

## Chapter 2

## Study Questions, Luke Chapter Two

Read: Luke 2:1-20

1. In the first few verses, what are some clues that the historian St. Luke is trying to be painfully accurate with his political and historical facts? Why do you think he mentions Roman emperors and governors-people of power?

2. In verses 4-7, what new things do we learn about Joseph and Mary? What facts about them are repeated from our study in St. Luke 1:26-38?

3. Shepherds were poor, lower-class people in their society, despised by religious Jews because their work kept them away from many religious activities. Looking at verses 8-14, why do you think God chose shepherds to be the first ones to hear the good news of the birth of Jesus?

4. What are the three ways Jesus is described in verse 11? What would each of these have meant for poor Jewish shepherds under Roman occupation in the first century? Why is this announcement by the angel good news?

5. Notice the contrast between these majestic titles for Jesus and the poor situation into which he was born in verses 6-7. Why do you think St. Luke emphasizes this contrast?

6. What is the reaction in heaven to the birth of Jesus according to verses 13-14? What is a benefit to those on earth? "On earth peace among those whom he favors" is a different translation from the one in our traditional Christmas carols, but it is more accurate. What do you think it means?

7. After the angels leave, in verses 15-16, what do the shepherds do? What have they become?

8. What is the shepherds' first act after seeing and experiencing Jesus (verse 17)?

Read: Luke 2:21-40

2:21 On which day did the priest circumcise Jesus? Who first gave Jesus his name?

2:22 Where was the Temple?

2:24 What gift did Joseph and Mary offer to God?

2:25 What was the name of the man that they met in the Temple?

2:26 What had the Holy Spirit told Simeon?

2:27 Who guided Simeon to the temple at the same time as Jesus?

2:28 What did Simeon do when he first saw Jesus?

2:32 What would Jesus be for the Gentiles? What would Jesus bring to the Jewish people?

2:35 What sad thing would happen to Mary?

2:36 What was the name of the lady who spoke God's message?

2:37 What did Anna do all the time?

2:38 What did Anna do when she saw Mary, Joseph and Jesus?

2:39 Where did Joseph, Mary and Jesus go to live afterwards?

2:40 What was Jesus like as he grew up in Nazareth?

## SAINTS SIMEON AND ANNA AT THE TEMPLE

Read Luke Chapter 2, verses 21-40

1. Verses 1-21 of this chapter describe the birth and circumcision of Jesus. Now it is time for his "presentation." How is this ceremony described in verses 22-24? Leviticus 12:6-8 in the Old Testament describes the origin of this purification ceremony. From the Leviticus passage and verse 24 we get a clue to the economic status of Mary and Joseph. What was it?

2. How is Simeon described in verse 25? 3. How do you think Simeon felt when he saw Jesus?

4. Now look at his "song" in verses 29-32. What does he say about the salvation that is brought by Jesus? Who were the "Gentiles?" If this "light of revelation" that Jesus will bring is for the Gentiles, and also for the glory of Israel, what is Simeon really saying about the revelation of Jesus?

5. Look at Simeon's further prophesy in verses 34-35. Why do you think there will be opposition to someone bringing the revelation of God? What do you think he meant when he said to Mary that "a sword will pierce your own soul"?

6. How is Anna described in verses 36-37?

7. In verse 38, as soon as Anna saw Jesus, what are two things she does immediately in response? How is this similar to the shepherds' response in verses 17 and 20?

8. Compare Simeon and Anna. What did they have in common? What was their response to encountering Jesus?

### **In closing:**

What characterizes those who genuinely seek Jesus?

What do they seem to do as soon as they encounter him?

How do the examples of these two people help you as you think about living your life, and ending your life, meaningfully?

## THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

Caesar's decree for a census of the entire Roman Empire made it necessary for Joseph and Mary to leave their hometown, Nazareth, and journey the 70 miles to the Judean village of Bethlehem.



promised that everything, even discomfort and inconvenience, has meaning in God's plan. He will guide you and provide all you need. Like Joseph, live each day by faith, trusting that God is in charge.

**2:7** Strips of cloth were used to keep a baby warm and give him a sense of security. These cloths were believed to protect his internal organs. The custom of wrapping infants this way is still practiced in many Mid-eastern countries.

**2:7** This mention of the manger is the basis for the traditional belief that Jesus was born in a stable. Stables were often caves with feeding troughs (mangers) carved into the rock walls. Despite popular Christmas card pictures, the surroundings were dark and dirty. This was not the atmosphere the Jews expected as the birthplace of the Messiah-King. They thought their promised Messiah would be born in royal surroundings. We should not limit God by our expectations. He is at work wherever he is needed in our sin-darkened and dirty world.

**2:7** Although our first picture of Jesus is as a baby in a manger, it must not be our last. The Christ child in the manger is the subject of a beautiful Christmas scene, but we must not leave him there. This tiny, helpless baby lived an amazing life, died for us, ascended to heaven, and will return to earth as King of kings. Christ will rule the world and judge all people according to their decisions about him. Do you still picture Jesus as a baby in a manger—or is he your Lord? Make sure you don't underestimate Jesus. Let him grow up in your life.

- **2:8** God continued to reveal the news about his Son, but not to those we might expect. Luke records that Jesus' birth was announced to shepherds in the fields. These may have been the shepherds who supplied the lambs for the Temple sacrifices that were performed for the forgiveness of sin. Here the angels invited these shepherds to greet the Lamb of God (John 1:36), who would take away the sins of the world forever.

**2:1** Luke is the only Gospel writer who related the events he recorded to world history. His account was addressed to a predominantly Greek audience that would have been interested in and familiar with the political situation. Palestine was under the rule of the Roman Empire with Emperor Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, in charge. The Roman rulers, considered to be like gods, stood in contrast to the tiny baby in a manger who was truly God in the flesh.

**2:1** A Roman census (registration) was taken to aid military conscription or tax collection. The Jews weren't required to serve in the Roman army, but they could not avoid paying taxes. Augustus's decree went out in God's perfect timing and according to God's perfect plan to bring his Son into the world.

**2:1-6** The Romans ruled the civilized world at this time. By contrast, Joseph controlled very little. Against his better judgment and political convictions, he complied with the Roman order to make a long trip just to pay his taxes. His fiancée, who had to go with him, was about to give birth.

The Romans were in control insofar as human authority can get its way by exerting human power. But the Romans did not recognize their limitations. In reality, God controls the world. In all times and places, he works his will. By the decree of Emperor Augustus, Jesus was born in the very town prophesied for his birth (Micah 5:2), even though his parents did not live there. Joseph and Mary were both descendants of David. The Old Testament is filled with prophecies that the Messiah would be born in David's royal line (see, for example, Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 33:15; Ezekiel 37:24; Hosea 3:5). Rome made the decree, just as God intended.

**2:4, 5** Sometimes we think to ourselves, "I'm being obedient, so why aren't things going better?" We face discomfort or inconvenience and immediately think either that we have misread God's will or that God has made a mistake. But watch this quiet couple as they head toward Bethlehem. God did not soften Joseph's bumpy road, but strengthened him. God did not provide a luxurious inn for Joseph and Mary, but brought his Son into the world in humble surroundings. When we do God's will, we are not guaranteed comfort and convenience. But we are

- **2:8-15** What a birth announcement! The shepherds were terrified, but their fear turned to joy as the angels announced the Messiah's birth. First the shepherds ran to see the baby; then they spread the word. Jesus is *your* Messiah, *your* Savior. Do you look forward to meeting him in prayer and in his Word each day? Have you discovered a Lord so wonderful that you can't help sharing your joy with your friends?

**2:9, 10** The greatest event in history had just happened! The Messiah had been born! For ages the Jews had waited for this, and when it finally occurred, the announcement came to humble shepherds. The Good News about Jesus is that he comes to all, including the plain and the ordinary. He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept him. Whoever you are, whatever you do, you can have Jesus in your life. Don't think you need extraordinary qualifications—he accepts you as you are.

**2:11-14** Some of the Jews were waiting for a savior to deliver them from Roman rule; others hoped the Christ (Messiah) would deliver them from physical ailments. But Jesus, while healing their illnesses and establishing a spiritual Kingdom, delivered them from sin. His work is more far-reaching than anyone could imagine. Christ paid the price for sin and opened the way to peace with God. He offers us more than temporary political or physical changes—he offers us new hearts that will last for eternity.

**2:14** The story of Jesus' birth resounds with music that has inspired composers for 2,000 years. The angels' song, often called the *Gloria* after its first word in the Latin translation, is the basis for many modern choral works, traditional Christmas carols, and ancient liturgical chants.

**DOUBTERS  
IN THE BIBLE**



<i>Doubter</i>	<i>Doubtful Moment</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Abraham . . . . .	When told he would be a father in old age . . . . .	Genesis 17:17
Sarah . . . . .	When she heard she would be a mother in old age . . . . .	Genesis 18:12
Moses . . . . .	When told to return to Egypt to lead the people . . . . .	Exodus 3:10-15
Israelites . . . . .	Whenever they faced difficulties in the wilderness . . . . .	Exodus 16:1-3
Gideon . . . . .	When told he would be a judge and leader. . . . .	Judges 6:14-23
Zechariah . . . . .	When told he would be a father in old age . . . . .	Luke 1:18
Thomas . . . . .	When told Jesus had risen from the dead . . . . .	John 20:24, 25

Many of the people God used to accomplish great things started out as real doubters. With all of them, God showed great patience. Honest doubt was not a bad starting point as long as they didn't stay there. How great a part does doubt have in your willingness to trust God?

**2:36** Although Simeon and Anna were very old, they had never lost their hope that they would see the Messiah. Led by the Holy Spirit, they were among the first to bear witness to Jesus. In the Jewish culture, elders were respected; thus, because of Simeon's and Anna's ages, their prophecies carried extra weight. In contrast, our society values youthfulness over wisdom, and contributions by the elderly are often ignored. As Christians, we should reverse those values wherever we can. Encourage older people to share their wisdom and experience. Listen carefully when they speak. Offer them your friendship, and help them find ways to continue to serve God.

**2:36, 37** Anna was called a prophet, indicating that she was unusually close to God. Prophets did not necessarily predict the future. Their main role was to speak for God, proclaiming his truth.

**2:39** Did Mary and Joseph return immediately to Nazareth, or did they remain in Bethlehem for a time (as implied in Matthew 2)? Apparently there is a gap of several years between verses 38 and 39—ample time for them to find a place to live in Bethlehem, flee to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath, and return to Nazareth when it was safe to do so.

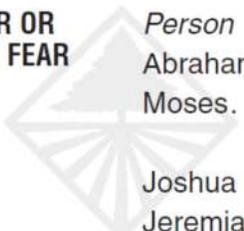
**2:41, 42** According to God's law, every male was required to go to Jerusalem three times a year for the great festivals (Deuteronomy 16:16). In the spring, the Passover was celebrated, followed immediately by the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread. Pass-

over commemorated the night of the Jews' escape from Egypt when God had killed the Egyptian firstborn but had passed over Israelite homes (see Exodus 12:21-36). Passover was the most important of the three annual festivals.

**2:43-45** At age 12, Jesus was considered almost an adult, so he probably didn't spend a lot of time with his parents during the festival. Those who attended these festivals often traveled in caravans for protection from robbers along the Palestine roads. The women and children usually would travel at the front of the caravan, with the men bringing up the rear. A 12-year-old boy conceivably could have been in either group, so both Mary and Joseph probably assumed that Jesus was with the other one. But when the caravan left Jerusalem, Jesus stayed behind, absorbed in his discussion with the religious leaders.

**2:46, 47** The Temple courts were famous throughout Judea as a place of learning. The apostle Paul studied in Jerusalem, perhaps in the Temple courts, under Gamaliel, one of its foremost teachers (Acts 22:3). At the time of the Passover, the greatest rabbis of the land would assemble to teach and to discuss great truths among themselves. The coming Messiah would no doubt have been a popular discussion topic, for everyone was expecting him soon. Jesus would have been eager to listen and to ask probing questions. It was not his youth but the depth of his wisdom that astounded these teachers.

**TO FEAR OR  
NOT TO FEAR**



<i>Person</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Person</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Abraham . . . . .	Genesis 15:1	Zechariah . . . . .	Luke 1:13
Moses . . . . .	Numbers 21:34 Deuteronomy 3:2	Mary . . . . .	Luke 1:30
Joshua . . . . .	Joshua 8:1	Shepherds . . . . .	Luke 2:10
Jeremiah . . . . .	Lamentations 3:57	Peter . . . . .	Luke 5:10
Daniel . . . . .	Daniel 10:12, 19	Paul . . . . .	Acts 27:23, 24
		John . . . . .	Revelation 1:17, 18

People in the Bible who were confronted by God or his angels all had one consistent response—fear. To each of them, God's response was always the same—don't be afraid. As soon as they sensed that God accepted them and wanted to communicate with them, their fear subsided. He had given them freedom to be his friends. He has given you the same freedom.

**2:48** Mary had to let go of her child and let him become a man, God's Son, the Messiah. Fearful that she hadn't been careful enough with this God-given child, she searched frantically for him. But she was looking for a boy, not the young man who was in the Temple astounding the religious leaders with his questions. Letting go of people or projects we have nurtured can be very difficult. It is both sweet and painful to see our children growing into adults, our students into teachers, our subordinates into managers, our inspirations into institutions. But when the time comes we must step back and let go—in spite of the hurt. Then our protégés can exercise their wings, take flight, and soar to the heights God intended for them.

- **2:49, 50** This is the first mention of Jesus' awareness that he was God's Son. But even though he knew his real Father, Jesus did not reject his earthly parents. He went back to Nazareth with them and lived under their authority for another 18 years. God's people do not despise human relationships or family responsibilities. If the Son of God obeyed his human parents, how much more should we honor our family members! Don't use commitment to God's work to justify neglecting your family.

**2:50** Jesus' parents didn't understand what he meant about his Father's house. They didn't realize he was making a distinction between his earthly father and his heavenly Father. Jesus knew that he had a unique relationship with God. Although Mary and Joseph knew he was God's Son, they didn't understand what his mission would involve. Besides, they had to raise him, along with his brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55, 56), as a normal child. They knew he was unique, but they did not know what was going on in his mind.

- **2:52** The Bible does not record any events of the next 18 years of Jesus' life, but Jesus undoubtedly was learning and maturing. As the oldest in a large family, he undoubtedly assisted Joseph in his carpentry work. Joseph may have died during this time, leaving Jesus to provide for the family. The normal routines of daily life gave Jesus a solid understanding of the Judean people.
- **2:52** The second chapter of Luke shows us that although Jesus was unique, he had a normal childhood and adolescence. In terms of development, he went through the same progression we do. He grew physically and mentally, he related to other people, and he was loved by God. A full human life is balanced. Thus it was important to Jesus—and it should be important to all believers—to develop fully and harmoniously in each of these key areas: physical, mental, social, and spiritual.



# ELIZABETH

In societies like Israel, in which a woman's value was largely measured by her ability to bear children, to be without children often led to personal hardship and public shame. For Elizabeth, a childless old age was a painful and lonely time but still she remained faithful to God.

Both Elizabeth and Zechariah came from priestly families. For two weeks each year, Zechariah had to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to attend to his priestly duties. After one of those trips, Zechariah returned home excited but speechless. He had to write down his good news, because he couldn't give it any other way. And what a wonderful surprise he had for his wife: Their faded dream would become an exciting reality! Soon Elizabeth became pregnant, and she knew her child was a long-hoped-for gift from God.

News traveled fast among the family. Seventy miles to the north, in Nazareth, Elizabeth's relative Mary also unexpectedly became pregnant. Within days after the angel's message that she would bear the Messiah, Mary went to visit Elizabeth. They were instantly bound together by the unique gifts God had given them. Elizabeth knew that Mary's son would be even greater than her own, for John would be the messenger for Mary's son.

When her baby was born, Elizabeth insisted on his God-given name: John. Zechariah's written agreement freed his tongue, and everyone in town wondered what would become of this obviously special child.

Elizabeth whispered her praise as she cared for God's gift. Knowing about Mary must have made her marvel at God's timing. Things had worked out even better than she could have planned. We, too, need to remember that God is in control of every situation. When did you last pause to recognize God's timing in the events of your life?

## **Strengths and accomplishments**

- Known as a deeply spiritual woman
- Showed no doubts about God's ability to fulfill his promise
- Mother of John the Baptist
- The first woman besides Mary to hear of the coming Savior

## **Lessons from her life**

- God does not forget those who have been faithful to him
- God's timetable and methods do not have to conform to what we expect

## **Vital statistics**

- Occupation: Homemaker
- Relatives: Husband: Zechariah. Son: John the Baptist. Relative: Mary.
- Contemporaries: Joseph, Herod the Great

## **Key verses**

"Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said" (Luke 1:43-45).

Elizabeth's story is told in Luke 1:5-80.