

## Luke 2 Christ's Birth

### PREFACE

God's Word contains the answers to all of life's problems and needs. As we apply God's Word to our daily lives, the Holy Spirit strengthens us, our faith grows, and our lives are transformed.

But for many the bible is a complex book, too huge to tackle.

By selecting important chapters of the Bible (20 from the Old Testament, 20 from the New Testament) and focusing on them, I hope to encourage you to get into God's Word. To help accomplish this, I have prepared a visual memory aid for each key chapter. The aids are purposely *weird* in order to increase retention. Each aid has three elements:

1. The *book* of the Bible
2. The *chapter*
3. The *theme* of the chapter

By studying the memory aid several times and focusing on it, you will recall the image and consequently the book, chapter and theme.

Remembering these key chapters will enrich your daily life. It will also help you to relate God's Word to others. As you write greeting cards or speak with people, you will be able to apply God's Word directly to their problems or needs.

At times, you will be unable to speak directly to a person. Send them a Key Chapter booklet! They are designed for sharing!

Each Key Chapter booklet is presented in the same format:

1. *Background* for the chapter
2. *Key verses* of the chapter
3. *Thoughts* on the theme of the chapter

Bible classes and small study groups will find the third section helpful for discussions. The *thoughts* will provide a variety of applications upon which to reflect.

God will not let his Word return void (Isaiah 55:11)!

He will bless you abundantly as you meditate on his Word (Psalm 119:48)!

He will enable you to be a blessing to others as you spread his Word (Genesis 12: 2-3)!

Soli Deo Gloria,  
Paul R. Schroeder

## Explanation of the Memory Aid

1. The BOOK of the Bible:  
Hot and cold water makes *lukewarm* water = **LUKE**
2. The CHAPTER:  
The *number* of drips = **CHAPTER 2**
3. The THEME:  
Epiphany star and manger in the two drops helped mark the *birth of Christ*. =  
**CHRIST'S BIRTH**

## LUKE 2: BACKGROUND

Luke 2 and Matthew 1-2 tell us of Christ's birth. Read both for the complete story.

Why was Christ's birth necessary? Well, let's go back to the beginning, Genesis 1-3. God, creator of all things, had created people perfect. There was a wonderful relationship between the Creator and his creation. Harmony prevailed between God and his people.

Then sin entered the picture. People were not content to be just people—they wanted to be like God. They yielded to Satan's temptation—rebellion and alienation resulted. People and God were separated. The harmony was destroyed.

Fortunately, God is a God of love. He still loved his creation and decided to give people another chance. He would give them an opportunity to be restored to the original harmony and perfection. God knew that Adam and Eve and all the people that were to become their sons and daughters could never accomplish this themselves—sin had destroyed that possibility. So it was up to God. *He* would have to save his people. There was no other way. God would have to send a Savior.

Since no human could fulfill the task of perfect obedience (which God required), God would send his own Son to do for all people what they could not do for themselves.

Christ would come to earth and take on human form. He would be God and man at the same time—perfect God and perfect man.

A sacrifice was necessary to pay the debt of sin. God is righteous and holy—the debt of sin had to be paid. The penalty for sin is death. So Christ must not only obey, he must also die. Obviously, Christ did not have to die for himself, he had no sin. So the Father counted Christ's death to the credit of those who by faith accepted his death in their place. He would die for them. Through his death, they would be set free from their sin. God would cover their sins with the blood of his sinless Son and pronounce them forgiven and, therefore, holy.

God had this plan from the beginning. He didn't want his people to be lost. He gave them a free will so they could love. Freedom of choice is necessary in order to love. But people chose sin instead. God had a plan to redeem and save them. He told the first

people about the Savior he was going to send. Those who believed in the Savior were saved.

Just as now, faith and trust in God were required then. It took faith for people to believe Christ was going to come. And it takes faith today to believe he has come. Both then and now, faith in Jesus saves.

God's plan to save his people was put into action at a specific point in history. It culminated in sending his Son to earth to take on human form—the Incarnation.

Christ, true God, second person in the Godhead, always was—without beginning or end. He is true God—eternal. But now he was also “taking on” human nature. He had to be true man so that he could suffer and die. So Jesus, true God, true man, came to be our Savior. He came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, take our sins away.

Throughout the history of the world, God sent prophets to keep telling the promise, “A Savior will be sent.” The Christmas story is the record of God's keeping his promise.

He did send his Son, in the flesh, born of a virgin, Mary, to live, suffer, die, and rise again as our Savior.

The birth of Christ is directly related to Easter morning. Christ's resurrection from the dead shows the victory over death and Satan. He won! He did it in our place! Through him, *we* have won.

God said he would come. He did. God said he will come again. He will.

Christ's first coming was humble and lowly—in a feeding trough. His final coming with his human nature will be in full glory and majesty—Resurrection Day.

Come quickly, Lord!

## KEY VERSES OF LUKE 2

### Verses 4

**So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.**

God uses seemingly common daily events of history to work out his divine will.

### Verses 7

**And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and paced him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**

Jesus was placed in a lowly, humble bed, a feed trough.

### Verse 8

**And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.**

In first-century Palestine, shepherds often found themselves at the low end of the economic ladder. Yet the, rather than prominent religious or government leaders, were the first to hear the angelic announcement. God often chooses to work with ordinary people.

### Verse 9

**An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.**

Angels appear throughout Scripture to signal the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. Angels of God met Jacob. An angel appeared to Zechariah, an angel appeared to Mary, an angel appeared to Joseph several times, etc. Angels were present at Jesus' ascension. Angels will be with him when he returns.

### Verse 10

**But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."**

God's gift, this most holy Gospel, this Good News, is for *all* people.

### Verses 13-14

**Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."**

One of the privileges of the heavenly angels—and one which will be ours one day—is to be able to praise God before his throne.

### Verse 20

**The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**

Seeing Christ changes lives.

### **Verse 21**

**On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.**

Some people choose to use the name of Jesus in profanity, but a day is coming (the climax of the Lord's Day) when every knee will bow before Him.

### **Verses 27-32**

**Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms, and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."**

Simeon's hymn of praise has become a favorite of many Christians. The theme: God's gift, Jesus, is for everyone.

### **Verses 36-38**

**There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.**

Those who are committed and faithful, like Anna, are blessed.

### **Verse 46**

**After three days, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.**

Of course, Jesus would be in his Father's house.

# THOUGHTS ON CHRIST'S BIRTH

## Day 1

Scholars have spent a lot of time trying to determine what the Star of Bethlehem was (Matthew 2:2). Books have been written suggesting various possibilities. Perhaps, they say, it was the conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. Others suggest it was an explosion in deep space, a nova or supernova. Perhaps it was a comet or a bright star like Sirius. God may have prepared a special comet just for this purpose. Origen, a Christian writer of the third century, held that view.

God could have used something already there or something new. Either way, God used the Star of Bethlehem to spotlight the birth of his Son.

The virgin birth is an essential part of Christ's first coming. If Christ had been conceived by man and woman, he would be only human. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in a woman and is god and man.

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## Day 2

The exact day of Christ's birth has no significance, but Christians have picked a date to remember and celebrate his birth: December 25. This was the date of an old pagan celebration of the "Unconquerable Sun". Some early Christians purposely chose to celebrate Christ's birth on December 25 in order to declare publicly that Christ conquers all. By the end of the fourth century, most Christians celebrated Christ's birth on this date.

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## Day 3

*Thoughts while visiting Christ's birthplace:*

There are two Bethlehems in the holy land. One is seven miles northwest of Nazareth in the territory of Zebulun. The Bethlehem which claims the honor of being the birthplace of the Savior is the one located in Judea, originally called Ephrath. References to this Bethlehem of Ephrath can also be found in the account of Rachel's death (Genesis 35:19) and in Micah's prophecy (Micah 5:2).

To this town came Mary and Joseph, both descendants of King David, shortly before Mary was to give birth to the Christ Child. It had been a rough three days' journey, but it was necessary. The order had gone out that everyone was to return to their city of ancestry. (When the Roman emperor told you to do something, you did it.)

Already at the time of Moses the Hebrews had a type of taxation (Exodus 30:12-13; Numbers 1:18). Now it was Herod the Great's turn, and he was going to collect the taxes

due Rome. (Actually, Rome had two types of taxation. The first was levied on all types of goods and property, while the second type was a head [poll] tax which was levied against every male and also served to recruit men for the military.)

As you would expect, accommodations in Bethlehem were not adequate to house the great influx of people. Every place was booked. But a place had to be found. God was soon going to bring his own Son into the world, through Mary. At last, a place was secured. It was nothing spectacular, but it was the last possible place—Joseph and Mary stayed in a stable. A manger was his bed. He who was the Bread of life was laid in a *feed trough*.

Here in Bethlehem God delivered his love letter to the world, using Mary's womb as his envelope. The letter said very clearly, "god loves you." God had gone way out of his way to prove the greatness of his love. Here was the evidence: God had sent his own Son to take on the form of man so that about 33 years later, through his suffering and death, humanity would be redeemed.

God had very carefully chosen the time to send his Son to earth—the time was right. Because of Alexander the Great, the Greek language had become the commonly accepted language of the then-known world. The message of God's arrival in Christ would find ears that understood the language. Rome was ruling the world during a prolonged period of stability. The Roman roads, built to help Caesar's soldiers move quickly to battle, would surely also aid the "soldiers of the cross" as they eagerly went to tell the message. God had chosen the time, and now he was acting. His Son was born on earth. Now to tell somebody...

When God announces something, he does a good job of it. The heavens opened and angels spilled out—messengers with great news. What a shock to the shepherds to see such a glorious sight! The angels told them God had come to live with man. They would find him in the town of Bethlehem, in a manger.

I wonder what our reaction would have been had we been one of the shepherds that night. Would we have analyzed the whole thing as being some sort of a mirage? Or would we have turned to our companions and said, "This sounds like pretty good news. Too bad we don't have someone to watch the flock so we can check to see if it's true. We certainly can't leave our sheep here alone. After all, this is how we make our living. Perhaps tomorrow morning one of us can go see if there's any truth to this whole thing."

God makes no mistakes. These shepherds listened and reacted immediately to the message. Quickly they dropped everything and set out for the little town. God had spoken—they had listened. No wonder God had selected them to be the first to hear the wonderful news!

God has many ways of announcing things. He chose an angel to announce the good news to the shepherds. There were some wise men in the East that he also wanted to inform, and this time he used a star. Matthew records the account in his second chapter. These

men followed the star, first to Jerusalem and then to the town where Jesus Christ was born.

God is still announcing the good news. The message is proclaimed from every Christian pulpit each Sunday. Just as the news warmed the hearts of the shepherds and brought adoration and praise from the Wise Men, the Gospel today continues to overwhelm the Christian with God's love. God loves you and me and sent his Son to save us! Thank you, God!

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#### **Day 4**

*Thoughts while visiting Bethlehem:*

This little village is much the same today as it was in the day of our Lord. Everything seemed calm, and people wandered slowly through the streets, going about their daily chores. Even the clothing of the Arabs resembled that which was worn by the people living in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

The Church of the Nativity was built on the spot additionally thought to be where Jesus Christ was born. Built in A.D. 325 by order of Queen Helena, the mother of the Christian emperor Constantine, it is one of the oldest churches in the world. Many scholars agree that the tradition behind selecting this site is quite accurate.

Emperor Hadrian, in A.D. 135, tried to profane the then assumed site of the nativity of Christ by planting there a grove of trees to honor Adonis. There can be little doubt that this grove of trees contributed to the fact that the Christian in 325 felt that this was the exact place where Christ was born. The church was built over a small grotto (cave) in which a manger was located.

The "cave" location does not contradict Scripture. The bible does not say whether the inn's stable was a room constructed from building material or a natural shelter such as a cave, underground or above ground. In those days it was customary to shelter animals in small caves along the sides of hills or mountains. The possibility exists that the manger referred to in the gospel accounts of the birth of Christ was in a cave.

Yet this is sure, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and laid in a manger because there wasn't room in the inn. In addition, we have the very old (and probably reliable) church tradition regarding the spot of his birthplace.

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## Day 5

*Thoughts on visiting the church of the nativity:*

As I walked toward the church, my eyes fastened on the entrance. It is so very small. Only one person can enter at a time and only then by stooping way over. Some people mistakenly say that the doorway was made so small to prevent anyone from entering the birthplace of Christ without humbling himself. This sounds beautiful but is not factual. This particular doorway was built around 1500 to prevent horses and animals from entering and desecrating the church.

Upon straightening up, I found myself in the church proper, which is 100 feet long and 70 feet wide. The sidewalls are decorated with beautiful mosaics. At the far end is the high altar of the Greek Orthodox Church. On both sides of the altar, stairways lead down to the Grotto of the Nativity. Thoughts raced through my mind as I descended the stairway. Here I was probably near the very spot where God, who had taken on the form of a human, was born of the Virgin Mary.

Inside the small grotto (not much larger than the average living room) stands the Altar of the Nativity. The traditional spot of the Savior's birth is covered with a marble slab in which is embedded a silver star. A Latin inscription on the star reads: *Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est* ("Here, of the virgin Mary, Jesus Christ was born.")

As people enter the cave, they kneel on the marble slab in which the star is embedded and silently say a prayer. After praying, most of the people bend down and kiss the star. The center of the star is hollow, enabling worshipers to place their hands thorough the star to touch the rock below.

I silently moved off to the side and spent much time reflecting on the Word of God that describes my Savior's birth, life, death, and resurrection. I felt extremely close to God. It was an overwhelming experience. Somewhere near here, I thought, God had been born so that he could die on the cross for us all, so we could live forever. Beginning here, in the person of his Son, God spoke to the world. God reveled himself as a loving God. He went so far to prove his love that he came to earth to demonstrate this message in person. God's desire to forgive us our sins caused him to do all this.

I knelt in prayer, thanking God for his great *gift*. I, too, as all visitor do, placed my hand through the hollow opening of the silver star and touched the native rock of the cave. As I silently ascended the stairway back to the main floor of the church, my heart was beating hallelujahs. God is a loving God. God came to save all people from their sins. God sent his Son to save you and me.

God's Word is true. He made a promise: He kept it. He promised to send the Savior: He did.

Of greatest importance to you personally are these facts: God loves you; he desires your salvation; Jesus alone gives you forgiveness and eternal life.