrived in this little town, which was overflowing with travelers, at a time when she was ready to give birth. The Son of God was born in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

This humble birth was to be the beginning for this child who was destined to be the King of the Earth. Can we see in this, a foreshadowing of a condition that has existed from that day until our own time? In a troubled busy world, how many people have no room in their hearts for the Son of God?

News of Great Joy

As we follow the narrative in Luke 2:8-20, we read of the announcement of this wondrous event to the shepherds who were tending their flocks that night. Suddenly, the darkness was illuminated by the Divine Glory (verse 9). We cannot miss the obvious echo here as the light of the world, the light of God, dispels the darkness of night.

The shepherds are frightened, but the Angel reassures them with the announcement that what was happening that night would be of world-wide benefit: *"...For behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people;" Luke 2:10*

The Message (The Good News)

Among the many prophecies regarding the birth of a Saviour, there were four that are especially relevant to this occasion, as the Angel made this announcement.

- 1. Isaiah (9:6,7) had prophesied of the 'Son born', the 'Child given', who would one day rule the world.**

2. Psalm 2 said the ‘Son born’ would be God’s Son - the ‘anointed’, or ‘Christ’ (verses 2,6 and 7).
3. Psalm 110 had called Him ‘Lord’, that is ruler or master (verse 1).
4. All this was in keeping with God’s intention to reveal Himself as ‘just’ and as a ‘Saviour’ (Isaiah 45:21).

These prophecies were being fulfilled that very night and would be manifested in Jesus Christ. Now the Angel, in his announcement, pulls these all astounding threads together saying: *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour, which is Christ the Lord” Luke 2:11*

Praising God

Then, just as suddenly as the darkness of the night had shone with the Angelic presence, a vast choir of Angels appeared saying *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” Luke 2:14*

The rendering of this verse has been taken from the American Revised Standard Version, which is closer to the original text than the King James Version, which speaks of ‘peace on earth and goodwill toward men’. We note that the ‘peace on earth’ proclaimed by the Angels is among men with whom God is pleased.

LESSONS FOR US

In the birth of Christ, we see the fulfillment of many prophecies pointing forward to the time when God would provide the perfect Sacrificial Lamb for sin - His own Son.

In the wisdom of God, prophecy is provided for our benefit. Consider just two reasons:

1. **When we witness the fulfillment of prophecy, we are provided with solid ground on which we can rest our faith in all of God’s Word. When history provides us with evidence of a fulfilled prophecy, we can have total confidence in prophecies regarding the future. In this case, accuracy regarding the birth of Jesus, means that we can confidently believe promises of His future return to this earth.**
2. **The fulfillment of these prophecies become beacons for each one of us providing reassurance that God is in control. They generate the excitement of knowing that we are getting closer to the GREAT DAY OF THE LORD as we see their fulfillment.**

As we study God’s Word, the recognition of these prophecies can stimulate our desire to be in a state of readiness and watchfulness, just as the faithful ones of the 1st Century anticipated the birth of the Saviour: *“But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:36*

SECTION 6

First Visit to Jerusalem

Only Luke's Gospel describes the first few days immediately following Jesus' birth.

The formal naming of the baby Jesus took place at the time of His circumcision on the 8th day after His birth. (Luke 2:21) It is, perhaps, interesting to note that the Bible mentions only 4 individuals who were given names by Divine instruction before their birth:

Ishmael (Genesis 16:11) – a type or fore-shadowing of unbelieving Jews

Isaac (Genesis 17:19) – a type of Christ

John the Baptist (Luke 1:13) – the herald of Christ

Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31) – the Son of God

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and His people.

Bible and Science

Written thousands of years ago, God's law specifically determined circumcision on the 8th day after birth. (Lev. 12:3) Modern science provides us with yet another item of information to confirm our faith that the Bible was written under Divine inspiration.

Recent studies have confirmed that the safest time to perform a circumcision is on the 8th day of life. Vitamin K, which causes blood to coagulate, is not produced in sufficient amounts until the 5th to 7th day. On the eighth day the body contains 10% more prothrombin **than normal**. This substance is also important in the clotting of blood. Present day technology enables us to artificially alter these circumstances. Such technology was not available in the days of Moses, so God provided the natural means to protect His people under His law.

Son of Man

This act of circumcision also declared that Mary's child, although of such Holy birth, nevertheless, shared the nature of all the other sons of Abraham. In his life of perfect obedience, he would also "cut off the flesh" by never sinning – 'true' circumcision!

The Temple

33 days later, Mary took Jesus and went with Joseph to the Temple in Jerusalem, to offer the ritual purification for motherhood that God's law demanded. (Lev. 12:4)

The sacrifice made on Mary's behalf (Luke 2:24) tells us much about the family into which Jesus was born. The offering of a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons, was the concession which the law made for extreme poverty, when the restricted means of a family simply did not allow the more usual offering of a lamb and a pigeon (Lev.12:6,8).

High Priest Designate

Luke states that at this time Jesus was to be presented to the Lord (Luke 2:21). This complies with the law given by the Lord to Moses regarding the dedication of the first born. Exodus 13:2 says: ***“Sanctify to me every first born, the first off-spring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.”***

Luke correctly records in verse 23 that this is according to the law. But significantly, in repeating that law, he includes a phrase, that is not found in any of the places where the law speaks of the consecration of the first born. ***“...Every first-born male that opens the womb shall be called Holy to the Lord.” (Luke 2:23)***

“Holy to the Lord” is a phrase used repeatedly in the Old Testament relative to the High Priest (e.g., Lev. 21:6-8; Exodus 28:36,38).

Luke, who, of course, wrote this Gospel after the death of Jesus, in these early references to Jesus' birth, hints at the truth that the Gospel ultimately disclosed. Through this child, later to become God's High Priest, is a means of cleansing and redemption for all the defilement of sin which is in human nature.

Simeon and Anna

It is in this solemn and beautiful setting in the Temple that Jesus was recognized as bringing joy to the hearts and lips of two who were waiting for the redemption of Israel.

Simeon, apparently lived only with the hope of seeing the realization of the glorious promises of God to His chosen people. He was an upright and godly man, who realized the significance of the days in which he lived, and had been rewarded with the knowledge, given to him through the Holy Spirit, that before his death, he would see the Messiah. (Luke 2:25, 26)

So, on this wonderful day, God's promise to this faithful man was fulfilled. Divine power guided him to the Temple at this very time, (verse 27) so that he knew for certain that God's purpose, especially concerned the humble family presenting their offerings.

He took the child into his arms, praising God for His mercy and goodness. His words, recorded by Luke 2:29-32, confirm that in the wisdom of God's Spirit, Simeon knew that this small child signified the fullness of God's redemption in this world of darkness and sin: ***“Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word ...”***

When the time comes, he will die in peace, having seen the beginning of the way to salvation and the overcoming of sin that God had promised way back in the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned. (See Genesis 3:15).

Mary and Joseph watched in amazement (verse 33) as Simeon, in deep exultation, proclaimed the destiny of their Son, echoing words of prophecy that had been awaiting fulfillment for centuries.

“For my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou has prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of Revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.” Luke 2:30-32

Most good reference Bibles will have at least three references to prophecies in Isaiah tied into these words of Simeon, spoken in the guidance of God’s Spirit or Power.

We have spoken much about echoes in these courses, but we can never understate their value. In this manner, God, in His wisdom, has provided guidance throughout the ages to faithful followers who love His Word. Key phrases in Simeon’s statement, immediately direct our attention to three prophecies regarding the wonderful fulfillment of God’s plan and purpose in providing salvation and grace through His Son. When we allow such phrases to direct us to the prophecies, a reading of the complete prophecy gives us greater insight into an understanding of what God is doing and how it relates to our own personal salvation. For in these, and in all such prophecies, God is providing vivid descriptions which combine to give us a picture of the conditions in which we can share when His Son returns to establish His kingdom and His Father’s glory will fill the earth.

These pictures also provide us with further insight into Jesus’ life and teachings. They add further meaning to what He did and why He suffered. In this way, we expand our understanding of God and His Son far beyond the words written in the Gospels.

As an exercise, it is suggested that the student compare these three verses in Luke with the three references in Isaiah. Look for the connecting phrases in the prophetic verses to which we are directed. Then read the complete portions of Scripture surrounding these reference verses and see how they relate to the salvation and the light that God is revealing to the world through His Son. In this way you can anticipate and watch and wait for the joy that He is preparing for those who translate their faith into action and follow Jesus as He opens the way to His Father.

The following are the three verses from Isaiah, which can be seen as linked to Simeon’s statement:

Isaiah 52:10 - “The Lord has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God”

Isaiah 42:6 - “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations,”

Isaiah 49:6 - "He says, 'it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make you a light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'"

Look at the chapters containing these verses and see the ways in which such Scriptures can be unmistakably recognized as a foreshadow of Christ and His vital part in God's plan of salvation. As an example of this, consider the first verse in Isaiah 49: ***"Listen to me, oh islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb; from the body of my mother He named me."***

Remember the statement earlier in this lesson that only four individuals were named by God before their births. Such a reference immediately narrows considerations down to four people to whom this Scripture might directly relate.

As we read through this chapter, a picture unfolds declaring God's covenant, that ultimately His people will be redeemed and restored through the work of His Son.

As a further study guide, do not end your search for understanding of God's Word in the Scriptures to which a reference is made. Look for other references in these Scriptures. As an example, a study of the references in Isaiah, chapter 52, will lead you to Psalm 98. Here we share in the Psalmist's song of joy as he presents us with a picture of the future work of the Son of God. As you read verses 2 and 3 of this Psalm, they will take you right back to Simeon as he stood in the temple holding the child Jesus in his arms.

"The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His loving kindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."
Psalm 98:2-3

As we return to chapter 2 of Luke, beginning at verse 34, we see that Simeon turned his eyes reluctantly from the child in his arms and blessed Mary and Joseph. Then in keeping with his knowledge of the trials and crucifixion that Jesus, the Lord's "suffering servant," would yet have to undergo, he warns Mary of the tragedy that she would have to endure. Ultimately, her soul would feel as pierced with a sharp sword as she stood in helpless sorrow at the foot of the cross, no doubt, sharing with her firstborn son all the agonies of crucifixion.

By this time the little family group was probably the center of attention in the Temple Court. A clue regarding this is given to us in verse 38. This interest would probably have grown when they were joined by the aged Anna, a figure who would be well known to the multitudes, for she had lived a life of consecrated service and piety in the Temple for probably 60 years.

We might conjecture that it was no coincidence that she should witness the unforgettable scene and hear the announcement from the lips of Simeon. Her recognition was instantaneous and it found expression in a prayer of deep gratitude, and a desire to speak of Jesus with all those who were looking for redemption in Israel. This is certainly a desire in which we all can share.

In the Beginning

This dedication in the Temple, was the beginning of the life of Jesus as one who is now consecrated to the Lord. It is interesting to note that during the first 40 days of His life, Jesus was treated as “a son of Abraham,” following the law for such a child. He was circumcised after the manner of the fleshly covenant. Here is an echo of the 40 days of probation noted in the Old Testament.

40 days - Moses was in the mount to receive the law (Exodus 24:18)

40 days - Moses was in the mount after the sin of the golden calf (Deut. 9:18,25)

40 days - The spies were in the promised land, resulting in the forty years punishment in the wilderness (Num.13:26; 14:34)

40 days - Elijah in Horeb (1Kings 19:8)

40 days - Jonah in Nineveh (Jonah 3:4)

On the 41st day of His life, Jesus was presented in the Temple, to the Lord. Under the law, as the firstborn male child, Jesus was to be sanctified and belonged to the Lord.

Jesus was to live His life as a manifestation of His Father, and on that very first day in the Temple, is declared to be the Light of Revelation through whom will come the salvation of God.

This theme runs as a golden thread throughout the New Testament. As one example, Paul presents an excellent summary of this theme in his letter to the Colossians. He states it as an expression of thanks to God for all that is available to the faithful through Jesus.

“Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the Saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1-12-14

He then declares of Jesus: ***“and He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation.” Colossians 1:15***

As Paul also says in Romans: ***“...Jesus was to be the first born among many brethren” (Romans 8:29)***, who would conform to His Father’s image and transfer them from darkness and sin to the inheritance of light.

That day of dedication in the Temple signified the beginning, as Jesus was consecrated to His redeeming work of salvation, as the Son of God.

Mark 1:1, Luke 1:2, and John 1:1, all introduce their Gospels with reference to the beginning of Christ’s ministry, but it is John, who puts Jesus’ life into complete perspective in relationship to God’s plan of salvation.

He presents Jesus' ministry as an echo of God's creative work in Genesis. By the power of God's Word alone, light entered a dark and formless world. ***"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness." Genesis 1:3-4,***

Jesus was the beginning of a new spiritual creation, so John presents this allusion to Genesis, so that his readers would clearly realize this. God's creative work is now manifested in His Son. His Word has become flesh. ***"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" John 1:14***

John declares to all readers of his Gospel, that from the beginning of His life of dedication, God's "Word," His Son, was with Him, in that He lived a "God-ward" life, fully, completely, absolutely. And of all mankind, this could be said only of Jesus, right from the beginning of His days: ***"He was in the beginning with God" John 1:2.*** This is verified through a consideration of the phrasing in verse 1: ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1***

So, after referring to Jesus as the Word with God, John then proclaims the Divine reflection of God in His Son.

God, through His creative Word, caused light to shine in darkness in the early days of creation. Jesus, His "Word made flesh," was the light to shine in a dark world of sin. Thus began a new Spiritual creation out of mankind, as the "Word dwelt among us." But the majority, in Jesus' day, rejected the new creation of light in Him, and did not see the light: ***"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." John 1:4-5,***

LESSONS FOR US

In Jesus' time there was a faithful remnant that feared the Lord and watched and waited for the signs of His activity. In these darkening Gentile days, we can find strength and comfort in this evidence. But there is also a subtle warning on the distinction between watching and waiting. All Israel was watching for the coming of the promised Messiah but only a remnant was waiting for Him.

It is not difficult to watch the signs of the times, but only a life of devotion, and a quiet submission of the heart, will prepare us for the true spirit of waiting as well as watching.

"...Wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come." 1 Thess. 1:10