

Luke 1 on the Birth of Jesus

Special Topical Lesson

by C. Pike - 12/21/2025

I. Introduction

- a. This message is being given on Sunday, December 21, 2025.
- b. On Christmas Day in 2022, I gave a lesson that included notes regarding the day and year of Jesus' birth. If you have any questions related to that, please refer to that lesson and the associated notes, posted on our teaching website.
 - i. I realize that in certain Christian circles, people have been told that Jesus *definitely was not* born on December 25. The claim is often made that the December 25 date originates from a relatively late custom, in which the Christians were 'piggybacking' off a pagan winter celebration held annually at that time of year.
 - ii. However, there is evidence for an early observance of the December 25 date in the West, going back at least to Hippolytus, who was a bishop in Rome in the early 200s.
- c. **Question:** How many books of the Bible touch on the events associated with the birth and infancy of Jesus?
 - i. Many Christians would say "two" (**Matthew** and **Luke**, thinking only of the New Testament).
 1. However, the birth and infancy of Jesus are prophesied in at least a dozen books of the *Old Testament* that I can think of offhand.
 2. While my focus in this message is not to point out all of those examples, we will be touching on a few of those Old Testament books today.
 - ii. Since the birth and infancy of Jesus are covered in greatest detail (in the New Testament) in **Matthew 1-2** and **Luke 1-2**, I have been alternating between those two accounts, taking from one or the other each year in the message on or closest to December 25, the date of the traditional western observance of the birth of Jesus.
- d. Today, we will look at Luke's account of the events leading up to the birth of Jesus Christ, specifically focusing on **Luke chapter 1**.
 - i. A better understanding of this story can strengthen our faith in the power and plans of God, and better equip us to persuade others and to answer critics.

- ii. While we do not find the teachings or example of Jesus as an adult in this part of the Scriptures, we do encounter some inspiring examples of men and women of faith, who are worthy of imitation (similar to the Old Testament examples held up in the 'hall of heroes of the faith' in **Hebrews 11**).
 1. In **Matthew 1-2** and **Luke 1-2** birth and infancy accounts, we can find such examples of faith in Mary, Joseph, Zacharias, Elizabeth, the shepherds, etc.
- iii. While the outline of this story is familiar to us all, I hope to go a little deeper and also bring out some practical lessons to keep in mind for our own lives.

II. Announcement to Zacharias (Father of John the Baptist)

a. Read **Luke 1:5-7**.

- i. Both Zacharias the priest and his wife Elizabeth are called "righteous before God" here. They are walking according to the commandments of God, and are referred to as "blameless".
- ii. Both are descended from Aaron and are elderly and childless.
- iii. Calvinists use **Romans 3** to claim that all people after the Fall became totally depraved (unrighteous, no fear of God, full of deceit).
 1. "As it is written: '*There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.*' 'Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit'; 'The poison of asps is under their lips'; 'Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'" (**Romans 3:10-18, NKJV**)
 2. Ironically, while Calvinists try to make the claim that there are none righteous "no not one" among all people, here in **Luke 1**, we already encounter two!
 3. Note that in **Romans 3**, Paul is actually quoting from **Psalms 13** from the LXX (roughly corresponding to **Psalms 14** in the MT), which begins with the phrase, "The fool says in his heart there is no God."
 4. So clearly, from this passage in **Luke**, as well as many other places throughout the Scriptures, the Calvinists are wrong in how they understand passages like **Romans 3**. There were indeed many God-

fearing people who the Spirit describes as “righteous” (not meaning they are flawless, but certainly they are not totally depraved!)

b. Read **Luke 1:1-17**.

- i. The angel’s appearance sends fear into Zacharias’ heart.
- ii. He and his wife will give birth to a son who will come “in the spirit and power of Elijah” to fulfill the prophecy at the end of **Malachi**. He will call people to prepare for the Lord’s coming.

c. Read **Luke 1:18-20**.

- i. Zacharias doubts what the angel tells him. Bad idea!
- ii. The angel Gabriel gives a terrifying response to Zacharias. Gabriel reveals who he is and the role he has been given by God.
 1. Gabriel is an angel who “stands in the presence of God” (**Luke 1:19**).
 2. Angels are spiritual warriors and messengers for God. In **Hebrews 1:13-14**, we are told that they are ministering spirits sent to assist us humans, who will inherit salvation.
- iii. Zacharias is given a punishment for his faithlessness (not believing something promised without first seeing it). He will be mute until the angel’s words are fulfilled.

III. Gabriel’s Announcement to Mary

a. Read **Luke 1:26-38**.

b. This revelation takes place in Nazareth.

- i. Earlier Christians saw these events as preceding those of **Matthew 1**. The account of Mary and Joseph begins in Nazareth, their hometown. They would later go to Bethlehem to give birth to Jesus. The manger scene, shepherds, and the appearance of the Magi happen after that.
 1. See Tatian’s *Diatessaron* and Eusebius in *Gospel Problems and Solutions* regarding the timeline of events of **Matthew 1-2** and **Luke 1-2**.

c. Joseph, the husband of Mary, is a direct descendant of King David.

- i. In **Matthew 1** and **Luke 3**, we find two lines of descent, which differ in a few places. Both of these establish the lineage of Joseph, Mary’s husband. Neither one addresses Mary’s lineage.

- ii. Julius Africanus (writing c. 245 AD, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6, pp. 126-127) and Eusebius (writing c. 320 AD, in Gospel Problems and Solutions, Responses to Stephanus No. 3 and 4).
 - 1. Both lineages found in the New Testament are correct.
 - 2. Matthew's genealogy provides the *natural or physical* lineage of Joseph. On the other hand, Luke's genealogy provides the *legal* lineage.
 - a. For example, in the case of a 'levirate marriage' where a man died childless, but his brother raised up descendants on his behalf. The living brother would thereby "raise up seed" for his deceased brother, as stipulated in the Law of Moses in **Deuteronomy 25:5-6**.
- iii. Note that both gospel genealogies establish that Joseph (not Mary) is directly descended from David. There is prophecy in the Old Testament that the Christ (= Messiah) would be descended from David. However, as a result of the virgin birth, Jesus was physically descended *only from Mary* (and not from Joseph).
 - 1. **Question:** Therefore, was Jesus *actually* descended from David?
 - a. (The answer to that question is provided below.)
- d. Mary's son is to be given the name "Jesus", as directed in advance by the angel.
 - i. "Jesus" = The Lord saves
 - ii. Note that the name "Jesus" is the very same Greek name (in the LXX as well as in the New Testament as *Joshua, the son of Nun* (who was given that special name by Moses in **Numbers 13:16-17**).
 - 1. Once again, Jesus was the name chosen for the one destined to finish what Moses began.
- e. Here, in **Luke 1:30-33**, the angel is paraphrasing a promise made to David about 1,000 years before, found in **2 Samuel 7/1 Chronicles 17**, also repeated in **Psalms 88/89 and 131/132**.
 - i. Peter refers to the same promise in his famous speech in Jerusalem on Pentecost, in **Acts 2**.
 - 1. "Therefore, [David] being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne," (**Acts 2:30**, NKJV)
 - ii. Read **1 Chronicles 17:11-14**.

1. Promises of this prophecy, given about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, were fulfilled in accordance with what the angel Gabriel said to Mary. Consider the following:
 - a. Mary's son is descended from David.
 - i. The statement made by Gabriel to Mary, "He will inherit the throne *of His father, David*" means that *Mary* (not only Joseph) *also was a direct descendant of David*.
 - b. Her son will receive the throne promised to David and will reign over the kingdom that will last forever.
 - c. He will be called "Son of the Highest". He will be the Son of God.
 - i. Note that while Muslims are willing to acknowledge Jesus as a great prophet and also as being the Christ who was foretold, they insist that He should not be considered "the Son of God". They often offer the objection "God cannot have a Son". However, here we have it stated in a prophecy in the Jewish Scriptures, given to David by Nathan, about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus, that the promised king to reign over the eternal kingdom would indeed be "God's Son"!
2. He would be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (no male participation would be involved in His conception).
 - a. The virgin birth of Christ was prophesied in **Isaiah 7:14**.
 - b. I believe this was also foreshadowed by the prophecy of **Genesis 3:15**. There, the Lord addresses conflict between the seed *of the woman* and Satan.
 - i. Satan had used a young woman (even a virgin at the time, Eve) to bring sin into the world.
 - ii. Likewise, the Lord would bring things full circle in what early Christian writer Ireneaeus referred to as a '*recapitulation*', to use a virginal woman (and not a man) to bring the downfall of Satan into the world; the one destined to "crush the head" of Satan!
 1. For more on this *recapitulation* concept in God's justice, see Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD, in ANF 1.249. See also Ireneaeus, writing c. 180 AD in *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 27, found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 455; and book 5, chapter 19, found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 547.

- c. Also, early Christians like Irenaeus saw the “belly” comment in **1 Chronicles 17:11** as indicating that the one to come from David’s line would be from a *woman* who was descended from David.
- i. “It shall be when your days are fulfilled, and you shall be laid to rest with your fathers, that I will set up your seed after you, he *who will be out of your belly*; I will establish his kingdom.” (**1 Chronicles 17:11**, LXX, OSB)
 - ii. The Greek word in the LXX translated “belly” here (koilia/κοιλία) refers to the abdominal area of a person (including the womb of a woman). It would be anatomically incorrect to use this term to refer to the reproductive private parts of a male.
 1. This is the same Greek word used three times in **Luke 1:41-44**, where it is rendered “womb”, as indicated below.
 2. “And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.’” (**Luke 1:41-44**, NKJV)
 - iii. Irenaeus pointed out the significance of this term, related to the virgin birth of Jesus:
 1. “And when He says, ‘Hear, O house of David,’ He performed the part of one indicating that He whom God promised David that He would raise up from the fruit of his *belly* [*Latin: ventris*] an eternal King, is the same who was born of the Virgin, herself of the lineage of David.
 2. “For on this account also, He promised that the King should be ‘of the fruit of his *belly*,’ which was the appropriate [term to use with respect] to a virgin conceiving, and not ‘of the fruit of his loins,’ nor ‘of the fruit of his reins,’ which expression is appropriate to a generating man, and a woman conceiving by a man.
 3. “In this promise, therefore, the Scripture excluded all virile influence; yet it certainly is not mentioned that He who was born was not from the will of man. But it has fixed and established ‘the fruit of the belly,’ that it might declare the

generation of Him who should be [born] from the Virgin, as Elisabeth testified when filled with the Holy Ghost, saying to Mary, 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy *belly*;' the Holy Ghost pointing out to those willing to hear, that the promise which God had made, of raising up a King from the fruit of [David's] belly, was fulfilled in the birth from the Virgin, that is, from Mary."

a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 21; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 452–453)

d. Given the above, we see that Jesus was, in fact, descended from David *through the virgin, Mary!*

f. Lessons for us, from Mary's example.

- i. Some groups of Christians have gone to extremes in venerating Mary: giving her special titles, praying to her regularly, building statues and shrines, etc. However, while we certainly don't need to go down the same path of excess, we don't need to swing to the opposite extreme (of avoiding or ignoring Scriptural references to her), either. It does say here, in the words of Elizabeth, that she is blessed among women. Therefore, let us treat her life and example with great respect, and imitate the good things we see here in her faith.
- ii. Mary questioned the angel Gabriel's message at first, but did so respectfully and humbly.
- iii. Mary believed the promise of God. Nothing is impossible for God.
 1. **Challenge for Us:** Let us each reflect on the personal challenges we may be facing today that may appear to be "too big" for us (even with God) to handle.
 - a. Mary accepted what Gabriel told her:
 - i. "...For *with God nothing will be impossible.*" (**Luke 1:37**, NKJV)
- iv. Then Mary responded with complete acceptance and willingness to serve God by doing the will of the Lord.
 1. "Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.'..." (**Luke 1:38**, NKJV)
 2. Her attitude here is similar to one of the things Jesus said we should pray in our own daily prayers:

- a. *"...Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* (**Matthew 6:10**, NKJV)

IV. Elizabeth Greet Mary, and Mary's Prayer

- a. Read **Luke 1:39-55**.

- i. More lessons for us from the faith of Mary.
 - 1. She offers a wonderful, heartfelt prayer to the Lord, which reveals a great deal about how she saw the Lord acting in her life, and in history. It begins with joyous praise of the Lord.
 - 2. Mary understood the importance of the fear God.
 - 3. She was humble and understood that the Lord opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (similar to **Proverbs 3:34-37**, later quoted by both Peter and James in their letters).
- ii. Blessed is Mary among women. She is mother of our Lord. And as she said in her prayer, "henceforth, all generations will call me blessed" (**Luke 1:48**, NKJV).