

## LUKE 2/1-20 & 3/15-38: Jesus – God and Man

- want to avoid just telling the Christmas story again so soon after Christmas.
- helped in this by the other passages 'set' for the day and by focussing on the title.

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS (2/1-20) - The Angel Speaks

v1-4 Luke links this key event to history – note his typical careful and detailed historical placement of events.

He also links this key event to prophecy (he shows how it fulfilled prophecy): the Messiah was to come from the line of David, be born in Bethlehem (v4), and set up his kingdom during the time of a fourth empire (v1).

Behind supreme earthly ruler, supreme heavenly Ruler shaping events to fulfil biblical prophecy & his purpose.

Joseph (and Mary) descended from David. David was both a forefather and a type (pattern) of Christ.

cf. Jn 7/41f,52 - the meekness of Christ: Jesus could so easily have silenced his opponents.

v4-7 The journey and arrival (no room) physically and socially difficult – call of God not always easy.

v7 With such a simple line is one of the three central events of history recorded – do not despise the day of small things (Zech 4/1), or reject the seemingly inconsequential because it is not spectacular.

The condescension of Jesus' incarnation is matched by the humility of his birth.

God's Saviour is born in a surprising country in surprising circumstances.

v8 Shepherds doing their everyday work when visited by angel (cf. Zech – & us)(God in the ordinary/routine).

December possibly too cold for this – why some scholars question whether Jesus was born at 'Christmas'.

v9-10a Same response to an angel, and the same counter-response, as with Zechariah & Mary (1/12f,29f).

v10b One of Luke's themes/emphases – joy at the good news of Jesus (cf. 1/14,44,47,58).

"that will be for all the people" – first appearance of one of Luke's major themes: this good news – this Saviour and his salvation – are for all people/nations (universality); he is a Saviour for everyone who will have him.

v11 Two more titles to add to the revelation of Jesus already given by Gabriel (1/31ff,35) and Elizabeth (1/43): Jesus is (#9) Saviour and (#10) Christ the Lord – i.e. this human baby is clearly though mysteriously divine!

The angel's message is of what God is doing (v we must do): salvation is being brought to the human race.

v12 Salvation is offered to all but invites a response: the shepherds (we) are invited to believe what angel says.

"a sign" – [i] that it's God – because it's so unusual; [ii] directions to help you find and identify him.

v13(&9) Angels appear with radiating glory only when they are representing God's special presence (the usual accompaniments of the appearing of God). But where is God? In the manger! The child is the divine Messiah. It is *his* angels and *his* glory that appears to the shepherds. [Cf. Jn 1/14 – the story of the glory.]

v14 "Glory to God in the highest": Jesus' coming, and the salvation he brings, bring glory to God.

Glory to God = God be honoured, because we see what he is like in what he has done. "and on earth peace to men": result of the salvation brought by this Saviour is peace with God (1/79, Ro 5/1).

In heaven God is to get honour; on earth men are to get peace.

"on whom his favour rests": there is more to God (and his dealings with men) than this, but this is the time of his favour (1/25,28,30,43; cf. 4/19, where Jesus does not complete the line in Is 61/2: 'and the day of vengeance of our God'); this is the 'face' he turns to us in the coming and preaching of Jesus (cf. Jn 3/13-18a v 18b-20,36); this is a time of invitation/salvation – but the reality of rejection/judgement is not absent. "and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests" – i.e. the whole human race, to whom God is pleased to give the Saviour; Jesus is offered to everyone and God would be pleased if everyone received him.

v15 The shepherds do respond with faith – but also they are ordinary men: curiosity gets the better of them!

"which the Lord [not 'the angel'] has spoken about" – they recognized that an angel speaks for God!

v16 Matthew has kings/magi greet the Promised Messiah, King of the Jews; Luke has common shepherds greet his ordinary (but unique) man – another example of one of Luke's major themes: Jesus and his message/ salvation are universal, for all men, even commoners, sinners and the poor (cf. Mary's Song)[ME p37b]

v17-20 Even as a baby, Jesus was having the same effect as he had throughout his ministry (a pattern repeated many times in rest of book): those who see/meet him (i) are amazed, (ii) spread the word about him (cf. 1/65f) – new-found salvation cannot be kept quiet for long, (iii) praise/glorify God. Let Jesus have the same effect on us today. The birth of Jesus requires a response.

v19 "all these things" – both what Gabriel (1/30-37) and the shepherds (2/10-14) had told her.

"treasured...heart": a great description of Christian meditation on God and Christ today!

v20 "heard and seen": God's revelation of himself throughout Scripture has always been 'a word *and* deed revelation'; our experience and praise of God, and our witness to him, should always be both too (cf. Ac 1/1).

"which were just as they had been told" – surprise, surprise! The truthfulness of God and his word.

### **JOHN PREPARES THE WAY (3/15-20) - The Prophet Speaks**

v15 John denied being the Christ and pointed to one coming after him. John's response is that of all true servants of Christ: rather than exploit the expectation they have created to exaggerate their own status, they give a true comparison of their status v Christ's.

v16 "I baptize you with water. But...He will baptize you with the HS": water baptism is contrasted with Spirit-baptism: the former does not convey the latter (although the latter may occur simultaneously); water does not convey the Spirit. Water is just the symbol of God's saving work: the Spirit is the Agent of it.

"one more powerful than I": the contrast between what they do indicates the contrast (gulf) between who they are. John (or any other human being) cannot give the Spirit. Only Jesus can. His is a greater ministry; he is a person with altogether greater spiritual power. His being able to give (baptize people with) the Holy Spirit is even more remarkable than John's being filled with the Spirit from birth (1/15).

“the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie”: so the one to come is greatly (infinitely) more worthy.

“with the Holy Spirit and with fire”: salvation and judgement. The “Holy Spirit” is the agent and fruit/evidence of salvation; “fire” is not here a symbol of the Spirit but of judgement (cf. v17, with its imagery of harvesting v hell). John here captures the *totality* of Jesus' work (in both comings) before the first has even begun: as a prophet he sees *everything* God will do to bring his kingdom – the outpouring of the Spirit and the outpouring of fire; he has a *total* vision of Jesus as Saviour and Judge. The unforeseen time-gap between the two (John saw the first but not the second) led to his later doubts as to whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah (7/18-23).

(This fits with John's message: flee the coming wrath and produce fruit in keeping with repentance – v7,9.)

Luke is saying that while the time of judgement only comes later, the time of decision (about Jesus) that determines that future judgement starts now! Jesus' work of separating and gathering began at his first coming and continues throughout this age until his second coming.

In short, Jesus is clearly the one John was pointing to: Jesus is the Messiah or Christ, 'the Anointed One', the divine-human heavenly man who would bring about God's purposes on the earth.

v18 Warning people of judgement and calling them to repentance *is* good news!

(Don't apologize for it!)

v19-20 One of the few places where Luke's "orderly account" (1/3) breaks chronology. These events lie in the future but they are linked to the present as cause and effect: John's future imprisonment was caused by his fearless preaching as shown here. (Note: John's preaching of holiness brought him into personal suffering.) And by including it here, Luke is able to explain what happened to John (why his ministry ended) and henceforth shift his focus exclusively to Jesus.

### **THE BAPTISM OF JESUS (3/21-22) - The Father Speaks**

Jesus was baptized not in repentance for sin but to show us the way (to “fulfil all righteousness”: Mw 3/15).

In being baptized, Jesus identified with sinners; he put himself among sinners who needed repentance.

The Spirit and prayer are two of Luke's themes/emphases – but the two are connected: Jesus was baptized in the Spirit *as* he prayed (cf. Ac 2).

Jesus is the perfect Son of God, but even he needed the baptism/empowering of the Holy Spirit for his ministry about to begin (v23). There is clearly a new dispensation of the Spirit beginning (cf. 1/15, 3/16).

The Holy Spirit descended in such a 'thick', manifest way it was visible (not necessarily physical – “in bodily *form*” v bodily; “*like* a dove”, not necessarily a dove). The Holy Spirit took the appearance of a dove: just as a dove evidenced new hope of a new world after the flood, the Spirit enables Jesus to bring a new hope/world.

The Father adds his testimony to the angel's and John's re Jesus' divinity (sonship). For us too, the baptism of the Holy Spirit not only empowers us for ministry but gives us an assurance of salvation and sonship.

He gives Jesus identity (“You are my Son”), security (“whom I love”) and affirmation (“with you I am well pleased”). This last phrase also identifies Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah (it echoes Is 42/1: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him...”)

This identity/security/affirmation holds true for God's other children – with qualification: we are not sons in the same way (a son v *the* Son, cf. Jn 20/17); incredibly, God loves us with the same love; there is a pleasure which a father feels in a child simply because he/she is his child, but there is an additional pleasure when the child does well. Jesus always does what pleases the Father (Jn 8/29, 14/31) but we don't (see 13 NT exhortations to do what pleases God – i.e. it is possible not to).

### **THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS (3/23-38)**

A person's ancestors have a lot to do with his identity/status. Luke could have started with the genealogy. But he has been dealing with preparatory events. Now Jesus is about to start his ministry (and Luke to focus on him). So this is an appropriate point to insert it: it shows who Jesus is and how he fits into world history.

The genealogy goes back 75 generations, starting with Joseph, Jesus' legal (but not biological) father.

There are several differences to Matthew's genealogy (Mw 1/1-17). The two explanations most commonly given for these are: (1) Luke traces Jesus' blood lineage through Mary while Matthew traces his legal lineage through Joseph; (2) Luke follows a more strict biological line while Matthew focuses on the Messianic line.

The G includes a Gentile (Obed was the son of Boaz and Ruth, the Moabite): Jesus is from & for all nations.

The genealogy goes back to/through (i.e. Jesus descended from) three key personages.

(1) David. David was given a promise that one day he would have a descendant who would follow the pattern he had started and rule over the nations forever: as Son of David, Jesus is the one who is anointed by the Spirit and rules over God's total people forever.

(2) Abraham. Abraham was promised that one day he would have a seed through whom Israel would come into being and through whom eventually all nations would be blessed: as Son of Abraham, Jesus fulfils the promise that Abraham's seed will bring worldwide blessing.

(3) Adam. Matthew's genealogy stops at Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, because his concern is to show that Jesus was a Jew, and not just a Jew but the fulfilment of the promise of a Jewish Messiah. But Luke traces Jesus' lineage all the way back to Adam. He wants to show Jesus' relationship with the whole human race. Jesus is first a man, descended from the first man, who was created a perfect man. Jesus is the second Adam, the second perfect man, the one who fulfils God's intention for the entire human race – Jesus comes for the entire human race. Adam was given the promise that one day what had happened through him would eventually be reversed through a member of the human race who would be 'the seed of the woman' (but not the seed of Adam): as Son of Adam, Jesus is genuinely human and is fully qualified to minister to the human race.

(4) But Luke goes even further: Jesus' genealogy goes back to God. This is not a heretical claim to divinity for man, but Luke's attempt to stress that un-fallen man does carry the glory of God, and that this possibility has been made available to man again through the un-fallen Jesus, who carried that glory. As Son of God, Jesus is like Adam, who was also 'son of God' (v38). The first man was also brought into being by a direct act of God (he had no human father). Jesus is the second/last Adam who restarts the human race on a new basis.

To summarize (1–4): as Son of David, Jesus is our Messiah-King. As Son of Abraham, Jesus links us into the world-wide blessing God intends for the human race. As Son of Adam, Jesus is capable of being our sympathizer, for he is a fellow human-being. As Son of God, Jesus has the power to protect us and bring us to glory, since he was especially brought into being for this very purpose.

*In summary:* Jesus was a man (he was born a baby) yet God (the testimony of the angel, John and the Father); he is Son of Adam, Son of God (genealogy) – both God and man! (the man who was God, the God-man)