

CHAPTER 2

Overview of Luke 2

In chapter 2, Luke provides some details concerning the birth and early childhood of Jesus. Whereas chapter 1 focused on the pre-birth events in the lives of Zacharias and Mary, chapter 2 focuses on outside witnesses of his birth: shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and even temple officials. Luke wants the reader to understand that Jesus' birth was not ordinary, even in regard to His conception. His birth was a cosmic event witnessed by those who were actively seeking God. The love theme throughout chapter 2 can be found in a number of places—from the humble setting of His birth, to the loving gifts of the Father to Simeon and Anna who had devoted their lives to serving God.

The question might be asked, “How did Luke, not an eyewitness to the events, know so much about them?” It is speculated that when Paul was in prison in Caesarea—some 3 years—Luke traveled to Jerusalem and interviewed Mary and others knew Jesus well. Tradition also has it that Philip's four daughters, who were prophetesses, were extremely well-informed about the birth, life and death of Jesus. Luke, as it turns out, was an investigative journalist.

What to look for in Luke 2

1. As you read each paragraph ask, “How is God speaking to me *personally* through His word?”
2. Jesus was the Son of God, the coming King of the Jews. Note particularly the humble circumstances of His birth.
3. Review chapter 1 and count the number of individuals who are “filled with the Spirit” (beginning with John the Baptist). Note features that are common to all these individuals, and the result of their being filled with Spirit.
4. Note Simeon's responses to meeting Jesus. Note the global and personal responses, and note what is the foremost desire in Simeon's heart.
5. Observe Anna's reaction to God after having lost her husband and not having any sons to provide for her. How did she spend the rest of her days?
6. When Jesus is separated from His parents, note where He is finally located, and what He is doing when He is found.
7. Note how Luke describes Jesus' childhood, and whether or not he records that Jesus worked miracles as a child, as the Gnostic gospels claim.

1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,

2:1-7 The birth of Jesus took place sometime between 6 and 4 BC. The exact time frame of the census is uncertain, but it is known that Caesar Augustus was the first declared emperor of Rome; the name “Augustus” means “exalted one.” Regardless of the details, the purpose of the census was twofold: registration for conscription into the Roman army (from which Jews were exempt), and registration to levy a “poll tax” which every person under Roman rule was required to pay annually. Because this was the “first census,” Jews were required to return to their ancestral cities to register. Both Joseph and Mary were descendants of David, and therefore required to journey to Bethlehem, the City of David, to register. From a human perspective,

5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.

7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

the timing couldn't have been worse. The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 70 miles over hilly terrain. There is no indication in Scripture that Mary actually rode on a donkey, although in all probability, she did. There is also no indication they traveled alone; they may have been part of a caravan of fellow travelers.

Would Joseph and Mary have traveled all the way to Bethlehem when she was nine months pregnant had not Caesar called for a census? It is highly unlikely. Also, had Joseph and Mary related the birth of their son to Micah's prophecy—that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2)—they might well have moved to Bethlehem much earlier. Joseph and Mary were not scholars of the Hebrew Scriptures, and may not have realized that the birth of their son was the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy. The point here is that God is in charge of rulers and kings (Isa. 40:23; Dan. 2:21) and uses even their politically motivated behaviors to exalt His name and fulfill His will. As God had planned since the beginning of time, the Messiah, the "stem of Jesse," would be born in the City of David (Isa. 11:1). **2:4** As indicated above, Mary went with Joseph to Bethlehem because both were direct descendants of David. A comparison of the genealogies found in Luke and Matthew indicate that Mary represents the *physical* descendant of David leading to the Messiah, and Joseph represents the *legal*, or royal line leading to the Messiah. The reader should take note: God doesn't express His love for mankind with a spattering of coincidences here and there; His love is directly tied to and expressed through His providential dealings with all mankind throughout history.

2:5 The phrase "who was engaged to him, and was with child" is nothing short of what could be considered a scandalous statement. Clearly, Joseph and Mary had neither married nor consummated their relationship. Mary's condition would have brought upon her great shame and ostracism, and upon Joseph, great judgment and contempt. Matthew's gospel helps shed light on Joseph's dilemma (Matt. 1:18-25). Matthew clearly states that Mary was still a virgin when Jesus was in her womb, and conception was not by Joseph, but by the Holy Spirit.

Can the reader see the great love that Joseph had for Mary? As Matthew states, his instinct was to "send her away secretly." Being engaged was as legally binding as marriage, and therefore Joseph had the legal right to break the covenant as well as the relationship. But he chose to suffer ridicule by trusting God, and he chose to risk his own reputation by loving Mary.

2:7a Also, Luke clearly states that Jesus is Mary's "firstborn" son, not her "only" son. Mary will have

other sons, including James, the author of the epistle (Luke 8:19-21; Gal. 1:19). God's love allowed Mary to have a full family to take care of her when Joseph apparently died at a relatively young age, and Jesus, the eldest son, was fulfilling God's plan for mankind. **2:7b** The birth of Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love for a lost world. That we live in a world without biblical love is indicated in the pathetic scene that no one at the inn was willing to make room for a woman who was about to have a baby. No one was willing to sacrifice their room for the One who will be willing to sacrifice His life for all mankind. Mary is directed to a stable. The incarnation of the word, God's ultimate act of love, is unrecognized by the world. It is a foreshadowing of things to come.

One last note needs to be inserted regarding Jesus' birth and the traditions associated with it. It is unlikely Mary gave birth the night she arrived in Bethlehem. Luke states, "while they were there," not "when they arrived...." Most likely, Joseph had pitched a tent, as most travelers did. When it came time for Mary to deliver, the inn would have been a better setting, as women helpers would have been available. As it turned out, the inn was full when it came time for Mary to give birth. Therefore, they resorted to a stable (which may have been a cave) where there was plenty of water and straw for a bed.

Also, the nativity scene currently celebrated at Christmas pictures animals, shepherds and the three wise men, and a bright star shining in the background. The nativity scene is a direct descendant of the Christmas morality plays held in churches during the Middle Ages. Churches condensed many events into a single event for simplicity's sake. Though Luke records the incident with the shepherds, it is unlikely they arrived there the same night, as they would have been punished for leaving sheep unguarded. Therefore, they probably arrived later the next day when their watch was over. Also, no animals are mentioned in Scripture (although there were probably some in stalls). And the three wise men from the East? Matthew's gospel does not mention the number of wise men—there may have been a whole caravan—and it is clear in Matthew 2:11 that they entered "the house," which some have speculated may have taken place as much as two years after Jesus' birth.

But out of love, we will forgive church tradition for these inaccuracies, as in the end, they are superiorly overshadowed by the superb truth that "the word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:12).

8 In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

12 “This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

2:8-20 Shepherds were at the bottom of the prestige chain in Jesus’ day. They had no status other than what their families gave them. These particular shepherds were most likely watching over sheep that were destined for sacrifice. In the hills of Bethlehem, Herod the Great had built a residence, and the surrounding fields were ideal for grazing sheep. Historians indicate that the sheep kept at Herod’s residence were those destined for sacrifice in his temple. It is no coincidence, then, that the shepherds keeping watch over lambs destined for sacrifice would be directed to the Lamb of God who would become the sacrifice for all mankind’s sins, God’s greatest gift toward man.

2:9-10 Notice that on almost all angelic visitations, their opening words are, “Do not be afraid.” Out of love, God anticipates our fears even before we do. Notice, too, that the good news is for “all people.” That means *all* people, including Gentiles. Luke especially would have picked up on these subtleties. The good news will result in “great joy.” This is explained in the next verse. Finally, note that the angel is *standing* before them, not hovering above them in the air, as is depicted at Christmas.

2:11 It is to shepherds, and only to shepherds, that the announcement is made that the Messiah is born. He is the long-awaited-for Deliverer. The word “Christ” is the Greek word for the Hebrew word “Messiah.” The good news that will come to all mankind and bring great joy is the news that God is fulfilling His promises and will indeed provide for all mankind a Deliverer from sin.

2:12 There is not only an announcement, but proof is provided.

2:13 For the sake of accuracy, please note that there is no mention that the angels sang. They were praising God and “saying.” Our assumption that the angels were singing probably comes from Handel’s “Messiah.”

2:14 What is being implied here is this: there are men and women who please Him and there are those who don’t. One of the most important questions in life is this: “With whom *is* God pleased?” A Christian might assume that God is pleased only with someone who has already believed in Jesus Christ. But the question is broader and more imminent than that; at this point in history, Christ hasn’t died for sins. As we will discover later in the Scriptures, those with whom God is pleased are those who truly understand what it means to love others and act accordingly toward their fellow man. The principle is quite simple and profound: those who act in love toward others will recognize God’s love through Christ, and those who don’t love will be blind to all God offers through Jesus Christ.

15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”

16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.

17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was *then* called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord

23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD”),

2:15-16 The shepherds went “straight” to Bethlehem. They “came in a hurry” and “found their way” to the Messiah. This is the manner in which those “with whom He is pleased” demonstrate their desire to see Jesus. For these, there is always an urgency to seek out Jesus. For those who have no desire to seek Jesus, there is always an urgency to flee His presence. Those with whom God is pleased seek the presence of Jesus with a sense of urgency.

2:17 Those who receive good news also have an urgency to tell others about it. This episode with the shepherds confirms for Joseph and Mary that their child is no ordinary child.

2:18 “All” refers to the shepherds, Joseph and Mary. It is possible that there were others present, but this is not stated.

2:20 What is the response of those who come into the presence of the Savior? “Glorifying and praising God” is the normal response. All fear is gone, for the perfect love that has been expressed by God through the birth of the Son of God casts out all fear.

2:21 As we read in John’s case (1:59), it was customary to name the child at his circumcision. However, in Jesus’ case, according to the instruction from the angel Gabriel, Jesus is given His name “before” His circumcision. There is significance in this. Jesus supersedes the law of Moses; that is, He existed *before* the Law. John’s naming was according to the Law, he being the last of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus’ naming was *before* the Law, Jesus being the *fulfillment* of the Law. Jesus’ name was given *before* He was “conceived in the womb.” Jesus existed before the Law was given to Moses, and He supersedes the Law because He existed *before* He came into the world to save mankind from its sin.

The name Jesus is Greek for the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “the Lord saves,” or “the Lord delivers.”

2:22-24 Mary required purification and Jesus required dedication according to the Law. Instead of a lamb *plus* a pigeon or turtledove, which was the required sacrifice, two turtledoves or pigeons were allowed to be used by those who were poor. Not only did Jesus have to be born in a stable, but He had to be dedicated with the poorest of sacrifices.

2:22 “...they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.” This event happens at the beginning of His life. At the end of His life, He will bring Himself up to Jerusalem and present Himself to the Lord. Whereas the least costly sacrifice is

24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.”

25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,

28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 “Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word;

30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation,

31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel.”

33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.

34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—

35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

presented in the beginning, the most costly sacrifice—His life—will be presented in the end. God’s love accepted the least costly sacrifice—Christ’s love allowed for the most costly sacrifice. The entire event of purification and dedication is one smothered with love: God’s love for Joseph and Mary, Joseph’s love for Mary, Mary’s love for God, and God’s love for His Son who will eventually become the Perfect Sacrifice.

2:25-32 God is a consoler and comforter of His people. Simeon is desperate to experience the “consolation,” or comforting of God’s people as promised by the prophet Isaiah (40:1). There is a wonderful irony here, because the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, “was upon him.” We know this by Jesus’ description of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16-17 where Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “the Comforter.” Not only was the Holy Spirit “upon” Simeon, but the Holy Spirit had “revealed” to him that he would actually come face to face with the Messiah. Why was the Spirit ministering so frequently in Simeon’s life? Because he was “righteous and devout.” One cannot become righteous and devout without the Holy Spirit, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, one becomes more righteous and devout. Simeon was wholly dedicated to the Lord.

2:32 “...a light of revelation to the Gentiles....” This quotation from the prophet Isaiah had more meaning than Simeon imagined at the moment, but it was not lost on the Gentile Luke. Simeon, like most devout Jews, assumed that the Messiah would make His *power and sovereignty* known to all the Gentile world by ruling over them, resulting in their acknowledgement that the God of Israel was the only true God. Luke, however, discovered that the Messiah would make His *salvation* known to the Gentile world, thus not only saving him, but saving *any* Gentile who received Jesus Christ as Lord. Thus, the “consolation of Israel” was not just for the Jews, but for the whole world.

2:33-35 This is the first indirect mention of the cross. As the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would see the Christ, the Holy Spirit also revealed to him a mystery that most Jewish leaders did not see—that the Messiah must first suffer and die. Even Jesus’ future disciples would have a difficult time accepting the fact that the Messiah must first experience the cross. Why? Because, like most of us, no one wanted to deal with the seriousness of personal sin and the cost of the sacrifice that would be needed to reconcile God to man. Like us all, most Jews wanted heaven and all God’s blessings without the sacrifice. That the Messiah must first suffer and die was a truth that the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon, most likely through Isaiah 53.

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage,

37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

38 At that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.

40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

2:35 Mary had no idea of the grief that would await her 33 years later. Up to the point of the word “Israel,” Mary is hearing only wondrous and glorious things about her Child. God’s love allowed her to continue on with the joy of the moment, and kept her from understanding the terrible truth that one day her heart would be broken. This is a hard thing to accept about God’s love; more often than not, love involves much more pain and sacrifice than we are willing to acknowledge or accept.

2:36-38 Anna was someone who, after the death of her husband, could have justifiably sought another husband. She could also have become very angry at God for taking her husband. Yet, instead of turning to anger, or to financial security from the world, she chose instead to see her situation as a sign from God and devote her life fully to the kingdom of God. Anna was what Paul would later refer to as “a widow indeed” (1 Tim. 5:3).

2:38 Whereas Simeon was looking for the consolation of Israel, Anna was looking for “the redemption of Jerusalem.” Whereas Simeon saw the big picture of national spiritual need, Anna saw the plight of the poor, the needy and the oppressed.

2:39-40 After the birth of Jesus, Mary remained “unclean” for 40 days, according to Mosaic law. During this time, she and Joseph returned to Nazareth, and soon after were married. So Joseph and Mary were officially married only *after* she gave birth to a child. Rumors, of course, would spread that Jesus was illegitimate, that Mary was an adulteress, that she had perhaps prostituted herself out to a soldier stationed in Nazareth, or that perhaps she had even been raped. As Simeon had prophesied, Jesus was already being “opposed.” We know from Matthew’s gospel that Joseph had had doubts in the beginning, but God lovingly informed him in a dream that Mary’s pregnancy was of the Holy Spirit. It was only through his love for her and her Son that he was willing to endure the gossip, the whispers, the ostracism, the rumors and the public humiliation that surely accompanied their return to Nazareth. Why didn’t Joseph choose another city where they could hide their secret? Because Joseph knew that Mary needed to be around family, and he was willing to suffer personal consequences to see that she was taken care of.

2:41-51 This paragraph indicates clearly that Jesus knew He was the Son of God. This passage, the only one in Scripture that mentions Jesus’ childhood, also emphasizes Jesus’ primary earthly ministry—

42 And when He became twelve, they went up *there* according to the custom of the Feast;

43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it,

44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him.

46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.

47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."

49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's *house*?"

50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.

51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all *these* things in her heart.

52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

teaching. Had Jesus performed miracles, as the apocryphal New Testament (Gnostic) literature record, would not Luke have mentioned it? Jesus' primary ministry, apart from His death on the cross, was to change people's mind about God and their relationship to Him. This can only be done by teaching truth, and by example. If one desires to know what "questions" Jesus was asking, one need look no further than the substance of His teaching throughout the gospels. Perhaps "all who heard Him" were so "amazed at His understanding" because He was able, even at the age of twelve, to grasp the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. The spirit of the law teaches that God is a God of love, and that God wants all mankind to experience His love and express His love to others.

A logical question to ask is why didn't Jesus inform His parents that He was remaining behind in Jerusalem? Wasn't that an unloving thing to do to His parents? The answer can be found in the number of days He went missing—three. Note that a total of three days goes by between the time they discover Him missing and the time they find Him in the temple. This event is a foreshadowing of the crucifixion and resurrection. In the crucifixion, Jesus will go "missing" for three days, and then He will be "found" in His Father's house—that is, in a resurrected state. During the time between His resurrection and ascension, He will be teaching, but this time, not teaching the rabbis but His disciples, the new leaders of the church. In verse 50, Joseph and Mary "did not understand the statement" because He had not disclosed Himself as the Son of God, and because they had no idea the cross was coming.

2:51 Jesus fulfills the fifth commandment by remaining in subjection to His parents, even though He knows He is the Son of God. This is another way of saying that He honored His father and mother, which in itself is another way of saying He loved them.

2:52 There is no mention of miracles or the "gifts of the Spirit," as the Holy Spirit had not yet empowered Him.

Questions for Your Personal or Group Reflection

1. In chapter 2, God continues to speak. Through the angel, He spoke to the shepherds and through the Holy Spirit He spoke to Simeon. God still speaks today through His word. How has God's word spoken to you as you have completed studying this chapter?
2. Ask yourself, "What is the primary focus of my life? Is it family? Is it my career? Is it satisfying my personal needs and wants?" If it is any of these things, where does your relationship with God fit in? Is it something that is just tacked on to these other priorities? If you really want to hear God's voice and have His word speak to you, what are you going to change in your priorities to make that happen? How will your life change in regard to prayer, study and service? What will it take for you to become "righteous and devout" as Simeon was? What are you "looking for"?
3. What would it take for you to be "filled with the Spirit," and how will you know when you are? Is being filled with the Spirit something you or a charismatic speaker makes happen, or does God make that happen?
4. Consider Anna's life. What did she do to replace personal loss and grief with joy and fulfillment? What is the great lesson her life teaches? Have you thought about what you would do if God intervened in your life like He intervened in Anna's?
5. When it comes to your relationship with Jesus, what are you focused on pursuing—His miracles, His "signs" or His teaching? Which of these will have the most lasting effect on your life and on those whom your life touches?
6. Go through chapters 1 & 2 and circle the word "favor" or its variants (e.g., "favored"). (You can find the word in 1:25, 28, 32, and 2:51.) What does it mean to find "favor" with God? How can you find favor with God? (Hint: There is a close relationship between "favor" and "grace.")
7. What has chapter 2 taught you about God's love, His desire for you to experience His love and how He wants you to express His love?

The Discippler's Commentary

Fill-in Outline for the Disciple

Luke 2

2:1-20 – The account of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and the witness of the _____

Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, aka _____

Bethlehem is called the "City of David" because that was _____

Verse 5 states that Mary was "engaged" to Joseph and was _____

The shepherds were watching sheep being raised for the purpose of _____

Though Gabriel announced that "the Child" was the Son of God, the angels call Him the _____

2:21-38 – The account of Jesus' presentation at the Temple and the blessing by _____

Jesus was circumcised on the "eighth day" and presented with an offering because He was _____

A man named Simeon, who is not a priest, is described as " _____ "

Simeon received a promise from the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he saw _____

Simeon's blessing upon the Child includes the prophetic words that He would be " _____ "

Simeon also prophesies that Mary, the mother of Jesus, will suffer great _____

Anna is a widow who devoted her life serving in the Temple with " _____ "

2:39-52 – The account of Jesus' trip with His family to Jerusalem and His teaching in the _____

Every year, Jesus parents traveled to Jerusalem for the _____

Jesus was teaching Jewish scholars in the temple when He was 12, one year *before* being an _____

Jesus' parents are unable to locate Jesus in the caravan, but find Him teaching in the Temple after _____

Joseph and Mary did not understand what Jesus meant when He said He had to be in _____

At this time, Jesus did not have complete understanding of God's will because He was " _____ "

The Discipler's Commentary

Answer Outline for the Discipler

Luke 2

2:1-20 – The account of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and the witness of the shepherds

Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, aka the land of the Gentiles

- *Whenever locations are mentioned, such as towns or the region of Galilee, a map is useful for students to gain perspective. Maps are often found in the back of some study Bibles.*
- *It also may be helpful to have the disciple look up Old Testament references that prophecy events surrounding Jesus' birth. Specifically, have the student look up Isaiah 9:1 and Micah 5:2. Seeing OT prophecies fulfilled is an important way to build faith.*

Bethlehem is called the "City of David" because that was where David was from

- *David, son of Jesse, a "Bethlehemite," is found in 1 Samuel 16.*
- *Help the disciple see the "big picture" of God's plan that Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem.*

Verse 5 states that Mary was "engaged" to Joseph and was with child

- *It would be important here to differentiate between being "engaged" in modern-day America and being engaged in Jewish culture. In Jewish culture, engagement was a legal contract between families.*
- *Have the disciple attempt to describe how Mary, being unmarried but "with child," would have been looked up by her relatives, her family, her friends and her community.*

The shepherds were watching sheep being raised for the purpose of sacrifice at the temple

- *It would be helpful here to include the information that the sheep were probably grazing under the shadow of Herod's residence, and that they were being raised specifically for sacrifice. Help the disciple see the relationship between these sheep and the "lamb of God," Jesus.*
- *Depending on the disciple's knowledge of the OT, some review may need to be made of the "Passover" lamb sacrifice in Exodus 12, and how Jesus fulfilled that role.*

Though Gabriel announced that "the Child" was the Son of God, the angels call Him the Messiah (Christ)

- *Messiah means "Anointed One." For scriptural references on this, see Ps. 2:2, Dan. 9:25, and John 1:41. King David was a "type" of Messiah. A Jewish tradition had been built up over the centuries that a Messiah would come a deliver Israel from all their enemies.*

2:21-38 – The account of Jesus' presentation at the Temple and the blessing by Simeon

Jesus was circumcised on the "eighth day" and presented with an offering because He was first born

- *This ceremony was instituted in the Mosaic law; the firstborn was always presented as an offering to God (Ex. 13:2; Lev. 27:26).*
- *Discuss with the disciple the significance that Joseph and Mary had to offer "turtledoves." Tie this fact into the events surrounding Jesus' birth in a stable.*

A man named Simeon, who is not a priest, is described as "righteous and devout"

- *Have the disciple attempt to describe what it would mean to be "righteous and devout" today. Make sure that the disciple does not limit his or her description to things one does or doesn't do (works), but to focus on the importance of relationships and the role of love in the disciple's life.*

Simeon received a promise from the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he saw the Messiah

- *Make sure the disciple understands that this was a unique promise given at a unique time, and therefore, not applicable to everyone. What is applicable is that God fulfills His universal promises to all believers, such as the promise of eternal life.*

Simeon's blessing upon the Child includes the prophetic words that He would be "a light to the Gentiles"

Luke 2

- *This will be an important concept to understand as the disciple begins learning about the gospel being received among the Gentiles in the Book of Acts, and the apostle Paul's role in that mission.*

Simeon also prophesies that Mary, the mother of Jesus, will suffer great personal pain

- *There are a multitude of lessons that can be gleaned from this passage. The most important one, perhaps, is that with the good news of Jesus Christ, there comes sacrifice and suffering. Sacrifice and suffering are a NORMAL part of the disciple's life. Refer to Rom. 8:17 and 2 Tim. 3:12.*

Anna is a widow who devoted her life serving in the temple with "fastings and prayers"

- *Have the disciple describe what was special about Anna. Speculate as to why Luke included her in his gospel.*

2:39-52 – The account of Jesus' trip with His family to Jerusalem and His teaching in the temple

Every year, Jesus' parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover

- *Provide the information that Jewish men were required to make a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem three times a year: at Passover (Feast of Unleavened Bread), Pentecost (Harvest; Feast of Weeks), and Feast of Booths (Feast of Ingathering). This is found in Exodus 23:15-17.*

Jesus was teaching Jewish scholars in the temple when He was 12, one year before being an accountable adult

- *At 13, Jewish boys go through a ritual called "bar mitzvah," which means "son of commandment." (Young girls go through "bat mitzvah" at age 12.) This means they became accountable as adults under the law of Moses.*

Jesus' parents are unable to locate Jesus in the caravan, but find Him teaching in the temple after three days

- *Help the disciple see the significance of the "three days," and how that ties into the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.*

Joseph and Mary did not understand what Jesus meant when He said He had to be in His Father's house

- *Raise this question for the disciple to ponder: how can we today be in our Father's house? Many will think of being in church. But the answer is much more profound. We are in our Father's house when we pray.*

At this time, Jesus did not have complete understanding of God's will because He was "increasing in wisdom"

- *Ask the disciple how he or she intends to "increase in wisdom" over the rest of their lifetime. Does this mean increasing in knowledge, or in the wisdom of the world? Have the disciple read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 and Colossians 1:9.*
- *Finally, ask the disciple how God is speaking to him or her personally through this chapter.*