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LUKE 2:1-53

Today's lesson is so familiar to all of us. We usually have this passage in Sunday School at Christmas. In fact, this is the passage most of us read with our families on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

In the words of one of my commentaries, we're going to see today

- **A baby born**
- **A child consecrated**
- **A lad lost**

Verses 1-7...

Every birth of a living child is a wonderful event, because it brings into the world a soul that will never die. But there was never a birth as wonderful as this one.

There never was a birth that had been **prophesied by so many over so long a period of time** as this birth.

There never was a birth **awaited by such a vast number of people** as this birth.

And there never was a birth **that went as unnoticed by those who had awaited it** as this birth.

The emperor gave the command that all the people of the inhabited earth go to his own city for a census in order to be taxed. Mary and Joseph were both of the house of David and both would be registered at Bethlehem. And God used a heathen emperor to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem so that prophecy would be fulfilled.

I wondered this week if Mary knew about this prophecy.

As we were praying last Sunday, Patricia thanked the Lord that Mary had such **a sensitive spirit**. And she made the comment in her prayer that Mary must have been raised in **a very godly home** because she didn't hesitate at all when the angel told her she had been chosen to bring the Son of the Most High God into the world.

And that was so true. Mary knew God. Mary knew God demanded obedience. And it may have been that Mary knew the Old Testament prophecy of **Micah 5:2...**

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity."

We need to remember that Mary and Joseph had not consummated their marriage. They were still betrothed to each other. Matthew tells us that Joseph and Mary had no sexual relations until after the Lord Jesus Christ was born.

As one commentator (Ivor Powell in his commentary on **Luke, Luke's Thrilling Gospel**) put it:

"They lived together as man and wife only in the sense that Joseph had taken her into his home to shelter her from the evil insinuations of those who otherwise would have accused her

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of sinful conduct."

I don't believe Joseph and Mary understood the **full significance** of all this...but I **do** believe they both acted on the light they had and God so honored them for it.

And when you get down to it, **that's all He expects of any of us**. We may not understand all the deep things of God. We may not understand all the deep theological truths of God's Word...but when we act on the light we do have I believe God gives us more!

Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem...He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and He was laid in a manger...because there was no room for his mother and earthly father in the inn.

One more thing before we leave this passage. If Caesar Augustus had made his decision to tax the people three months earlier or three months later, the unfolding of the plans of God would have been thrown into confusion. The time for Mary's delivery of Jesus would not have coincided with the registration for paying the taxes... **But, the events of the world don't operate on the schedule of man.**

Men **think** they do! But, God does what He will among the hosts of heavens and the inhabitants of the earth...and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, "What have you done?" Oh, they might question Him...but they may or may not get an answer!!

All these things came to pass to bring the mother and earthly father of Jesus **to the appointed place at the appointed time!**

And we need to realize that God holds **our** times in His hands just as surely as He held the times of Mary and Joseph and the birth of this precious little baby in His hands!

Verses 8-18...

The announcement of the birth of the King of kings and the Lord of lords wasn't made on **CNN**, or **NBC**, or **CBS**, or **ABC**, or the **BBC**, or **Fox News** or even on **TBN**.

**It wasn't made to the priests. It wasn't made to the emperor.
It wasn't made to the scribes or the Pharisees.**

In fact, **Matthew** tells us that when the wise men came looking for Jesus that this troubled Herod and it troubled Jerusalem. And Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes together and asked where the Messiah would be born and they knew where because they knew the verse we just read from *Micah*, but they didn't know He had already been born!

And it's believed the wise men came as long as two years after the birth of Jesus. For two years the birth of the long-awaited Messiah had escaped the attention of the religious leaders of Israel...and it **shouldn't** have...and hopefully we'll have the time to get to that next week...

The Bible tells us that God's people are destroyed because of lack of knowledge... These scribes and Pharisees and priests had knowledge of **tradition**...they even had knowledge of **Scripture**...but they lacked knowledge of **God!** They sought the wisdom of **men**...but **not** the wisdom of **God!**

And don't we see that in America today? America became the greatest nation on the face of the earth because America had a knowledge of God...but folks are turning their backs on that knowledge and we are in danger of being destroyed.

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So, the announcement of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ was made to **shepherds** who were in the fields with their flocks. And we need to remember that shepherds were considered very lowly people.

This passage tells us that an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and a multitude of the heavenly host were praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

Angels play a very significant role in Luke's gospel...

Did you know the angels really don't know exactly how it feels to be saved? The Bible tells us that angels long to get a clear glimpse of salvation. Why? Because they haven't experienced it.

God didn't create angels to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. God created angels to be His messengers and if they refuse to do this as Lucifer did, they are thrown out of heaven.

And what did the shepherds do when the angels left?

Verse 16...

And not only that, but

Verse 17...

Verses 18-20...

No one knew what to make of what the shepherds told them...but that didn't stop the shepherds. They went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen...

And Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Baptists don't have a lot of ceremonies or rites or rituals. We observe **two church ordinances**... one is **baptism** and the other is the **Lord's Supper**. But, the Jewish people had a number of rituals that God had given them in the Law and the next verses tell us of two of them.

Verse 21...

Why was it necessary for Jesus to be circumcised? I believe there are three reasons...

Jesus was a part of a Jewish family. And being a Jew, He would be circumcised to identify Himself with Israel, to identify Himself with the chosen people of God.

Also, circumcision identified Him with the covenant that God had made with Abraham.

Lastly, if Jesus had not been circumcised, He would have never been allowed to speak a word in the Temple. No uncircumcised man could speak in the holy Temple of God.

The naming of the baby was to be on this same day. Mary had already been given the name by which He would be called and they called Him by this name, Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

Jesus..."Jehovah is Salvation..."

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Verses 22-24...

We see in these verses a second ritual. And that is the rite of purification. For 40 days, Mary would have been ceremonially unclean. For 40 days after the birth of the Lord Jesus, Mary would not have been allowed into the Temple.

But, then she came and she came for two reasons...

First, she came to bring an offering to the Lord to take care of her ceremonial uncleanness. And the second reason was to dedicate her baby back to the glory of God.

And this passage tells us Mary and Joseph brought two turtledoves. Now when you read the book of **Leviticus**, that was the offering that was allowed only for poor people.

Now, this isn't a very popular idea today. We live in a day when so many television ministries are preaching a **health and wealth message**. I want to tell you...we need to listen to radio and TV evangelists with a discerning ear.

If it is the will of God to make all people rich, then why did God allow His Son to be born into a poor home?

Mary was poor. Mary is not the queen of heaven. Mary is not the celestial mother of the universe. Mary is not even the mother of God...Jesus existed before Mary. Mary was **the human vessel that God used to bring Jesus into the world...**and she was a poor woman.

Paul tells us in **2 Corinthians 8:9**:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

And here are Mary and Joseph coming to the Temple to bring their offering and to bring their Son to be offered to God and they encounter two people there that day.

Verses 25-35...

The first person we see here is a man, Simeon. Simeon was righteous and devout and he was looking for "the consolation of Israel." This phrase means he was looking for the Messiah to come.

This man was filled with the Holy Spirit. We know that because he had heard from the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Messiah. And secondly we are told that he came in the Spirit to the Temple.

You know, I think many times you and I make the same mistake that Elijah made. Remember when Elijah said, "Oh, woe is me...I'm the only one left?" Well, God said, "You're not the only one left, Elijah...there are 7,000 more in Israel just like you...7,000 more who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

And even though these were dark days in Israel...and even though God had not spoken to His people any recorded word in 400 years...and even though God's Spirit had been taken from the Temple...

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There were still godly people around. There was Zacharias and there was Elizabeth. There was a young virgin who without hesitation had said, "...be it done to me according to your word." There was Joseph who trusted God's word enough to stand by Mary.

And here is Simeon, who could say, "Now, Lord, I can depart in peace because I have seen Thy salvation." And did you notice that even though Simeon was a Jew, he knew that the Messiah of the Jews would also be the Messiah of the Gentiles?

And Simeon said a very meaningful thing to Mary...

"Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed...and a sword will pierce even your own soul..."

You know, there is nothing in the world that gives us more **joy** than being a mother. But, I'll tell you something else...there is nothing in the world that can give us more **sorrow and concern** than being a mother.

About 8 or 9 years ago at a January class meeting – our class was much smaller then – I went around the room and asked our ladies what their heart desire for the new year was...and without exception, the mothers in our class said it was **for their children to walk a closer walk with Jesus.**

I've seen the tears of many of you and I've prayed with many of you about your children. And many of you have seen my tears and prayed with me about my children.

Many of us have children who are walking so closely with the Lord, but many of us don't... and even if our children are walking a close walk that doesn't mean things always go well in their lives. And the things that break the hearts of our children break ours as well.

But, think what Mary was about to go through. In 33 short years, her precious Son would be nailed to a Cross for you and for me. Did she understand this on this day of dedicating the Lord Jesus back to God the Father? I don't believe she did...but one day she would stand at the foot of that Cross and her heart would break.

(In verses 36-38...don't read)

Here is an old lady of 84...a prophetess...who never left the Temple...who served night and day with fastings and prayers...and at the very moment Simeon gave his prophetic message to Mary, she gave thanks to God and to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

(Verses 39...don't read) tell us that Jesus and His earthly family returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth...

Verses 40...

Jesus grew. Jesus increased in wisdom. And the grace of God was upon Jesus.

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus learned things? I mean, Jesus learned from His mother and He learned from His earthly father.

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Our pastor has a little question he asks from time to time. **“Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?”** He means that God has never had to learn anything! He is omniscient! He is all-knowing! There isn't anything that **has ever happened or is happening or ever will happen** that He doesn't know about already beforehand! He simply knows everything!

Was Jesus God? Absolutely! But, was Jesus omniscient as a little boy? I don't believe so. Why? Because when He came to earth, He laid aside for a time that attribute of His deity...He was made in the likeness of man and He had to learn things...He had to walk by faith and in obedience. What did He learn? He learned things that were taught Him!

Now, there's a big difference between **Jesus'** learning and **our** learning. Jesus never had to **unlearn** anything. Part of **our** problem is that we've been taught the **wrong** things, and for us to get the **right** things into our head, we have to get the **wrong** things out!

Even in the day of Jesus, people had to **unlearn** things. Do you remember Jesus saying this? He said, “Now you have heard that it has been said...but I say unto you...” What was Jesus saying? He was saying, **“You must unlearn some things you've already learned...”**

And I believe God wants His people to have teachable spirits. Some of us have been taught by very well-meaning parents or teachers or preachers things that just don't line up with the Word of God. Some of us have been taught by **not** so well-meaning folks. But, God wants to teach **you** and God wants to teach **me** the truths of His Word!

And Jesus had a teachable spirit. When did Jesus become omniscient? I don't know. I don't know that Jesus ever regained His omniscience when He lived on this earth. Remember when someone asked Him, “When is Your coming again and when will You establish Your kingdom?”

And Jesus said, “No man knows the day or the hour. Not even Me,” He said. “Only the Father in heaven knows that.”

Verses 41-51...

This is the only reference we have in our Bibles to anything Jesus ever did as a boy. At the age of twelve, we see Him along with His family going to Jerusalem. They were going to observe Passover.

Jewish law required all Jewish males that live within 20 miles of Jerusalem to come to the temple to worship three times a year...Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

So they had come to Jerusalem to observe Passover, but when it came time for the family to leave, Jesus stayed in Jerusalem.

Now it seems strange that Jesus wasn't missed until they had gone a day's journey.

Well, we need to remember that folks back then didn't travel like you and I do today. They traveled in caravans...and since the women and the children traveled at a slower pace, they left first.

Then the men would leave. And since Jesus was twelve years old...Mary must have thought He had stayed to travel with Joseph and Joseph must have thought He had left with Mary. Has this ever happened in your family?

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But, Jesus **wasn't** with **Joseph**. And Jesus **wasn't** with **Mary**. Jesus was sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. He's learning. He's growing. "And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers."

These folks didn't know what to think of twelve year old who had such understanding of the things of God!

And Mary and Joseph were **astonished** when they saw Him and Mary asked Him why did He treat them this way...and Jesus said, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house...that I must be about My Father's business?"

I believe for the first time Mary may be feeling the sword piercing her heart that Simeon spoke of. For the first time, Mary may be realizing that Jesus wasn't going to be her little boy all His life...that He really did have a higher calling!

What did Jesus know at the age of twelve?

First of all, we see here **Jesus knew who His real Father was**. He knew His real Father was Almighty God!

Secondly, He knew that **His real Father had a real purpose for His life**.

Thirdly, He determined, **He knew that he must fulfill the will of His Father for His life**.

And fourthly, **He knew He still had much to learn**.

And I think the same can be said for you and me when we come to Jesus...

- we find out who our real Father is...
- we find out our real Father has a real purpose for our life...
- we find out that we really must fulfill the real purpose of our real Father for our life...
- we know that we really still have much to learn...

Verse 51 tells us Mary again treasured these things in her heart...

One commentator I read this week: *"Mary's mind was quickly becoming a treasure-house where jewels were being stored."*

Verse 52...

I believe the most important lesson we can take from this chapter today is this...

If Jesus had to grow, how much more do you and I need to grow? If Jesus all of His earthly life was continuing to grow and learn and increasing in wisdom, then you and I need to make sure that we don't stop our growth process too soon. It's amazing how much we **don't** know!

Also, we need to remember that the **way** we grow is to realize that God has a purpose for our lives!

How do we find that purpose for our lives? Well, may I suggest to you that you start in **the Word**?

I want to tell you by the authority of this Book that it is living. It is powerful. It is active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It will rise up off the page and grab you...

But, having said that, you must pick it up. You must read it. You must pray over it. You must spend time in it. **You mustn't expect it to get into you if you're not willing to get into it.**

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Also, I believe we find the purpose for our lives in **prayer**...just talking with God...and listening for Him to speak to us. How much time do you spend each day praying? Jesus prayed and we're going to see that over and over in our study of the gospel of **Luke**! And if **He** needed to pray...how much more do we?

Also, I believe we find the purpose for our lives when we come to **worship** in the house of God. There's something about hearing the Word taught and preached. There's something about praying with and for others. There's something about hearing others pray for us. There's just something about being with the family of God!

My prayer for us as we go along in this wonderful gospel is that we will discover by studying the life of the Lord Jesus Christ how He learned and how He spent time with His Father and how He went about His Father's business and how we can do the same thing!