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# **Advent Activity from *The Catholic Youth Bible*<sup>®</sup>**

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# Leader Guide Activity



# LUKE

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## Luke, chapters 1-2; Matthew, chapters 1-2 Christmas Carols and the Two Infancy Narratives

**Objective:** In this activity, the students identify aspects of Matthew's and Luke's infancy narratives that have been woven into popular Christmas carols.

**Materials Needed:**

• copies of the lyrics for a dozen or so Christmas carols with biblical themes ("Silent Night," "The First Noel," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Joy to the World," etc.)

1. In preparation for this activity, direct the students to read Matthew 1:18–2:23 and Luke, chapters 1–2, jotting down the similarities and differences between those accounts of Jesus' birth.
2. Divide the class into groups and give each group the lyrics for several Christmas carols to review. The students should assess whether different verses of each song echo Luke's or Matthew's version of the infancy narrative. They should also note how much of the song is not based directly on the Scriptures. They might want to use different-colored markers or highlighters to mark the different versions.
3. After the groups have completed their review, ask them to share their findings with the rest of the class. Help the students reflect on possible reasons why the gospel versions differ and why the two versions are often mixed together into one account.

Ask these questions:

*Which gospel version is most commonly used?*

*Which version touches you most deeply?*

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# Scripture Passages



## The Gospel According to

# MATTHEW

### Quick Summary

Have you ever watched a really good movie with a plot twist at the end that makes you rethink the whole movie? Well, if the Old Testament was the first part of such a movie, the Gospel of Matthew would be the plot twist at the end. The twist? All the events in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Christian Old Testament) were a preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ!

To show how Jesus was the fulfillment of the hopes and prophecies contained in the Old Testament, Matthew draws parallels between the life and teaching of Jesus and the people and events of the Old Testament. We read about Jesus in situations that recall Old Testament heroes like Moses and the prophets. Jesus takes Old Testament teachings and gives them renewed meaning in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection are the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

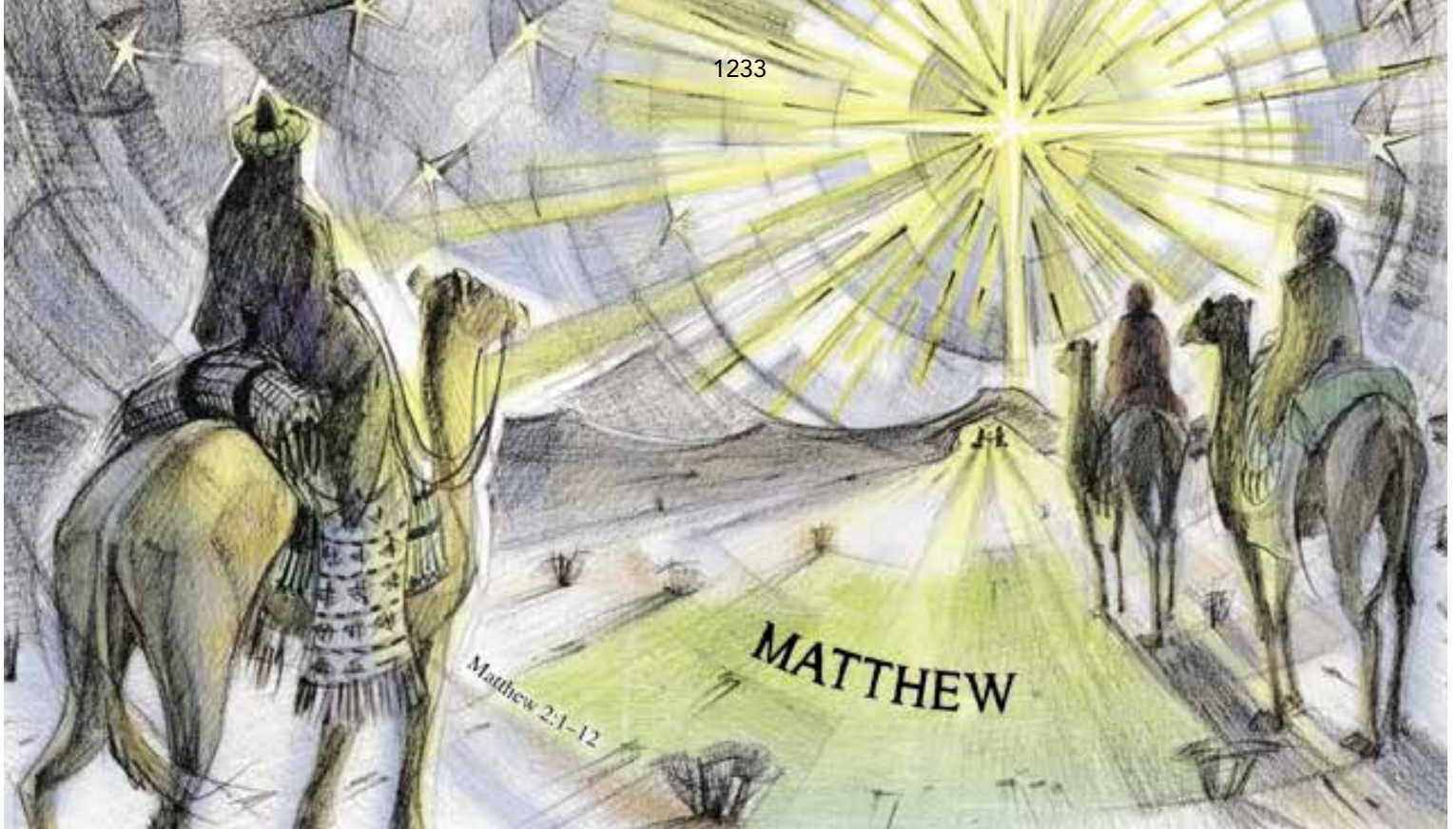
The Gospel of Matthew concludes with Jesus commissioning his followers to bring his good news to the whole world. He calls us to participate in that mission too.

### How Is This Relevant to My Life Today?

- ✱ Matthew shows us that true love requires commitment and sacrifice.
- ✱ Jesus shows us how to stay faithful when the right thing is difficult to do.
- ✱ Our actions toward one another have consequences, *eternal* consequences! We find Jesus in the people we meet, especially those who are needy.

### Headline Highlights

- ✱ Magi Investigate New Star (2:1–12)
- ✱ Getting God's Attention (5:1–12)
- ✱ Cure for Anxiousness (6:25–34)
- ✱ Thousands Fed with Miracle Lunch! (14:13–21)
- ✱ Jesus' True Identity Revealed (16:13–20)
- ✱ Rich Man Leaves Troubled (19:16–30)
- ✱ Christ's Disguises (25:31–46)
- ✱ Betrayed! Betrayed! (26:36–56)
- ✱ Officials Plot Empty Tomb Cover-Up (28:1–15)



## I. The Infancy Narrative

### The Genealogy of Jesus.†

**1**<sup>1\*</sup>The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.†

<sup>2\*</sup>Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.\* <sup>3\*</sup>Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar.\* Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, <sup>4\*</sup>Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, <sup>5\*</sup>Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, <sup>6\*</sup>Jesse the father of David the king.

David became the father of Solomon, whose

**1:1–2:23** The infancy narrative forms the prologue of the gospel. Consisting of a genealogy and five stories, it presents the coming of Jesus as the climax of Israel's history, and the events of his conception, birth, and early childhood as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The genealogy is probably traditional material that Matthew edited. In its first two sections (Mt 1:2–11) it was drawn from Ru 4:18–22; 1 Chr 1–3. Except for Jechoniah, Shealtiel, and Zerubbabel, none of the names in the third section (Mt 1:12–16) is found in any Old Testament genealogy. While the genealogy shows the continuity of God's providential plan from Abraham on, discontinuity is also present. The women Tamar (Mt 1:3), Rahab and Ruth (Mt 1:5), and the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba (Mt 1:6), bore their sons through unions that were in varying degrees strange and unexpected. These "irregularities" culminate in the supreme "irregularity" of the Messiah's birth of a virgin mother; the age of fulfillment is inaugurated by a creative act of God.

Drawing upon both biblical tradition and Jewish stories, Matthew portrays Jesus as reliving the Exodus experience of Israel and the persecutions of Moses. His rejection by his own people and his passion are foreshadowed by the troubled reaction of "all Jerusalem" to the question of the magi who are seeking the "newborn king of the Jews" (Mt 2:2–3), and by Herod's attempt to have him killed. The magi who do him homage prefigure the Gentiles who will accept the preaching of the gospel. The infancy narrative

mother had been the wife of Uriah. <sup>7†</sup>Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. <sup>8</sup>Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. <sup>9</sup>Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. <sup>10</sup>Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos,† Amos the father of Josiah. <sup>11</sup>Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.

<sup>12\*</sup>After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, <sup>13</sup>Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, <sup>14</sup>Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of

proclaims who Jesus is, the savior of his people from their sins (Mt 1:21), Emmanuel in whom "God is with us" (Mt 1:23), and the Son of God (Mt 2:15).

**1:1** *The Son of David, the son of Abraham*: two links of the genealogical chain are singled out. Although the later, David is placed first in order to emphasize that Jesus is the royal Messiah. The mention of Abraham may be due not only to his being the father of the nation Israel but to Matthew's interest in the universal scope of Jesus' mission; cf. Gn 22:18 "... in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing."

**1:7** The successor of Abijah was not Asaph but Asa (see 1 Chr 3:10). Some textual witnesses read the latter name; however, *Asaph* is better attested. Matthew may have deliberately introduced the psalmist Asaph into the genealogy (and in Mt 1:10 the prophet Amos) in order to show that Jesus is the fulfillment not only of the promises made to David (see 2 Sm 7) but of all the Old Testament.

**1:10** *Amos*: some textual witnesses read *Amon*, who was the actual successor of Manasseh (see 1 Chr 3:14).

**1:1** Gn 5:1; 1 Chr 17:11; Gn 22:18. **1:2–17** Lk 3:23–38. **1:2** Gn 21:3; 25:26; 29:35; 1 Chr 2:1. **1:3** Gn 38:29–30; Ru 4:18; 1 Chr 2:4–9. **1:4** Ru 4:19–20; 1 Chr 2:10–11. **1:5** Ru 4:21–22; 1 Chr 2:11–12. **1:6** 2 Sm 12:24; 1 Chr 2:15; 3:5. **1:7–11** 2 Kgs 25:1–21; 1 Chr 3:10–15. **1:12–16** 1 Chr 3:16–19.

# CHALLENGE

CLAIM YOUR  
SPIRITUAL FAMILY

Matthew 1:1

Like Jesus, we also have a genealogy. Often our faith and values are learned or passed down from these people, and from others who have had a major influence in our lives, directly or indirectly.

## TAKE ACTION!

- 1 Create a chart with your name as well as the names of three to five people who have had a spiritual or faith influence in your life.
- 2 Write a word next to each person's name that represents the value they have passed on to you.
- 3 Reach out to each person on your chart, and tell them how grateful you are for what you have learned or inherited from them. Ask them how they learned what they passed on to you.
- 4 Continue to think of others who have passed on important things to you. Fill out your chart with more names as people come to mind. Place your chart between these pages.

Eliud, <sup>15</sup>Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, <sup>16</sup>Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup>Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.†

† **1:17** Matthew is concerned with fourteen generations, probably because fourteen is the numerical value of the Hebrew letters forming the name of David. In the second section of the genealogy (Mt 1:6b–11), three kings of Judah, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, have been omitted (see 1 Chr 3:11–12), so that there are fourteen generations in that section. Yet the third (Mt 1:12–16) apparently has only thirteen. Since Matthew here emphasizes that each section has fourteen, it is unlikely that the thirteen of the last was due to his oversight. Some scholars suggest that *Jesus who is called the Messiah* (Mt 1:16b) doubles the final member of the chain: *Jesus*, born within the family of David, opens up the new age as *Messiah*, so that in fact there are fourteen generations in the third section. This is perhaps too subtle, and the hypothesis of a slip not on the part of Matthew but of a later scribe seems likely. On *Messiah*, see note on Lk 2:11.

† **1:18–25** This first story of the infancy narrative spells out what is summarily indicated in Mt 1:16. The virginal conception of Jesus is the work of the Spirit of God. Joseph's decision to divorce Mary is overcome by the heavenly command that he take her into his home and accept the child as his own. The natural genealogical line is broken but the promises to David are fulfilled; through Joseph's adoption the child belongs to the family of

### The Birth of Jesus.†

<sup>18</sup>Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,† but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,† yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup>\*Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord† appeared to him in

David. Matthew sees the virginal conception as the fulfillment of Is 7:14.

† **1:18** *Betrothed to Joseph*: betrothal was the first part of the marriage, constituting a man and woman as husband and wife. Subsequent infidelity was considered adultery. The betrothal was followed some months later by the husband's taking his wife into his home, at which time normal married life began.

† **1:19** *A righteous man*: as a devout observer of the Mosaic law, Joseph wished to break his union with someone whom he suspected of gross violation of the law. It is commonly said that the law required him to do so, but the texts usually given in support of that view, e.g., Dt 22:20–21 do not clearly pertain to Joseph's situation. *Unwilling to expose her to shame*: the penalty for proved adultery was death by stoning; cf. Dt 22:21–23.

† **1:20** *The angel of the Lord*: in the Old Testament a common designation of God in communication with a human being. *In a dream*: see Mt 2:13, 19, 22. These dreams may be meant to recall the dreams of Joseph, son of Jacob the patriarch (Gn 37:5–11, 19). A closer parallel is the dream of Amram, father of Moses, related by Josephus (*Antiquities* 2:212, 215–16).

† **1:20** 2:13, 19; Lk 1:35.

a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,† because he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

<sup>23†\*</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son,  
and they shall name him  
Emmanuel,”

which means “God is with us.” <sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. <sup>25</sup>He had no relations with her until she bore a son,† and he named him Jesus.\*

#### The Visit of the Magi.†

**2** <sup>1</sup>When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod,† behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star† at its rising and have come to do him homage.”\* <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.† <sup>5\*</sup>They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of  
Judah;  
since from you shall come a ruler,  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.” <sup>9</sup>After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they

**1:21** *Jesus*: in first-century Judaism the Hebrew name Joshua (Greek *Iēsous*) meaning “Yahweh helps” was interpreted as “Yahweh saves.”

**1:23** *God is with us*: God’s promise of deliverance to Judah in Isaiah’s time is seen by Matthew as fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, in whom God is with his people. The name Emmanuel is alluded to at the end of the gospel where the risen Jesus assures his disciples of his continued presence, “. . . I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

**1:25** *Until she bore a son*: the evangelist is concerned to emphasize that Joseph was not responsible for the conception of Jesus. The Greek word translated “until” does not imply normal marital conduct after Jesus’ birth, nor does it exclude it.

**2:1–12** The future rejection of Jesus by Israel and his acceptance by the Gentiles are retrojected into this scene of the narrative.

**2:1** *In the days of King Herod*: Herod reigned from 37 to 4 B.C. *Magi*: originally a designation of the Persian priestly caste, the word became used of those who were regarded as having more than human knowledge. Matthew’s magi are astrologers.

# Did you Know?

Jesus’ Family Tree

Matthew 1:1–17

The unique focus of the Gospel of Matthew is immediately revealed in the first two chapters. The author of Matthew starts by tracing Jesus’ family tree, making his case that Jesus was the Messiah who would restore the covenant promised to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. Next he traces Jesus’ ancestry back to David to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made to David. Things get even more fascinating with a closer look at all the people mentioned in the list: patriarchs and slaves, kings and peasants, men and women, Jews and non-Jews.

Essentially, this genealogy demonstrates that God has been present and at work from the call of Abraham, the “father” of Judaism, through the high point of their history (David), and even through their darkest times (the Babylonian exile). And “God is with us” still in Jesus (Matthew 1:23).

had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>They were overjoyed at seeing the star, <sup>11†\*</sup>and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

**2:2** *We saw his star*: it was a common ancient belief that a new star appeared at the time of a ruler’s birth. Matthew also draws upon the Old Testament story of Balaam, who had prophesied that “A star shall advance from Jacob” (Nm 24:17), though there the star means not an astral phenomenon but the king himself.

**2:4** Herod’s consultation with the chief priests and scribes has some similarity to a Jewish legend about the child Moses in which the “sacred scribes” warn Pharaoh about the imminent birth of one who will deliver Israel from Egypt and the king makes plans to destroy him.

**2:11** Cf. Ps 72:10, 15; Is 60:6. These Old Testament texts led to the interpretation of the magi as kings.

**1:23** Is 7:14 LXX. **1:25** Lk 2:7. **2:2** Nm 24:17. **2:5–6** Mi 5:1; 2 Sm 5:2. **2:11** Ps 72:10–11, 15; Is 60:6.



# Did Know

Jesus, Emmanuel

Matthew 1:23

The author of Matthew's Gospel presents Jesus as the promised Messiah and highlights Jesus' Jewish origins. The author does this to let Jewish-Christian readers know that believing in Jesus as the Messiah is not a break with their Jewish traditions.

One of the first examples is in the announcement of Jesus' birth. The author quotes Isaiah 7:14, in which Isaiah tells King Ahaz that his young wife will conceive a son and they will name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."

This is the perfect description for Jesus, the Son of God, who fully shares our humanity. The gospel ends with the same promise, when the Risen Jesus tells his disciples, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

## The Flight to Egypt.

<sup>13</sup>† When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt,† and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." <sup>14</sup>Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. <sup>15</sup>† He stayed there until the death

**2:13–23** Biblical and nonbiblical traditions about Moses are here applied to the child Jesus, though the dominant Old Testament type is not Moses but Israel (Mt 2:15).

**2:13** *Flee to Egypt*: Egypt was a traditional place of refuge for those fleeing from danger in Palestine (see 1 Kgs 11:40; Jer 26:21), but the main reason why the child is to be taken to Egypt is that he may relive the Exodus experience of Israel.

**2:15** The fulfillment citation is taken from Hos 11:1. Israel, God's son, was called out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus; Jesus, the Son of God, will similarly be called out of that land in a new exodus. The father-son relationship between God and the nation is set in a higher key. Here the son is not a group adopted as "son of God," but the child who, as conceived by the holy Spirit, stands in unique relation to God. He is son of David and of Abraham, of Mary and of Joseph, but, above all, of God.

**2:18** Jer 31:15 portrays Rachel, wife of the patriarch Jacob, weeping for her children taken into exile at the time of the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom (722–21 B.C.). Bethlehem was traditionally identified with Ephrath, the place near which Rachel was buried (see Gn 35:19; 48:7), and the mourning of Rachel is here applied to her lost children of a later age. *Ramah*: about six miles north of Jerusalem. The lamentation of Rachel is so great as to be heard at a far distance.

**2:20** *For those who sought the child's life are dead*: Moses, who had fled from Egypt because the Pharaoh sought to kill him (see Ex 2:15), was told to return there, "for all the men who sought your life are dead" (Ex 4:19).

of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet\* might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

## The Massacre of the Infants.

<sup>16</sup>When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. <sup>17</sup>Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet:

<sup>18</sup>† "A voice was heard in Ramah,  
sobbing and loud lamentation;  
Rachel weeping for her children,  
and she would not be consoled,  
since they were no more."

## The Return from Egypt.

<sup>19</sup>When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt <sup>20</sup>and said,\* "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."† <sup>21</sup>He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod,† he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>†\*He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazorean."

## II. The Proclamation of the Kingdom

### The Preaching of John the Baptist.†\*

**3** <sup>1</sup>In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea† <sup>2</sup>[and] saying, "Repent,† for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"\*

**2:22** With the agreement of the emperor Augustus, Archelaus received half of his father's kingdom, including Judea, after Herod's death. He had the title "ethnarch" (i.e., "ruler of a nation") and reigned from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6.

**2:23** *Nazareth . . . he shall be called a Nazorean*: the tradition of Jesus' residence in Nazareth was firmly established, and Matthew sees it as being in accordance with the foreannounced plan of God. The town of Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament, and no such prophecy can be found there. The vague expression "through the prophets" may be due to Matthew's seeing a connection between Nazareth and certain texts in which there are words with a remote similarity to the name of that town. Some such Old Testament texts are Is 11:1 where the Davidic king of the future is called "a bud" (*nēser*) that shall blossom from the roots of Jesse, and Jgs 13:5, 7 where Samson, the future deliverer of Israel from the Philistines, is called one who shall be consecrated (a *nāzîr*) to God.

**3:1–12** Here Matthew takes up the order of Jesus' ministry found in the gospel of Mark, beginning with the preparatory preaching of John the Baptist.

**3:1** Unlike Luke, Matthew says nothing of the Baptist's origins and does not make him a relative of Jesus. *The desert of Judea*: the barren region west of the Dead Sea extending up the Jordan valley.

**3:2** *Repent*: the Baptist calls for a change of heart and conduct, a turning

**2:15** Hos 11:1. **2:18** Jer 31:15. **2:20** Ex 4:19. **2:23** 13:54; Mk 1:9; Lk 2:39; 4:34; Jn 19:19. **3:1–12** Mk 1:2–8; Lk 3:2–17. **3:2** 4:17; 10:7.

# The Gospel According to LUKE

## Quick Summary

Black and white. Male and female. Rich and poor. Important and unimportant. Sadly throughout the world, differences among people are used to separate them into categories. In the Gospel of Luke, such divisions are repeatedly challenged, and the people whom society thinks are unimportant are afforded their proper dignity.

For example, women and children in first-century society had little status—they were supposed to be unseen and unnoticed. But Luke breaks that practice by beginning his gospel with two women, Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, and the births of their sons, Jesus and John the Baptist. Another example is many Jewish leaders ignoring outcasts and rejecting outsiders. But Jesus does the opposite. He serves the poor and challenges his disciples to love their enemies. He even praises the faith of a Roman centurion. Finally, even as Jesus hangs dying on the cross, he teaches compassion and forgiveness by offering a repentant criminal a place in paradise.

Luke's Gospel is a challenge to everyone to respect the dignity of all people and to protect the rights of the most vulnerable among us.

## How Is This Relevant to My Life Today?

- ✿ Following Jesus means that we are called to go against what society may consider to be important.
- ✿ Jesus expects us to be as generous in our forgiveness as he was in forgiving those who hurt him.
- ✿ God's love extends to all people, and we are called to love everyone too.

## Headline Highlights

- ✿ Lowly Woman Blessed by God (1:46–56)
- ✿ Centurion's Servant Healed Remotely (7:1–10)
- ✿ Shocker! Samaritan Is a Hero (10:25–37)
- ✿ Nameless Rich Man Dies (16:19–31)
- ✿ Despised Tax Collector Praised (19:1–10)
- ✿ Poor Widow's Generosity Praised (21:1–4)
- ✿ Criminal's Last-Minute Conversion (23:39–43)



## I. The Prologue†

**1**<sup>1</sup>Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us,\* <sup>2</sup>just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us,\* <sup>3</sup>I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

† **1:1–4** The Gospel according to Luke is the only one of the synoptic gospels to begin with a literary prologue. Making use of a formal, literary construction and vocabulary, the author writes the prologue in imitation of Hellenistic Greek writers and, in so doing, relates his story about Jesus to contemporaneous Greek and Roman literature. Luke is not only interested in the words and deeds of Jesus, but also in the larger context of the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises of God in the Old Testament. As a second- or third-generation Christian, Luke acknowledges his debt to earlier *eyewitnesses* and *ministers of the word*, but claims that his contribution to this developing tradition is a complete and accurate account, told in an orderly manner, and intended to provide *Theophilus* (“friend of God,” literally) and other readers with certainty about earlier teachings they have received.

**1:5–2:52** Like the Gospel according to Matthew, this gospel opens with an infancy narrative, a collection of stories about the birth and childhood of Jesus. The narrative uses early Christian traditions about the birth of Jesus, traditions about the birth and circumcision of John the Baptist, and canticles such as the Magnificat (Lk 1:46–55) and Benedictus (Lk 1:67–79), composed of phrases drawn from the Greek Old Testament. It is largely, however, the composition of Luke who writes in imitation of Old Testament birth stories, combining historical and legendary details, literary ornamentation and interpretation of scripture, to answer in advance the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?” The focus of the narrative, therefore, is primarily christological. In this section Luke announces many of the themes that will become prominent in the rest of the gospel: the centrality of Jerusalem and the temple, the journey motif, the universality of salvation, joy and peace, concern for the lowly, the importance of women, the presentation of Jesus as savior, Spirit-guided revelation and

## II. The Infancy Narrative†

### Announcement of the Birth of John.

<sup>5</sup>In the days of Herod, King of Judea,† there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.\* <sup>6</sup>Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. <sup>7</sup>But they had no child,† because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.\* <sup>8</sup>Once when he was

prophecy, and the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. The account presents parallel scenes (diptychs) of angelic announcements of the birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus, and of the birth, circumcision, and presentation of John and Jesus. In this parallelism, the ascendancy of Jesus over John is stressed: John is prophet of the Most High (Lk 1:76); Jesus is Son of the Most High (Lk 1:32). John is great in the sight of the Lord (Lk 1:15); Jesus will be Great (a LXX attribute, used absolutely, of God) (Lk 1:32). John will go before the Lord (Lk 1:16–17); Jesus will be Lord (Lk 1:43; 2:11).

**1:5** *In the days of Herod, King of Judea:* Luke relates the story of salvation history to events in contemporary world history. Here and in Lk 3:1–2 he connects his narrative with events in Palestinian history; in Lk 2:1–2 and Lk 3:1 he casts the Jesus story in the light of events of Roman history. Herod the Great, the son of the Idumean Antipater, was declared “King of Judea” by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C., but became the undisputed ruler of Palestine only in 37 B.C. He continued as king until his death in 4 B.C. *Priestly division of Abijah:* a reference to the eighth of the twenty-four divisions of priests who, for a week at a time, twice a year, served in the Jerusalem temple.

**1:7** *They had no child:* though childlessness was looked upon in contemporary Judaism as a curse or punishment for sin, it is intended here to present Elizabeth in a situation similar to that of some of the great mothers of important Old Testament figures: Sarah (Gn 15:3; 16:1); Rebekah (Gn 25:21); Rachel (Gn 29:31; 30:1); the mother of Samson and wife of Manoah (Jgs 13:2–3); Hannah (1 Sm 1:2).

† **1:1–4** Acts 1:1; 1 Cor 15:3. **1:2** 24:48; Jn 15:27; Acts 1:21–22. **1:5** 1 Chr 24:10. **1:7** Gn 18:11; Jgs 13:2–5; 1 Sm 1:5–6.

serving as priest in his division's turn before God,<sup>9</sup> according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense.\*<sup>10</sup> Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering,<sup>11</sup> the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense.<sup>12</sup> Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him.<sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid,† Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John.\*<sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,<sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of [the] Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink.† He will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb,\*<sup>16</sup> and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.<sup>17</sup> He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah† to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord.\*<sup>18</sup> Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."<sup>19</sup> And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel,† who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news.\*<sup>20</sup> But now you will be speechless and unable to talk† until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time."\*

<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary.<sup>22</sup> But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute.<sup>23</sup> Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home.<sup>24</sup> After

this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying,<sup>25</sup> "So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others."\*

#### Announcement of the Birth of Jesus.†

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,<sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.\*<sup>28</sup> And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."\*<sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.<sup>30</sup> Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.<sup>31</sup>\* Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.<sup>32</sup>\* He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High,† and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,<sup>33</sup> and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."\*<sup>34</sup> But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"†<sup>35</sup> And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.\*<sup>36</sup> And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived† a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;<sup>37</sup> for nothing will be impossible for God."\*<sup>38</sup> Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

#### Mary Visits Elizabeth.

<sup>39</sup> During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah,<sup>40</sup> where

**1:13** *Do not be afraid*: a stereotyped Old Testament phrase spoken to reassure the recipient of a heavenly vision (Gn 15:1; Jos 1:9; Dn 10:12, 19 and elsewhere in Lk 1:30; 2:10). *You shall name him John*: the name means "Yahweh has shown favor," an indication of John's role in salvation history.

**1:15** *He will drink neither wine nor strong drink*: like Samson (Jgs 13:4–5) and Samuel (1 Sm 1:11 LXX and 4QSam<sup>a</sup>), John is to be consecrated by Nazirite vow and set apart for the Lord's service.

**1:17** *He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah*: John is to be the messenger sent before Yahweh, as described in Mal 3:1–2. He is cast, moreover, in the role of the Old Testament fiery reformer, the prophet Elijah, who according to Mal 3:23 (4:5) is sent before "the great and terrible day of the Lord comes."

**1:19** *I am Gabriel*: "the angel of the Lord" is identified as Gabriel, the angel who in Dn 9:20–25 announces the seventy weeks of years and the coming of an anointed one, a prince. By alluding to Old Testament themes in Lk 1:17, 19 such as the coming of the day of the Lord and the dawning of the messianic era, Luke is presenting his interpretation of the significance of the births of John and Jesus.

**1:20** *You will be speechless and unable to talk*: Zechariah's becoming mute is the sign given in response to his question in v. 18. When Mary asks a similar question in Lk 1:34, unlike Zechariah who was punished for his doubt, she, in spite of her doubt, is praised and reassured (Lk 1:35–37).

**1:26–38** The announcement to Mary of the birth of Jesus is parallel to the announcement to Zechariah of the birth of John. In both the angel Gabriel appears to the parent who is troubled by the vision (Lk 1:11–12, 26–29) and

then told by the angel not to fear (Lk 1:13, 30). After the announcement is made (Lk 1:14–17, 31–33) the parent objects (Lk 1:18, 34) and a sign is given to confirm the announcement (Lk 1:20, 36). The particular focus of the announcement of the birth of Jesus is on his identity as Son of David (Lk 1:32–33) and Son of God (Lk 1:32, 35).

**1:32** *Son of the Most High*: cf. Lk 1:76 where John is described as "prophet of the Most High." "Most High" is a title for God commonly used by Luke (Lk 1:35, 76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17).

**1:34** Mary's questioning response is a denial of sexual relations and is used by Luke to lead to the angel's declaration about the Spirit's role in the conception of this child (Lk 1:35). According to Luke, the virginal conception of Jesus takes place through the holy Spirit, the power of God, and therefore Jesus has a unique relationship to Yahweh: he is Son of God.

**1:36–37** The sign given to Mary in confirmation of the angel's announcement to her is the pregnancy of her aged relative Elizabeth. If a woman past the childbearing age could become pregnant, why, the angel implies, should there be doubt about Mary's pregnancy, for *nothing will be impossible for God*.

**1:9** Ex 30:7. **1:13** 1:57, 60, 63; Mt 1:20–21. **1:15** 7:33; Nm 6:1–21; Jgs 13:4; 1 Sm 1:11 LXX. **1:17** Sir 48:10; Mal 3:1; 3:23–24; Mt 11:14; 17:11–13. **1:19** Dn 8:16; 9:21. **1:20** 1:45. **1:25** Gn 30:23. **1:27** 2:5; Mt 1:16, 18. **1:28** Jgs 6:12; Ru 2:4; Jdt 13:18. **1:31** Gn 16:11; Jgs 13:3; Is 7:14; Mt 1:21–23. **1:32–33** 2 Sm 7:12, 13, 16; Is 9:7. **1:33** Dn 2:44; 7:14; Mi 4:7; Mt 28:18. **1:35** Mt 1:20. **1:37** Gn 18:14; Jer 32:27; Mt 19:26.

# CHALLENGE

Luke

ASK FOR  
MARY'S HELP

Luke 1:42

Mary had a special role in God's plan. As faithful and holy mother to the whole Church, Mary sympathizes with our needs and concerns and brings them before God.

## TAKE ACTION!

- **Join a Prayer Group:** Find a group at your school or parish that prays the Rosary. Join the group at least one time in order to pray and reacquaint yourself with the prayers of the Rosary.
- **Reflect on the Meaning:** Take time to pray the Hail Mary, one phrase at a time, reflecting on the meaning of each phrase.
- **Ask for Intercession:** Spend 1–2 minutes each night this week praying the Hail Mary. During the day, write down one or two special needs you might ask Mary's intercession for and then focus on these when you pray.



she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, <sup>42</sup>cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." <sup>43</sup>And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord† should come to me? <sup>44</sup>For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup>Blessed are you who believed† that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.\*

### The Canticle of Mary.

<sup>46</sup>\* And Mary said:†

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;\*

<sup>47</sup> my spirit rejoices in God my savior.\*

<sup>48</sup> For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;

behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.\*

<sup>49</sup> The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.\*

<sup>50</sup> His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.\*

<sup>51</sup> He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.\*

<sup>52</sup> He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones

but lifted up the lowly.\*

<sup>53</sup> The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.\*

† **1:43** Even before his birth, Jesus is identified in Luke as the Lord.

**1:45** *Blessed are you who believed:* Luke portrays Mary as a believer whose faith stands in contrast to the disbelief of Zechariah (Lk 1:20). Mary's role as believer in the infancy narrative should be seen in connection with the explicit mention of her presence among "those who believed" after the resurrection at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:14).

**1:46–55** Although Mary is praised for being the mother of the Lord and because of her belief, she reacts as the servant in a psalm of praise, the Magnificat. Because there is no specific connection of the canticle to the context of Mary's pregnancy and her visit to Elizabeth, the Magnificat (with the possible exception of v. 48) may have been a Jewish Christian

hymn that Luke found appropriate at this point in his story. Even if not composed by Luke, it fits in well with themes found elsewhere in Luke: joy and exultation in the Lord; the lowly being singled out for God's favor; the reversal of human fortunes; the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. The loose connection between the hymn and the context is further

**1:41** 1:15; Gn 25:22 LXX. **1:42** 11:27–28; Jgs 5:24; Jdt 13:18; Dt 28:4.

**1:45** 1:20. **1:46–55** 1 Sm 2:1–10. **1:46** Ps 35:9; Is 61:10; Heb 3:18. **1:47** Ti 3:4; Jude 25. **1:48** 11:27; 1 Sm 1:11; 2 Sm 16:12; 2 Kgs 14:26; Ps 113:7.

**1:49** Dt 10:21; Ps 71:19; 111:9; 126:2–3. **1:50** Ps 89:2; 103:13, 17. **1:51** Ps 89:10; 118:15; Jer 32:17 (39:17 LXX). **1:52** 1 Sm 2:7; 2 Sm 22:28; Jb 5:11; 12:19; Ps 147:6; Sir 10:14; Jas 4:6; 1 Pt 5:5. **1:53** 1 Sm 2:5; Ps 107:9.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped Israel his servant,  
remembering his mercy,\*  
<sup>55</sup> according to his promise to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”\*  
<sup>56</sup> Mary remained with her about three months and  
then returned to her home.

#### The Birth of John.†

<sup>57</sup> When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have  
her child she gave birth to a son. <sup>58</sup> Her neighbors  
and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his  
great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her.\*  
<sup>59</sup>† When they came on the eighth day to circum-  
cise\* the child, they were going to call him Zecha-  
riah after his father, <sup>60</sup> but his mother said in reply,  
“No. He will be called John.”\* <sup>61</sup> But they answered  
her, “There is no one among your relatives who has  
this name.” <sup>62</sup> So they made signs, asking his father  
what he wished him to be called. <sup>63</sup> He asked for a  
tablet and wrote, “John is his name,” and all were  
amazed. <sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened, his  
tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God.\* <sup>65</sup> Then  
fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these  
matters were discussed throughout the hill country  
of Judea. <sup>66</sup> All who heard these things took them to  
heart, saying, “What, then, will this child be?” For  
surely the hand of the Lord was with him.

#### The Canticle of Zechariah.

<sup>67</sup> Then Zechariah his father, filled with the holy  
Spirit, prophesied, saying:

<sup>68</sup>† “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
for he has visited and brought redemption  
to his people.\*

† seen in the fact that a few Old Latin manuscripts identify the speaker of the hymn as Elizabeth, even though the overwhelming textual evidence makes Mary the speaker.

**1:57–66** The birth and circumcision of John above all emphasize John’s incorporation into the people of Israel by the sign of the covenant (Gn 17:1–12). The narrative of John’s circumcision also prepares the way for the subsequent description of the circumcision of Jesus in Lk 2:21. At the beginning of his two-volume work Luke shows those who play crucial roles in the inauguration of Christianity to be wholly a part of the people of Israel. At the end of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 21:20; 22:3; 23:6–9; 24:14–16; 26:2–8, 22–23) he will argue that Christianity is the direct descendant of Pharisaic Judaism.

**1:59** The practice of Palestinian Judaism at this time was to name the child at birth; moreover, though naming a male child after the father is not completely unknown, the usual practice was to name the child after the grandfather (see Lk 1:61). The naming of the child John and Zechariah’s recovery from his loss of speech should be understood as fulfilling the angel’s announcement to Zechariah in Lk 1:13, 20.

**1:68–79** Like the canticle of Mary (Lk 1:46–55) the canticle of Zechariah is only loosely connected with its context. Apart from Lk 1:76–77, the hymn in speaking of a *horn for our salvation* (Lk 1:69) and *the daybreak from on high* (Lk 1:78) applies more closely to Jesus and his work than to John. Again like Mary’s canticle, it is largely composed of phrases taken from the Greek Old Testament and may have been a Jewish Christian hymn of praise that Luke adapted to fit the present context by inserting Lk 1:76–77 to give Zechariah’s reply to the question asked in Lk 1:66.

**1:69** *A horn for our salvation*: the horn is a common Old Testament

<sup>69</sup>† He has raised up a horn for our salvation  
within the house of David his servant,\*  
<sup>70</sup> even as he promised through the mouth of his  
holy prophets from of old:  
<sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and from the  
hand of all who hate us,\*  
<sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our fathers\*  
and to be mindful of his holy covenant\*  
<sup>73</sup> and of the oath he swore to Abraham our  
father,\*  
and to grant us that, <sup>74</sup> rescued from the  
hand of enemies,  
without fear we might worship him <sup>75</sup> in  
holiness and righteousness  
before him all our days.\*  
<sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called prophet of the  
Most High,  
for you will go before the Lord† to prepare  
his ways,\*  
<sup>77</sup> to give his people knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
<sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God\*  
by which the daybreak from on high† will  
visit us\*  
<sup>79</sup> to shine on those who sit in darkness and  
death’s shadow,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

<sup>80</sup> The child grew and became strong in spirit, and  
he was in the desert until the day of his manifes-  
tation to Israel.\*

#### The Birth of Jesus.

**2** <sup>1</sup>† In those days a decree went out from Cae-  
sar Augustus† that the whole world should  
be enrolled. <sup>2</sup> This was the first enrollment, when

figure for strength (Ps 18:3; 75:5–6; 89:18; 112:9; 148:14). This description is applied to God in Ps 18:2 and is here transferred to Jesus. The connection of the phrase with *the house of David* gives the title messianic overtones and may indicate an allusion to a phrase in Hannah’s song of praise (1 Sm 2:10), “the horn of his anointed.”

**1:76** *You will go before the Lord*: here *the Lord* is most likely a reference to Jesus (contrast Lk 1:15–17 where Yahweh is meant) and John is presented as the precursor of Jesus.

**1:78** *The daybreak from on high*: three times in the LXX (Jer 23:5; Zec 3:8; 6:12), the Greek word used here for *daybreak* translates the Hebrew word for “scion, branch,” an Old Testament messianic title.

**2:1–2** Although universal registrations of Roman citizens are attested in 28 B.C., 8 B.C., and A.D. 14 and enrollments in individual provinces of those who are not Roman citizens are also attested, such a universal census of the Roman world under Caesar Augustus is unknown outside the New Testament. Moreover, there are notorious historical problems connected with Luke’s dating the census *when Quirinius was governor of Syria*, and the various attempts to resolve the difficulties have proved unsuccessful. P. Sulpicius Quirinius became legate of the province of Syria in A.D. 6–7 when Judea was annexed to the province of Syria. At that time, a provincial census of Judea was taken up. If Quirinius had been legate

**1:54** Ps 98:3; Is 41:8–9. **1:55** Gn 13:15; 17:7; 18:18; 22:17–18; Mi 7:20. **1:58** 1:14. **1:59** 2:21; Gn 17:10, 12; Lv 12:3. **1:60** 1:13. **1:64** 1:20. **1:68** 7:16; Ps 41:13; 72:18; 106:48; 111:9. **1:69** Ps 18:3. **1:71** Ps 106:10. **1:72–73** Gn 17:7; Lv 26:42; Ps 105:8–9; Mi 7:20. **1:72** Ps 106:45–46. **1:73–74** Gn 22:16–17. **1:75** Ti 2:12. **1:76** Is 40:3; Mal 3:1; Mt 3:3; 11:10. **1:78–79** Is 60:1–2. **1:78** Mal 3:20. **1:80** 2:40; Mt 3:1.

# WHO is my NEIGHBOR?

Luke

## What God Honors Luke 2:8-20

On December 25, we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus. As Luke records the moment of birth of the Messiah, to whom do the angels appear to announce this remarkable event, this “good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10)? the high priest? the rich and important residents of Bethlehem? No, the announcement is made to shepherds, poor workers living in the fields nearby.

Luke makes the point that sometimes what the world sees as unimportant, God honors. This truth is a challenge, but it is also good news for all of us, rich and poor alike. How do your attitudes and actions reflect God’s special attention to those who are poor?



Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, <sup>5</sup>to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, <sup>7</sup>and she gave birth to her firstborn son. † She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.\*

†  
of Syria previously, it would have to have been before 10 B.C. because the various legates of Syria from 10 B.C. to 4 B.C. (the death of Herod) are known, and such a dating for an earlier census under Quirinius would create additional problems for dating the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (Lk 3:1, 23). A previous legateship after 4 B.C. (and before A.D. 6) would not fit with the dating of Jesus’ birth in the days of Herod (Lk 1:5; Mt 2:1). Luke may simply be combining Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem with his vague recollection of a census under Quirinius (see also Acts 5:37) to underline the significance of this birth for the whole Roman world: through this child born in Bethlehem peace and salvation come to the empire.

**2:1 Caesar Augustus:** the reign of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus is usually dated from 27 B.C. to his death in A.D. 14. According to Greek inscriptions, Augustus was regarded in the Roman Empire as “savior” and “god,” and he was credited with establishing a time of peace, the *pax Augusta*, throughout the Roman world during his long reign. It is not by chance that Luke relates the birth of Jesus to the time of Caesar Augustus: the real savior (Lk 2:11) and peace-bearer (Lk 2:14; see also Lk 19:38) is the child born in Bethlehem. The great emperor is simply God’s agent (like the Persian king Cyrus in Is 44:28–45:1) who provides the occasion for God’s purposes to be accomplished. **The whole world:** that is, the whole Roman world: Rome, Italy, and the Roman provinces.

**2:7 Firstborn son:** the description of Jesus as *firstborn* son does not necessarily mean that Mary had other sons. It is a legal description indicating that Jesus possessed the rights and privileges of the firstborn son (Gn 27;

<sup>8</sup>†Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. <sup>9</sup>The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear.\* <sup>10</sup>The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>†\*For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in

Ex 13:2; Nm 3:12–13; 18:15–16; Dt 21:15–17). See notes on Mt 1:25; Mk 6:3. **Wrapped him in swaddling clothes:** there may be an allusion here to the birth of another descendant of David, his son Solomon, who though a great king was wrapped in swaddling clothes like any other infant (Wis 7:4–6). **Laid him in a manger:** a feeding trough for animals. A possible allusion to Is 1:3 LXX.

**2:8–20** The announcement of Jesus’ birth to the shepherds is in keeping with Luke’s theme that the lowly are singled out as the recipients of God’s favors and blessings (see also Lk 1:48, 52).

**2:11** The basic message of the infancy narrative is contained in the angel’s announcement: this child is *savior*, *Messiah*, and *Lord*. Luke is the only synoptic gospel writer to use the title *savior* for Jesus (Lk 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23; see also Lk 1:69; 19:9; Acts 4:12). As *savior*, Jesus is looked upon by Luke as the one who rescues humanity from sin and delivers humanity from the condition of alienation from God. The title *christos*, “Christ,” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *māšīah*, “Messiah,” “anointed one.” Among certain groups in first-century Palestinian Judaism, the title was applied to an expected royal leader from the line of David who would restore the kingdom to Israel (see Acts 1:6). The political overtones of the title are played down in Luke and instead the Messiah of the Lord

**2:4** Mt 5:2; Mt 2:6. **2:5** 1:27; Mt 1:18. **2:7** Mt 1:25. **2:9** 1:11, 26. **2:11** Mt 1:21; 16:16; Jn 4:42; Acts 2:36; 5:31; Phil 2:11.

a manger.”<sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

<sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest\*  
and on earth peace to those on whom his  
favor rests.”

#### The Visit of the Shepherds.

<sup>15</sup>When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”<sup>16</sup> So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.<sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child.<sup>18</sup> All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds.<sup>19</sup> And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.<sup>20</sup> Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

#### The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus.

<sup>21</sup>When eight days were completed for his circumcision,† he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.\*

#### The Presentation in the Temple.

<sup>22</sup>†When the days were completed for their purification† according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord,\*<sup>23</sup> just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,”\*<sup>24</sup> and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of

turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel,† and the holy Spirit was upon him.<sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord.<sup>27</sup> He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him,<sup>28</sup> he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

<sup>29</sup> “Now, Master, you may let your servant go  
in peace, according to your word,  
<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation,\*  
<sup>31</sup> which you prepared in sight of all the  
peoples,  
<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and glory for your people Israel.”\*

<sup>33</sup>The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him;<sup>34</sup> and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted\*<sup>35</sup> (and you yourself a sword will pierce)† so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”<sup>36</sup> There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phannuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage,<sup>37</sup> and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.<sup>38</sup> And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.\*

(Lk 2:26) or the Lord’s anointed is the one who now brings salvation to all humanity, Jew and Gentile (Lk 2:29–32). Lord is the most frequently used title for Jesus in Luke and Acts. In the New Testament it is also applied to Yahweh, as it is in the Old Testament. When used of Jesus it points to his transcendence and dominion over humanity.

**2:14** *On earth peace to those on whom his favor rests:* the peace that results from the Christ event is for those whom God has favored with his grace. This reading is found in the oldest representatives of the Western and Alexandrian text traditions and is the preferred one; the Byzantine text tradition, on the other hand, reads: “on earth peace, good will toward men.” The peace of which Luke’s gospel speaks (Lk 2:14; 7:50; 8:48; 10:5–6; 19:38, 42; 24:36) is more than the absence of war of the *pax Augusta*; it also includes the security and well-being characteristic of peace in the Old Testament.

**2:21** Just as John before him had been incorporated into the people of Israel through his circumcision, so too this child (see note on Lk 1:57–66).

**2:22–40** The presentation of Jesus in the temple depicts the parents of Jesus as devout Jews, faithful observers of the law of the Lord (Lk 2:23–24, 39), i.e., the law of Moses. In this respect, they are described in a fashion similar to the parents of John (Lk 1:6) and Simeon (Lk 2:25) and Anna (Lk 2:36–37).

**2:22** *Their purification:* syntactically, *their* must refer to Mary and Joseph, even though the Mosaic law never mentions the purification of the husband. Recognizing the problem, some Western scribes have altered the text to read “his purification,” understanding the presentation of Jesus in the temple as a form of purification; the Vulgate version has a Latin form that could be either “his” or “her.” According to the Mosaic law (Lv 12:2–8), the

woman who gives birth to a boy is unable for forty days to touch anything sacred or to enter the temple area by reason of her legal impurity. At the end of this period she is required to offer a year-old lamb as a burnt offering and a turtledove or young pigeon as an expiation of sin. The woman who could not afford a lamb offered instead two turtledoves or two young pigeons, as Mary does here. *They took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord:* as the firstborn son (Lk 2:7) Jesus was consecrated to the Lord as the law required (Ex 13:2, 12), but there was no requirement that this be done at the temple. The concept of a presentation at the temple is probably derived from 1 Sm 1:24–28, where Hannah offers the child Samuel for sanctuary services. The law further stipulated (Nm 3:47–48) that the firstborn son should be redeemed by the parents through their payment of five shekels to a member of a priestly family. About this legal requirement Luke is silent.

**2:25** *Awaiting the consolation of Israel:* Simeon here and later Anna who speak about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem represent the hopes and expectations of faithful and devout Jews who at this time were looking forward to the restoration of God’s rule in Israel. The birth of Jesus brings these hopes to fulfillment.

**2:35** (*And you yourself a sword will pierce*): Mary herself will not be untouched by the various reactions to the role of Jesus (Lk 2:34). Her blessedness as mother of the Lord will be challenged by her son who describes true blessedness as “hearing the word of God and observing it” (Lk 11:27–28 and Lk 8:20–21).

**2:14** 19:38. **2:21** 1:31; Gn 17:12; Mt 1:21. **2:22–24** Lv 12:2–8. **2:23** Ex 13:2, 12. **2:30–31** 3:6; Is 40:5 LXX; 52:10. **2:32** Is 42:6; 46:13; 49:6; Acts 13:47; 26:23. **2:34** 12:51; Is 8:14; Jn 9:39; Rom 9:33; 1 Cor 1:23; 1 Pt 2:7–8. **2:38** Is 52:9.





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# Gospel Comparison Chart



# Gospel Comparisons

Mark



Matthew



Luke



John



Writer

Mark: A second generation Christian, possibly a follower of Peter; traditionally the John Mark of Acts

Matthew: An unknown Jewish Christian, traditionally the apostle Matthew

Luke: A Gentile Christian, traditionally Luke the physician and Paul's traveling companion

John: The beloved disciple, the apostle John, or his disciple

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Date Written

AD 65–70

AD 75–80

AD 80–85

AD 90–110

Images of Christ

The suffering servant of God, Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, and Lord

Teacher and prophet like Moses, Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, and Lord

Great healer, merciful, compassion for the poor, Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, and Lord

Logos, Word of God, Son of God, Son of Man, Lamb of God, Redeemer, Messiah, and Lord

The Author's Community

A Gentile Christian community in Rome undergoing persecution

A Jewish Christian community in Antioch, Syria

Written to Theophilus (meaning "lover of God"), who possibly represents any Christian (Greece)

Community of Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans of Ephesus in Turkey

Theological Themes

Jesus shows that the suffering in our lives can be a source of grace when united to the sufferings of Christ.

Jesus teaches what it means to be a member of the kingdom of heaven. He prepares his followers to continue his teaching and ministry.

Jesus heals longstanding divisions among people. He calls his followers to have a special compassion for those excluded from wealth and power.

Jesus is the divine son of God, the image of God in flesh. Salvation is available for those who believe in Jesus and commit their lives to him.

Historical Situation

The Romans subdue armed Jewish rebellions. Christians experience persecution in Rome.

Written after Romans had destroyed all of Jerusalem, including the temple of Herod

Written when the persecution of Jews and Christians was intensifying

Emperor Domitian deified himself and mandated that all people worship him. Jewish leaders banned Christians from the synagogues.



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# Challenge



# CHALLENGE

John 1:14

SHARE  
CHRISTIAN JOY

The Christmas season offers the perfect opportunity to share the joy of Christ's birth with others; however, we are called to share Christian joy throughout the year.

## TAKE ACTION!

- **Share Joy:** Mark this page if it is not yet Christmas and come back at that time. In the meantime, explore ways you can more intentionally share joy with others.
- **Go Caroling:** Gather a group of friends and go Christmas caroling in a nursing home or assisted-living facility, singing the songs most familiar to the residents. Take a picture of your time there and put it in your Bible.
- **Plan a Party:** Gather a group to plan a Christmas party for underprivileged youth or for people with developmental disabilities. Include Christmas carols and invite everyone to sing them. Plan a craft or other activity that focuses on the manger or a nativity scene. Have everyone sign your Bible.