

Commentary on Luke

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SECTION 1 continued (chapter 1 & 2).

Chapter 2 The Birth And Development of the Child Jesus.

We now come to the event on which the two opening chapters are centred (see opening analysis), the birth of the One of Whom the Gospel testifies, the One Who is called 'great', the Son of the Most High, the everlasting King over the everlasting kingdom (compare Isaiah 9.6-7). And yet it is all over in two verses. There is nothing sentimental about it. For it is why He was born that is Luke's interest, not the details of the birth. Perhaps magical stories were already being invented by some (as we find them later in the apocryphal Gospels) and he wanted nothing to do with them. While being the King of glory He was coming as a man among men, and that was how He was to be seen. It is noteworthy that Luke does not mention the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2.1-11). This is quite understandable, for it would not have fitted into the theme of this chapter, which is based around humility and humble beginnings. Rather does he stress the visit of the shepherds to the child lying in a manger, placing it in direct contrast with the rulers in their palaces.

But this description of His lowly birth is then followed by a series of testimonies, first by angels, and then by the Holy Spirit, to His status and future. These may be seen as paralleling the inspiration that has gone before in chapter 1. Jesus is to be seen as celebrated by God both before and after His birth. Heaven bears witness while the earth is silent. And the chapter then ends with Him briefly in His Father's house, an indication of what is to come.

How quietly the event itself takes place, for the birth is all over in two verses. Nevertheless in this passage Luke brings out all that needs to be brought out, and among these things he deliberately and emphatically draws attention to the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as a scion of the house of David. This is emphasised by the background history so that it cannot be missed. It is stressing that He was of the house and family of David.

We cannot doubt that Luke had in mind the prophecy which would be well known to his readers, that the One Who was to be ruler in Israel, Whose origin was from of old, from ancient days, would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5.2) and would be the root of Jesse, David's father (Isaiah 12.1). But he does not draw attention to the prophecies specifically. He leaves the inference to be drawn. There is a studied silence about it, a silence which is typical of Luke in a number of places. He often gets over his message by silence.

Chapter 1 has been full of the divine as being revealed to the human, with great emphasis on the coming event. Chapter 2.8 onwards is the same, except that it looks back on the great event. But the great event itself passes in a way that is so ordinary that we can hardly credit it (in total contrast to His death). The King is being born in order to commence His Kingly Rule, and yet all we see, and are told of, in Luke is a baby lying in a manger arrayed in a swaddling cloth. It reminds us that He came into the world as true man.

It tells us too that as a result of the instructions of mighty Rome, His adoptive father had to attend at Bethlehem for enrolment. Joseph is revealed as fulfilling his political obligations, in obedience to the 'powers that be' (Romans 13.1). He is a man under authority. Yet every reader knows that really it is this baby that the Gospel of Luke is all about, for this is Jesus Christ the Lord made man, a fact emphasised here by understatement. The great oak that is to come springs from the tiny acorn.

So the opening draws attention to the fact that Jesus came as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, into a world ruled by Rome, and in a land governed by Rome, even though in the case of Palestine indirectly, and that His own life will be very much

affected by Rome's decisions. Even Herod is very much a vassal king under Roman control, and has to submit to Caesar's decrees, as is made clear here. Rome controls all. This emphasis on Roman authority at the beginning of Luke's writings ties in with Luke's later emphasis at the end of his two books on the fact that the Kingly Rule of God must be established and proclaimed by an Apostle in Rome (Acts 23.11; 28), by which time the accomplishment of this baby will be resounding throughout the Roman Empire as the word mightily prevails.

The Birth of Jesus (2.1-7).

Central to all the magnificent incidents in chapters 1 & 2 is the fact that Jesus will be born, and yet it is quite remarkable when we come to it how quietly the incident itself passes by. It is seen as occurring under the shadow of Rome, and without fanfare, as a historical event which can be dated. Apart from by the angels to the shepherds there is to be no earthly fanfare (the Magi arrive much later). He slips quietly into the world asleep in a manger. He is God's still small voice (1 Kings 19.11-12), heard only by those who are chosen. Thus does His birth occur almost unnoticed by the world.

However, as in chapter 1 the birth is known by representatives of the godly. For here in chapter 2 there is a stirring among the godly, as first the shepherds, and then Simeon and Anna, bear their testimony to Him, the first as a result of angelic testimony, the remaining two as inspired by the Holy Spirit. But all He appears to be to mighty Rome is a baby of someone not very important who is swearing his allegiance, and of whom they know almost nothing. Yet before Luke has finished writing He will be shaking the very foundations of the Empire and will have broken the power of Satan and of death.

Note how much of these verses (5 out of 7) is about the enrolment and how little about the birth. Had we not had chapter 1 we might have thought that the enrolment was the really important thing, and the birth merely incidental. But in fact what it is doing is emphasising His Davidic descent. That comes central in the chiasmus below. Furthermore Luke wants us to contrast the enrolment brought about by Caesar making his decrees with what God is doing. God too, unknown to the world but known to His own, is also making His decrees.

The passage may be analysed as follows:

- a Now it came about that in those days there went out a decree ('dogma' = decree, command) from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled (1).
- b This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to enrol themselves, every one to his own city (2-3).
- c And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, to Judaea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (4a).
- d Because he was of the house and family of David (4b).
- c To enrol himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child (5).
- b And it came about that while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her firstborn son (6).
- a And she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the guest chamber (7).

Note here how there are five verses for the enrolment and only two for the birth. In 'a' the lord of the world sends out his decree that all are to swear their loyalty, and in the parallel the real Lord of the world lies in a manger because there is no room for Him even in the guest room (although it is true that soon will come some who will swear their loyalty to Him). In 'b' the stress is on the fact that this is Quirinius 'first' enrolment, and that Rome will continue with its influence so that one day in the years to come there will be another second enrolment, and in the parallel the baby is the 'first'-born (prototokos) of teen-age Mary. Here then are two 'firsts'. In 'c' Joseph goes to Bethlehem (where according to prophecy the Messiah will be born) and in the parallel Mary goes with him because she is bearing the promised child. In 'd'

focus is centrally placed on the Davidic lineage of Jesus' adoptive father. This child is to be the Son of David. So quietly does Luke bring out the contrasts and yet centre on what is most important.

2.1 'Now it came about that in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled.'

In 3 BC a 'worldwide' (Roman) decree went out, on the twenty fifth anniversary of the reign of Augustus, that all men of position and importance must go to their places of authority and swear their fealty to Caesar. This may well have been that enrolment. Joseph, being in line for the throne of David in Jewish eyes, would therefore be required to join his father at the family lands of the Davidic house in order to swear his fealty. Rome's spies in Palestine would know all about the coming Son of David who would rise above Israel's enemies. They would therefore see any son of David as a potential threat that had to be controlled. If this speaks of that event then it is historical evidence that Herod died in 1 BC (see introduction).

It is, however, possible that this was a similar enrolment organised some years prior to that event, of which as yet we have no archaeological evidence. Josephus tells us that during the last days of Herod 'the whole Jewish people' swore allegiance to Caesar, confirming that such an enrolment did take place, at least in Palestine, at that time. There are still many gaps in our knowledge of the history of that period.

Or it may have been an 'enrolment' for a different purpose. If it was for the purposes of taxation it may simply be stating that Caesar had issued a general requirement for all to be taxed which resulted in the fact that each province carried it out as seemed best when it was suitable. We certainly know that from 6 AD regular taxation censuses were conducted in Judaea and elsewhere every fourteen years, and actual documents for such censuses held in Egypt have been found among papyri and exist from 20 - 270 AD. According to Josephus at the tax census which was organised by the Romans and was held in Judaea in 6 AD, there was a great deal of trouble and an insurrection (see Acts 5.37). This would be because it was carried out without regard to Jewish sensitivities. The one here may have been a similar tax census fourteen years prior to that, but conducted by Herod along Jewish lines in such a way as to prevent such trouble, at which family tribal possessions were required to be registered by the tribal leaders and owners, the emphasis being on the enrolment of the tribes, and the measuring of their possessions. At these censuses names and details were recorded together with a record of what was owned.

Whichever way it was it clearly required the presence of Joseph at his family home. This would be unusual for a census organised by Rome, which would normally be carried out at the place of residence, but if it was by Herod he may deliberately have ordered people to return to their tribal possessions in order to make it appear very much a Jewish enrolment and a patriotic activity. An edict by a governor of Egypt in 104 AD is known in which the demand was made that all return to their family homes.

The mention of Augustus is apposite. It was the consequences of the long peace under his reign, together with the administration that he set up, of which censuses were an important part as he organised the Empire, that would under later emperors enable the Good News to spread so rapidly as it does in Acts. And it is a reminder that it was his hand that finally determined the present destiny of Palestine.

2.2 'This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was a responsible official of Syria.'

The presence of Rome is further underlined by pointing to an authority nearer to home. The enrolment was carried out by Quirinius, the emperor's authorised official in Syria. An enrolment in 3 BC would tie in with the fact that Quirinius, who was governor of Syria at the time of the census in 6 AD, is also evidenced as having had some kind of civil authority there around 3 BC. He also performed military functions in Syria between 10 and 7 BC, which

would tie in with a census around that time. Indeed he appears to have been involved in Syria's affairs over a good long period with authority from Caesar. So from that point of view any date is possible. It also explains why this is called his 'first' enrolment, with the one in 6 AD being his second. The fact that there is a first, followed later by a second emphasises Rome's continual control. Note how Luke by parallelism connects his 'first' enrolment with Joseph and Mary's 'firstborn' son. One is a first act by a dominant authority demonstrating the subjection of Palestine, the other is the first act of God in the deliverance of His true people. As Rome begins more to exert its control, so does God act in order to deal with it.

The word used of Quirinius' office means 'responsible authorised official' not strictly 'governor'. He could therefore have been responsible for this census while another was in power as 'governor'.

2.3-5 'And all went to enrol themselves, every one to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the town of Nazareth, to Judaea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to enrol himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child.'

'All' went to enrol themselves. This may mean all leaders and people considered to be of importance, or it may have looked wider. Each had to go to his 'own city', that is in this case his tribal inheritance. In Joseph's case he had to go to Bethlehem because he was of David's line and David's tribal roots were in Bethlehem, and it was no doubt where Joseph's family still had land.

This does raise the question as to Joseph's connection both with Bethlehem and Nazareth. It is true that in verse 39 we are told that Joseph and Mary, with Jesus, 'returned to their own town Nazareth'. And certainly Nazareth was Mary's home town from the beginning. And equally certainly it was Joseph's home town when they came down to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old. But that does not necessarily mean that it was so for Joseph at the time of Jesus' birth.

There are a number of possible scenarios. Joseph may have been living in Nazareth, where he courted Mary, but with his father and other family living in Bethlehem. He himself may have been living in Bethlehem and simply have come up to Nazareth on hearing of his betrothed's condition, marrying there and returning to Bethlehem speedily because of the enrolment. Or he may have had business interests in both Nazareth and Bethlehem and have moved often between the two (as Aquila and Priscilla appear to have done in Acts between Rome and Corinth), sharing his time between Bethlehem and Nazareth.

While the fact that they 'returned to their own town Nazareth' (verse 39) may be seen as militating against the idea that he lived in Bethlehem all the time, that verse is a very summarised explanation as to how they were in Jerusalem for the purification and were in Nazareth for Jesus' visit to Jerusalem twelve years later, at which point it was their home town. It may not mean that they went there immediately or lived there all the time. They 'returned' may simply refer to the fact that they had previously left it together for the enrolment.

Thus it could be that at the time of the birth Joseph lived in Bethlehem at the family home, and Mary lived at Nazareth. Then that on hearing that she was pregnant he went to Nazareth, where God put her in the clear in his eyes, after which they married rather hurriedly, and that that was why he was there when the enrolment call came, which explains why they came together to Bethlehem, in order to enrol and possibly live there. This would also explain why they were still in Bethlehem after forty days. It further explains adequately why Mary accompanied Joseph even though she was pregnant. Then after the visit of the Magi they fled to Egypt, and when they finally returned from Egypt they 'returned' to Nazareth where they had married which now became 'home' to Joseph as well as Mary. From then on it was seen

as 'their own town' (verse 39). That is one possible scenario. Another is that Joseph was more closely connected with Nazareth for reasons given earlier.

Whatever way it was what a come down this was for the house of David. He who should have been God's firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth (Psalm 89.27) was trudging slowly along the dusty roads to pay allegiance to another. Such were the consequences of Israel's disobedience. He took with him his betrothed wife who was at the time pregnant. It is possible that she was required to be 'enrolled' as well, which did sometimes happen, although we do not know one way or the other for sure. It may simply be that they wanted their firstborn to be born in their tribal portion, or that they were returning to Joseph's home. Whether they knew of the prophecy in Micah 5.1 we do not know. God certainly knew. Furthermore they may have been escaping disapproval from some more staid people who frowned at their having (in other people's eyes) conceived a baby while still only betrothed. And the kindly Joseph may have wanted his child bride to be where he could protect her from such calumniations.

It would appear that they then settled down in Bethlehem, for the appearance of the wise men and the slaughter of the children (Matthew 2) occurred some time after the birth (it must have been after the forty days of purification). And in fact it was only the warning from an angel that later caused them not to return to Bethlehem, but to go back to living in Nazareth, when they returned from taking refuge in Egypt (Matthew 2.22-23).

So this does raise the question as to where Joseph actually lived. As we have already seen it is quite possible that in fact he normally lived at the family home in Bethlehem, but that he had gone to Nazareth when he heard that Mary was pregnant so as to divorce her (or he may have gone after he learned the truth). On learning from God that her story was actually true he may then have stayed with her for a time in a supportive role, during which time they were married. The marriage would probably have been a quiet one due to the bride's condition, and it was unconsummated. But the demands of the census may then have meant that he had to cut short his visit and return to Bethlehem, naturally taking his wife with him. When they arrived back at the family home it may have been crowded out because of the census so that the guestroom was full, which would explain why, in spite of Mary's condition, they had to sleep on the ground floor where the domestic animals were also kept. This might well have been where Joseph was used to sleeping anyway, and was quite regularly used for sleeping in. If his father was still alive he, and his wife, would merit the use of the main 'guestroom'.

Luke probably still uses the term 'betrothed' in order to indicate that they had not yet consummated their marriage (although some witnesses have 'wife' or 'betrothed wife'). He is technically aware. As far as he is concerned they were not yet fully married. Matthew tells us that a marriage ceremony had taken place although Joseph did not consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born (Matthew 1.24-25). It is, however, unlikely that she would have accompanied Joseph if the wedding had not taken place. The distinctions are only technical.

The chiasmus brings out that the stress is finally on the fact that Jesus was of the house and family of David, and that He therefore had to be born in Bethlehem because of His Messiahship. There is as yet no evidence that the Jews were actually previously expecting the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem. It may well be that the discovery by the 'wise men' of Jerusalem in Matthew 2.5 was the first recognition of the fact. But Luke's readers would certainly know it, and would recognise that the Scriptures had said it.

2.6 'And at about that while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her firstborn son.'

And it was while they were in Bethlehem, possibly at the family home, that the time came for the baby to be born (it is not said that it happened immediately on their arrival, nor is that the impression given). Note that He is described as *her* firstborn son. This may be emphasising the

fulfilment of the promise, as promised to her, or it may be hinting at the fact that Joseph had had no part in His conception.

They were there because of Quirinius 'first' great act of establishing his, and Rome's, authority. Here is an example where in the sovereignty of God the Roman Empire was unwittingly used in order to bring about the fulfilment of prophecy. Rome saw itself as by this act making clear its supremacy, but through the 'firstborn' son of the line of David God was also, unseen by the world, establishing His authority in the very house of David, and revealing His supremacy by bending Rome to His will. The 'first' of Quirinius was paralleled by the 'first' of God. We should note here that as a result of His adoption by Joseph, who would acknowledge Him as his firstborn in the Temple, He would in Jewish eyes be seen as Joseph's main heir.

In view of the great heralding of His coming in chapter 1, and indeed of Whom Luke knew Him to be, the restraint of this account is quite remarkable. It suggests that he stuck firmly to the tradition which he received from eyewitnesses, and wanted it to be quite clear that He was born as a true man without any frills. (No inventor would have put it so simply).

'The days were fulfilled that she should be delivered.' Compare Genesis 25.24; Luke 1.57. God was seen as the One Who fulfilled the days. Note that it happened 'while they were there'. But they actually remained in Bethlehem for some considerable time. So the birth may not have taken place until some time after their arrival. There is actually no reason at all for thinking that it happened on the first night.

'Firstborn son.' Had Luke wished to stress that this was her only son he could have used monogenes. Thus it would appear that at the least he did not see the question as important, and at the most knew that she later had other children. This last suggestion is supported by the fact that in Matthew 1.25 we read literally, 'and Joseph was not 'knowing' her until she had brought forth a son', with the thought being that after that he was 'knowing' her. This ties in, of course, with the fact that all the Gospels speak of her other sons, and even name them (8.19-21; Matthew 12.46; 13.55; Mark 3.31; 6.3). The myth of a perpetual virgin has no place in Luke's Gospel.

2.7 'And she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the guest room.'

As was usual with a new born baby He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, long strips of cloth wound round and round the baby to keep Him warm and secure. But because the guest room was full (probably because Joseph's father or some other important relatives were using it) Joseph and Mary slept on the ground floor. Others also would be sleeping there at such a time, along with some domestic animals, as was customary in Jewish homes. They were not as fussy as we are, and they saw their animals as valuable, and as family friends. Among other things they were their daily milk supply. And there they laid Jesus in one of the animal's feeding boxes among the warm and comfortable straw (it would be much more comfortable than Mary's bed). What a stark contrast this was to the great Caesar making his decrees from his palace. And yet here was a greater than Caesar. Such was the introduction of the Son of God into the world.

'The guest room.' 'Kataluma' ('guestchamber' - 22.11; Mark 14.14) not 'pandocheion' ('inn' - 10.34). The word is the same as that used for the guestchamber in which Jesus and His disciples would eat the Passover (22.11). It could also mean 'a resting place', which could include an inn, but it is unlikely that on visiting the family lands they would sleep in an inn. Inns were for people who had nowhere else to go, and could find no hospitality. But at such a time hospitality would be at its most generous, especially for an heir to the throne of David. Even if they had no family home there would be relatives there, and tribal hospitality would not have allowed them not to be welcomed, especially as they would be expected because of

the enrolment. Sleeping in the ground floor room was common practise and no insult, especially when the house was full. All suggestions that they were in a stable or in the open air are an insult to Jewish hospitality.

The Angels Declare the Coming of the Messiah and Bless God for His Goodness in Sending Him, and Appear to the Shepherds in the Fields to Prepare the Way For His Coming. God's Own Enrolment Is Being Made On Behalf of His Son (2.8-14).

We should note that in the two Gospels that speak of Jesus' birth those who acknowledge Him are the unexpected. Matthew has foreigners coming to acknowledge Jesus and Luke has shepherds. That Luke stresses the shepherds ties in with his continual emphasis on the poor, for shepherds were regularly poor, and they were also looked on as not being quite the thing because their job prevented them from observing the laws of uncleanness, and even engaging regularly in Sabbath worship. They were seen (sometimes quite justly) as dishonest and irreligious. Indeed their testimony was unacceptable in law courts. However the fact that God selected these men out suggests that they at least were devout men. Indeed others see these shepherds as those employed by the priests and the Temple in order to look after sheep which had been brought for offerings, which would tie in with this. Even so they would still be poor and have difficulty in maintaining the proper observance of ceremonial law.

These shepherds are the last of a trilogy (Zacharias, Mary and the shepherds) in which an angel appears to declare the coming of the Messiah (no angel appeared to Elisabeth), and the first in a trilogy (the shepherds, Simeon and Anna) of those who welcome Jesus after His birth. On one side of them are Zacharias and Mary, and on the other Simeon and Anna. We might see Zacharias as representing the priesthood, Mary as representing womanhood, Simeon and Anna as representing all the men and women who are faithful in Jerusalem, and the shepherds as representing all the people. They are in noble company.

We may analyse the passage as follows:

- a And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the countryside, and keeping watch by night over their flock (8).
- b And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were very much afraid (9).
- c And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people, for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (10-11)
- d "And this is the sign to you, You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger" (12).
- e And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying (13).
- f "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased" (14).
- e And it came about that, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us now go even to Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come about, which the Lord has made known to us" (15).'
- d 'And they came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger' (16)
- c And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this child, and all who heard it wondered at the things which were spoken to them by the shepherds (17-18).
- b But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart (19).
- a And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken to them (20).

In 'a' the shepherds are abiding in the countryside, and in the parallel they return to the

countryside full of praise to God. In 'b' the shepherds ponder on what they hear and see and are afraid, while in the parallel Mary ponders on all that is said. In 'c' the angel gives the shepherds great news about the Coming One Who is to be Saviour, Messiah and Lord, and in the parallel they make known the great news to others causing great wonder by their words. In 'd' the sign is that they will find the babe lying in a manger, and in the parallel they do so. In 'e' there appear a multitude of angels who give praise to God, and in the parallel they depart, leaving the shepherds to act on their words. In 'f', central to the passage, we have the content of their praise, giving glory to God and certainty of salvation to the world.

2.8 'And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the countryside, and keeping watch by night over their flock.'

The scene now moves to the countryside, possibly the craggy mountainside, where there were shepherds who were watching their flocks by night. Day and night it was their responsibility to watch over the sheep, summer and winter alike if the weather was mild enough. Here was where David had once watched his father's sheep (1 Samuel 17.15, 34-37), here he had slain the lion and the bear, and it was therefore seemly that when his Greater Son was being born into the world shepherds should be involved in it. It is an indication of God's delicate touch, and a reminder of the Davidic connection.

Such shepherds would not be looked on favourably by most people and they would almost certainly not have been seen as ritually 'clean'. They were not in a position to observe the niceties of religion. Yet we are probably justified in seeing in these shepherds pious men, and men who were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, men who were looking for the consolation of Israel (compare verse 25).

2.9 'And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were very much afraid.'

As they sat around talking, and peering every now and again into the darkness for any sign of savage beasts, they must have been greatly astonished when suddenly an angel of the Lord stood by them, especially as, with his presence, the glory of the Lord shone around them.

Had God wanted us to know who this angel was He would have told us. Idle speculation therefore is useless. But all knew what 'the glory of the Lord' represented. This was God revealing Himself in the Shekinah, the revealing of His glory long awaited by Israel, as a foretaste of what was to come. It would be next revealed at the Transfiguration (9.29; Matthew 17.2, 5). And then at the Resurrection (Matthew 28.3-4). It was in direct contrast with the darkness which accompanied the cross, when the light appeared to be going out. Such a revelation from God must have been terrifying to those poor men. It would be the last thing that they were expecting. So 'they were terrified'.

2.10 'And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people, for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."'

The angel assured them that they need not be afraid. Rather they should rejoice. For he had brought them good news indeed, 'glad tidings of great joy' (for 'joy' compare 1.14, 47, 58). It was glad tidings which would be for 'all people' (compare Isaiah 61.1). The shepherds would see this as meaning all classes of people in Israel, including themselves. Luke probably intends us to see its wider connections. And this good news was that on that very day, in the city of David (Bethlehem), was born 'a Saviour Who is Christ the Lord'.

The words are expressed in the same kind of language that was used by kings and emperors when a new heir was born. It was the Birth Announcement of a King. The birth of Augustus was also said to have been heralded as 'good tidings'. They were tidings of joy for all. In this case the words happened to be true. His birth really was good tidings

In verse 1 Caesar Augustus had announced his decree. Now it was God's turn to issue a decree as He called these shepherds to enrol and pay allegiance to the Saviour. Caesar had called the mightiest in the Empire to submit to him. Here, symbolically, God also called the mightiest in His empire, those who were meek and lowly. Two empires were progressing side by side. But the empire of the meek and lowly would eventually come out on top.

It is possibly not without significance that 'shepherd' was regularly a picture of God's servants and ministers of the word throughout both Old and New Testaments (Numbers 27.17; 1 Kings 22.17; Jeremiah 23.4; Ezekiel 34.23; 37.24; Zechariah 13.7; John 21.15-17) fellow-shepherds with God (Psalm 23.1; 80.1; Isaiah 40.11; John 10.11-14; Hebrews 13.20; 1 Peter 2.25; 5.4). Caesar wanted great leaders and men of wealth and position (22.25), God wanted the humble and poor to be His shepherds and through whom to do great things (22.24-27; 1 Corinthians 1.27).

'A Saviour.' Compare 1.47 where God is Mary's Saviour; John 4.42 where Jesus is called the Saviour of the world by the Samaritan woman; Acts 5.31 where Jesus is declared to be a Prince and a Saviour to bring repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins; Luke 1.77; Acts 13.23 where Jesus is the Saviour Whom God has brought to Israel; Ephesians 5.23 where Christ is the Saviour of His body, the church; Philippians 3.20 where His people look for their Saviour to come from Heaven and totally transform them, making them like Himself; 2 Timothy 1.10 where our salvation has been revealed through the appearing of 'our Saviour Christ Jesus', Who abolished death and brought light and immortality to light through the Good News; Titus 2.13 where we look for the glorious appearing 'of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ', Titus 3.6 where the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Saviour has appeared to bring us His merciful salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit 'which He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour'; 2 Peter 1.2 where our standing is 'in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ'; and so on. In Jewish terms the description links Him with God (2 Samuel 22.3; Psalm 106.21; Isaiah 43.3, 11 (the only Saviour); 45.15, 21; 49.26; 60.16; 63.8; Hosea 13.4 (the incomparable Saviour).

This idea of Jesus as the Saviour is prominent in Luke (see verse 30; 1.69, 71, 77). He has come to seek and to save that which was lost (19.9-10), as is evidenced by the parables (see especially chapter 15). And His work is regularly spoke of in terms of 'saving' or 'making whole'.

'Christ the Lord.' He is also both Messiah and Lord. Compare Acts 2.36 where as the crucified and risen One He is made 'both Lord and Messiah'. As Messiah He fulfils all the promises in the Old Testament of a great Deliverer from the house of David. As Lord He is superior to David as his Lord (20.41-44; Psalm 110.1), and Paul takes it further by seeing in the title the Name above every Name, the Name of YHWH (Philippians 2.9-11). So the three titles reveal His saving power, His fulfilment of prophecy, and His position as supreme Lord. The chapter began with Caesar Augustus, who was regularly called Saviour and Lord. Now we are introduced to the greater and more effective Saviour and Lord as pronounced from heaven.

'In the city of David.' A clear indication that here was the promised coming 'David', the everlasting King promised by the prophets.

2.12 "And this is the sign to you, You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger."

And how would this babe be known? By the sign that God had given. That is, by the fact that he was wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. This was no accident. It was prearranged. Strange identification for the arrival of the Lord Messiah, and even more so for the Son of the Most High. But it was so. The One Who holds all things together (Colossians 1.17; Hebrews 1.3), was Himself held together in swaddling clothes. And it was very apt for

shepherds as His lying in a manger revealed the baby as associated with their kind of work. He lay in a manger where animals would feed, and was thus revealed as One who had come to the meek and lowly. They would have felt very much at home.

2.13 ‘And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,’

And then all Heaven broke loose, for as the shepherds watched in amazement they saw with the angel a whole mass of the heavenly host, praising God for what He was doing. Great legions would be called on to welcome the Emperor’s son when he was born, and to hail his birth. But even greater legions welcomed into the world the Son of God. The legions of angels, which would not be called on to prevent His death (Matthew 26.53), came to celebrate His birth. What was happening was strange to these shepherds, but it must have seemed even stranger to those angels. No one knew better than they that this baby deserved the highest place that Heaven affords. And yet all He had here was a manger. How they must have cringed to see Him lying there. But it was not for them to criticise their Lord and God. They could only wonder and sing His praise for what He was willing to do in order to save men and women.

When God laid the foundations of the earth, ‘the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of the elohim (‘heavenly beings’ or ‘God’) shouted for joy’ (Job 38.7). How much more fitting that when God laid His new foundation stone (1 Corinthians 3.11) and new cornerstone (20.17; Ephesians 2.20; 1 Peter 2.6) for His new heaven and earth, they should do so even more rapturously.

The contrast with the other appearances of an angel is striking. Gabriel had pointed ahead to what was to be. The angels would have been listening to that also but their cries of praise and their declarations of God’s glory at that point remained hidden as far as earth was concerned. But now that the wonderful and amazing event has actually happened it can no longer remain completely hidden. For a short while, so wonderful is the event, that the curtain between Heaven and earth is allowed to fall away and Heaven’s view of things is revealed on earth to the shepherds (compare 2 Kings 6.17).

2.14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased (literally ‘among men of favour’).”

And this was what the angels said, and it is the focal point of the chiasmus. ‘Glory to God in the Highest’. That is ever what they cry whether they are on earth or in heaven (compare Revelation 4.11; 5.13). For they, and they alone, really appreciate His true glory. To those who know Him as He is, He is the glorious One. And behind it lay the idea that this glory was now visiting the earth. As John could say, ‘we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth’ (John 1.14)

But now they also sang a different song, ‘On earth peace among men of favour.’ Thus God reveals His glory in Heaven and His peace on earth. It is through peace in their hearts that men experience His glory. This phrase could mean ‘peace among men in whom He is well pleased’ (RSV) or ‘peace among men on whom His favour rests’ (NEB). The language is typically Semitic and appears in hymns among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The coming of this baby into the world would offer to men peace with God (Romans 5.1), peace from God (Romans 1.7 and often), and the peace of God which passes all understanding (Philippians 4.7). And this would be for all who responded fully to Him and thereby in their lives were pleasing to Him. Or alternately, to put the emphasis more correctly, it was for those on whom His favour rests. The bringing of peace was the Messiah’s task (Isaiah 9.6, 7; Zechariah 9.9-10). This was indeed what Jesus had come to do as the prince of Peace, to save men and women and enable them to be reconciled to God through His gracious provision for their need so that He might reveal His kindness towards them continually for evermore

(Ephesians 2.6-7). This was why the angel had called Him, ‘the Saviour’.

This promise is the more significant in that at this time the Roman world was enjoying the great Pax Romana. Peace reigned over the known world. And it was a splendid achievement. But it did not reign in men’s hearts. That is why in the end it had to fail. As Epictetus could say in 1st century AD, ‘while the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion grief and envy. He cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace’. That was one difference between the great peace of Augustus, and this peace brought by the Lord Messiah.

2.15 ‘And it came about that, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, “Let us now go even to Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come about, which the Lord has made known to us.” ’

Once the angels had departed section by section like a marching regiment (the word suggests going away following one after another), and the glorious light of God no longer shone, the shepherds were quick in coming to their decision. “Let us now go even to Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come about, which the Lord has made known to us.” This was the language of godly men.

2.16 ‘And they came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger.’

So as rapidly as they could they hurried to Bethlehem, and there they ‘searched for and found’ (aneurosko) Mary and Joseph with the baby lying in the manger. We are not told how, but, as a midwife had probably been called for, the news would have spread around and someone would be able to point the way. For the birth of a son to Joseph would be news in Bethlehem.

2.17-18 ‘And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this child, and all who heard it wondered at the things which were spoken to them by the shepherds.’

And once they had seen what they saw they went away and continually told everywhere what the angels had told them about this child, and there was great wonder everywhere as people considered what the shepherds said. They would make it known for years. It was a never to be forgotten event. Such amazement is another theme of Luke’s writings (verses 33, 47; 4.22; 8.25; 9.43; 11.14, 38; 20.26; 24.12, 41; Acts 2.7, 12; 3.10; 9.21; 13.12). For the Good News is truly amazing.

Compare here 1.65-66. These are the first two instances of what will become common in Luke’s writings, especially in Acts, the ‘spreading of the word’. The news was so wonderful that it could not be held back.

2.19 ‘But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart.’

And Mary, to whom the shepherds would have explained everything, kept what they had said, along with what the angel had said to her earlier, and everything else that she heard about those days, and pondered on them regularly in her heart. She no doubt explained this to Luke when she was telling him about these wonderful events. It was inevitable that it would be so. They were not things easily forgotten. It was not until she got older and ‘more sensible’ that she tried to put a brake on Jesus’ ministry (Mark 3.21, 31-35). For, godly woman though she was, like us she was only human.

2.20 ‘And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken to them.’

And as for the shepherds, they returned to the countryside, and to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen. Such behaviour inevitably follows reception

of the Good News. Compare 5.26; 7.16; 13.13; 17.15; 18.43, 23.47; Acts 2.47; 4.21; 10.46; 13.48. The glad tidings were for all mankind.

Note the interesting contrasts. The hearers were filled with wonder, Mary kept it all in her heart and meditated on it, the shepherds glorified and praised God. They had no doubt about what had happened.

Jesus Is Circumcised and Presented at the Temple and Is Blessed By Simon Who Prophesies Over Him (2.21-35).

The purification of Mary and Jesus from the ritual defilement of child birth was necessary due to the requirements of Jewish Law, something that would take forty days, and offerings and sacrifices would then be made once the period was over. The fact that the birth had made Mary 'unclean' is clear evidence of the genuineness of the birth and of the fact that the one born was true man. It was right that Jesus also should partake in all this, for He was 'born under the Law' for our sakes (Galatians 4.4), and for our sakes went through all that He had to face. He was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin (Romans 8.3), in all things becoming like His brethren (Hebrews 2.17) so that on their behalf He might die for their sin. Thus what He went through He went through, not for His own sin (for He was without sin - 2 Corinthians 5.21; 1 Peter 2.22), but for us as representative man.

Here in this passage Simeon is placed in parallel with Elisabeth in 1.41-45 (see opening chiasmus). Both prophesy by the Holy Spirit over Jesus, the one before His birth and the other after His birth. Mankind and womankind together combine to acknowledge His coming.

It will be noted how all the people who have been involved in proclaiming Jesus are 'ordinary people'. They are godly, but ordinary (although in a sense that is a contradiction). Not a chief priest, or Scribe, or elder among them. It is not to the world's great that He comes, but to those who will receive Him.

This passage can be analysed as follows:

- a And when eight days were fulfilled for circumcising him, his name was called JESUS, which was so called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb (21).
- b And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were fulfilled, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male which opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord", and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (22-24).
- c And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he would not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Messiah, and he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, that they might do concerning him after the custom of the law, then he received him into his arms, and blessed God (25-28).
- d And he said,

"Now let your servant depart, Lord,
According to your word, in peace,
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
Which you have prepared before the face of all peoples,
A light for revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of your people Israel" (29-32).

- e And his father and his mother were marvelling at the things which were spoken concerning him, and Simeon blessed them
- d And said to Mary his mother,'

**“Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel,
And for a sign which is spoken against.
(Yes, and a sword will pierce through your own soul),
That thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.”**

- **c And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher (she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and she had been a widow even to fourscore and four years), who departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day, and coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (36-38).**
- **b And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth (39).**
- **a And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him (40).**

In ‘a’ the baby Jesus is circumcised and named Jesus as God had commanded, and in the parallel he becomes strong and the grace of God is on Him. In ‘b’ the customs of the Jews are carried out and in the parallel the parents, having fulfilled those customs, return home to Nazareth with Him. In ‘c’ there is a man in whom is the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, who blesses Jesus, and in the parallel there is a woman who is a prophetess who does the same. These together are the two witnesses necessary to testify to what is true. Both give blessings to the baby Jesus. In ‘d’ we have in parallel the two prophetic statements of Simeon. And central in ‘e’ we find the perplexed parents, and Simeon blessing them. The real central point of this chiasmus are the two prophetic statements which come to a perplexed world.

2.21 ‘And when eight days were fulfilled for circumcising him, his name was called JESUS, which was so called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.’

On the eighth day after His birth Jesus was circumcised, a ritual which had to be undergone by all Jews who did not wish to be cut off from Israel. It was considered so important that it could even be carried out on the Sabbath day. This removal of the foreskin was a sign that the recipient was being brought within the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17.12). The seven day wait was probably in order to cater for the ‘removal by waiting’ of the uncleanness of childbirth, due partly to the contact with the blood and afterbirth involved. The naming of Jesus here would appear to confirm that this ‘naming’ at the time of circumcision had become the custom (compare 1.59). It is this naming, (which is drawn attention to by the comment), that is important to Luke. Jesus was here named with the name given by the angel before He was born, indicating His separation to God from before His birth.

22.22-24 ‘And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were fulfilled, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male which opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”, and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons”.’

According to the law of Moses every firstborn male of Israel belonged to God for the purpose of service in God’s Dwellingplace, because they were seen as having been redeemed by God at the Passover and therefore as having become His. Initially a sacrifice would be offered on their behalf. But then, in order that they might be redeemed from the obligation of service at the Tabernacle/Temple (they had been substituted by the Levites) five shekels had to be paid to a priest at least one moon period after the birth (Exodus 13.2, 12; Numbers 18.15; compare 1 Samuel 1.24-28). Although all this would be done Luke does not mention it because what he is interested in is the presentation of Jesus to God as holy. All the rest is merely background.

Furthermore when a woman bore a male child she was seen as fully ritually unclean for seven days, (making unclean any who came in contact with her or entered her room), and after that

she was secondarily unclean for another thirty three days. During that period of forty days she was not allowed to enter the Temple or take part in a religious ceremony (on bearing a girl child it was for eighty days). At the end of forty days her purification would be complete. Then at the end of the forty days she had to offer up a lamb as a 'whole burnt offering' (literally 'that which goes up'), an offering of atonement, dedication and worship, and a pigeon for a 'purification for sin sacrifice', a sacrifice for dealing with and removing sin. But in the case of the poor they could offer instead two pigeons, one of the pigeons replacing the lamb. See for the regulations Leviticus 12. These regulations appear to have been slightly relaxed by Jesus' day so that two young pigeons were seen as sufficient for any woman whether poor or not. Thus this offering need not indicate that they were poor.

There was no obligation to actually bring the child to the Temple, but women who lived not too far from the Temple would want to take the opportunity of showing off their babies when they came to offer their offerings. To have a male child was a triumph and an occasion for gratitude.

The purpose of all these offerings was redemption and atonement. The idea would seem to be that child birth was a constant reminder of the woman's part in the sin of Eden. Every child birth harked back to that day and thus to the need for both atonement, and cleansing from impurity, for the woman. Furthermore the baby would over the period be made constantly ritually unclean by his contact with his mother and the afterbirth, thus he too would need to be ritually 'purified'.

'As it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male which opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord." Luke is not actually citing a particular verse (although it may have been found like this in a compendium of Jewish or Christian sayings) but is combining the ideas found in a number of Scripture verses e.g. Exodus 13.2, 12, 15; Numbers 18.15.

Thus Jesus' mother and father brought Him to the Temple to present Him before God, having carried out the necessary requirements for 'their' purification. This 'their' may mean that of the mother and child, or it may have been including the father. He would carry the taint of uncleanness from his contact with his wife. We must distinguish the 'purifying from uncleanness' from the sacrifices which followed, which were for atonement, although they too purified in their own way. In all this God's ordinances were gladly and religiously fulfilled. Jesus was a full Jew, as He had to be for 'salvation was of the Jews' as the Old Testament made clear (John 4.22), and the Jews would not have accepted anyone who did not completely fulfil the Law.

It should be noted that Jesus constantly fulfilled all Jewish requirements, even when it was not necessary in His own case because of His sinlessness. This was in order to 'fulfil all righteousness', that is, do what was right for a man to do and come nothing short of what God required of Israel, of which He had voluntarily become a member. For Israel was summed up in Him. This would, as we know, include participation in the Passover. He participated in these ceremonies in His capacity as representative on behalf of the whole of Israel for whom He was 'born under the Law' (Galatians 4.4) and for Whom He would be the bearer of sin (2 Corinthians 5.21).

But note how Luke skirts over the detail of the ceremonial. He is more concerned to emphasise that Jesus was presented to God as One Who was holy before the Lord. The ceremonial was secondary. And he makes no mention of the payment of the five shekels which released Jesus from the obligation of Temple service. He is rather concerned with the fact that Jesus was being offered to God for a greater service. Nevertheless he lays great stress on His parent's obedience to God's command in carrying out all that was required of them, emphasising their continual piety and obedience to the Law (verses 22-24, 27, 39). Until the cross and resurrection such fulfilment was fully required.

2.25 ‘And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.’

We are now introduced to an unofficial representative of the godly in Israel (He was God’s choice for the purpose). His name was Simeon. Any attempt to seek to identify him with anyone known from history is futile. Simeon was too common a name. He represented those who were righteous and devout, fulfilling God’s Law from a loving and obedient heart, and who ‘looked for the consolation of Israel’ (compare Isaiah 40.1), that is, for God’s final deliverance and blessing through the Messiah. And he was a man on whom was the Holy Spirit. Here we have an example of one on whom was the Spirit continually, not for the purpose of some supernatural manifestation in inspired words, but in daily life, as indicated in Psalm 51.10; 139.7; 143.10.

‘Devout (eulabes).’ The word means ‘to take well hold of’ and therefore ‘to be cautious’. Then it came to mean ‘caution in spiritual things, careful to please God’.

‘The consolation (paraklesin) of Israel.’ Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be the parakletos. The word means ‘the comforting, the strengthening, the encouragement’ and the idea was that it would be through the Messiah as the Holy Spirit was poured forth, an experience which would be common to many as individuals.

2.26 ‘And it had been revealed (communicated) to him by the Holy Spirit, that he would not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.’

And during the course of his spiritual life it had been revealed to him by the Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the coming of the Christ, of the Lord’s Messiah. Thus, possibly for long years, he had longed and waited expectantly for His coming. And as he grew older he must have wondered if it would ever be.

‘Revealed/communicated.’ The word means originally ‘to transact trade’ and thus came to mean ‘gave an authoritative answer to’ and to indicate a divine oracle.

‘The Messiah of the Lord.’ The ‘anointed One’ appointed by YHWH Who would act on His behalf.

2.27 ‘And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, that they might do concerning him after the custom of the law.’

And the Spirit guided this man into the Temple at the right moment, and when ‘the parents’ (for this is how they would be seen in Israel) brought in the child Jesus, in obedience to the Law, in order to carry out all legal requirements, he recognised through the Spirit Who this child was.

The use of ‘parents’ says nothing about the question of the method of Jesus’ birth. From a Jewish point of view they were His parents regardless of whether He was adopted or begotten.

2.28 ‘Then he received him into his arms, and blessed God.

And going over to them he received Jesus into his arms and blessed God. The fact that they yielded Jesus up might suggest that this man was well known for his godliness, or it may simply have been that they recognised in him a man of the Spirit. This should be the ambition of us all, to be recognised as men of the Spirit by all spiritual people whom we meet, not through word, (although we should certainly testify to Him), but through the power of God within us. Not that we can say it of ourselves. Others should say it of us.

Simon’s Prophetic Sayings (2.28b-35).

2.28b ‘And he said,

The words are Simon’s, through the Spirit.

2. 29-32

**“Now let your servant depart, Lord,
According to your word, in peace,
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
Which you have prepared before the face of all peoples,
A light for revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of your people Israel.”**

Simon’s prayer was one of heartfelt gratitude. He had been allowed to go on living until he saw the Lord’s Messiah, and now here in his arms was the One for Whom Israel had waited for so long. And as he looked down at Him he could probably hardly believe that it at last it was true, and he prayed, and expressed his willingness that he himself might now depart in peace (this suggests that he was old, but he might not have been. He may simply have been saying that his life was now fulfilled whatever his age). His life mission of preparing men for His coming was over. He was no longer needed here. For now he had seen in this little babe God’s Salvation, a salvation which was not only for Israel but was for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike (Psalm 98.2-3 may be in mind here. See also Isaiah 52.10). Jesus was to be a light for revealing God to the Gentiles and was to be the glory of His people Israel. His glorious light would come to both. Thus through Him the Shekinah would come to Israel (Isaiah 60.19 compare 46.13), but it was not only them, for His glorious light was also to go far off to the Gentiles as Isaiah had prophesied long before (Isaiah 42.6; 49.6).

The word he uses for ‘Lord’ is despota which means Master (compare Acts 4.24; Revelation 6.10). It was used of a master with his slave, and here he refers to God as his Master, and he as His slave. It indicated God’s sovereignty and right to obedience. Now that his task is done he seeks his release.

‘My eyes have seen --.’ He too is an eyewitness to what Christ is. ‘Your salvation.’ In other words ‘the Saviour Whom You have sent.’

29.33-35 ‘And his father and his mother were marvelling at the things which were spoken concerning him, and Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother,’

**“Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel,
And for a sign which is spoken against.
(Yes, and a sword will pierce through your own soul),
That thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.”**

His father and mother ‘were marvelling’. They continued to marvel at what was said of Him each time that it happened, including what was said by this godly (probably old) man who was a stranger to them. Indeed their marvelling increased. For this was the first time that such stress had been laid on the fact that He was to be a light to the Gentiles, that what He had come to bring was truly for all, and that all nations would benefit from it. Previously the main idea had been that He had come to act on behalf of Israel. And that was wonderful. But now it was made clear that He was God’s gift to the whole world, and that all would benefit from His coming. Here was no national Messiah. Here was the supreme international Saviour. So His parents could only be more and more amazed at the way in which the impact of this son of theirs was expanding and seemingly growing wider and wider. The description of the wonder is partly in order for the reader also to ask himself what the wondering is about, and then to answer his own question in terms of the offer of worldwide salvation.

Then Simeon blessed them and spoke to Mary. The fact that he spoke to her alone would seem to confirm that she is seen as the only instrument of His birth. His words carried an ominous ring. Up until now all had been blessing and rejoicing, and it was fitting that it should be so, but now came the gentle reminder that another side was involved. God’s purposes could only go forward through much tribulation. Through this child many in Israel would be raised up,

becoming great men of God, and many others who appeared to be great men of God would fall because they refused to recognise Him. It also includes the idea that some might fall and rise again like Saul who would become Paul (Acts 9). And some who thought they had risen might fall, like Judas. He would not be welcomed by all. There would be both falling and rising. Some would find Him to be a stumblingblock. Others would discover in Him a spiritual resurrection. And those who thought that they stood must beware lest they fall.

The ideas behind this verse of the two contrasts of falling and rising can be found in Isaiah 8.14-15 - 'He will become a sanctuary (rising), and a stone of offence (falling) -- many will stumble, and they will fall and be broken'. We can also consider Isaiah 28.13-16 - ' -- that they may go and fall backward (falling) -- I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation (rising) --'. The point is that Jesus will divide the nation in two between those who respond and rise and those who reject and fall. Some will respond, while others will oppose. These texts are frequently alluded to elsewhere in the New Testament (see 20.17-18; Romans 9.33; 1 Peter 2.6-8) and also at Qumran.

He would be a sign from God. But there would be many who would speak against Him and not for Him. And indeed Mary should recognise that her own heart too would undergo pain and suffering because of Him. She would know many pricks of pain, many ups and downs and go through many a period of doubt and fear, and even unbelief, until finally she would receive the greatest blow of all at the cross from which she would be led away weeping by a hand not her son's, until she finally came through to full faith. (It was popularly recognised that the rise of the Messiah would be preceded by times of tribulation, and here Simeon is personalising it). And all this would be because His presence would bring out what was truly in men's hearts. Through His presence among them all hearts would be laid open and revealed by their attitude towards Him. For in Him light had come into the world, and men would reveal themselves by how they responded to that light. This is the first clear indication in Luke of the suffering that awaits Jesus.

Anna the Prophetess Comes To Where Jesus Is In the Temple and Gives Thanks to God and Spreads the News Among the Godly In Israel (2.36-40).

In the larger chiasmus (see on introduction to 1.1) this is in parallel with the revelation to Mary. Here womankind again acknowledge the coming of the Messiah. Luke especially brings out the equal part played by women in the preparation for and welcoming of Jesus.

2.36-38 'And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher (she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and she had been a widow even unto fourscore and four years), who departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and continually spoke of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.'

This woman Anna was a prophetess, but was also one who genuinely loved God. She was very old and spent her time in the Temple. Her husband had died seven years after their marriage, and since then she had been a widow, and she was now either eighty four, or, if it (less likely) means that she had been married eighty four years, over a hundred. She had no priestly connections but came from the tribe of Asher (her tribe was thus not lost after all!). The naming of her tribe indicates that she is a true born Israelite. But she never left the Temple, worshipping God with fasting and supplications night and day. She was one of a small band of especially choice souls in Israel. Never leaving the Temple may be a slight exaggeration, but conveys the right impression. She was dedicated to worshipping God in the Temple. However it could be that accommodation was given in buildings in the Temple courtyards for such as her, and that she did in fact never leave the Temple, receiving alms from the people. As a prophetess she was probably a focus of attention for women coming to the Temple for guidance in spiritual matters.

'Fourscore and four years' is twelve times seven. The idea is probably of the perfection of her dedication. She had been married to a husband for seven years, but her 'marriage' to the Lord had been for twelve times longer. No one could be more worthy of welcoming His Son.

And coming up to where they were at that very hour (we may presume guided by the Spirit) she gave thanks to God, and then immediately she went away, her heart thrilled, in order to 'continue to proclaim' the news of His coming to all the faithful, those who were especially looking for redemption in Israel. By this we are reminded that beneath all the pageantry and formal ritual and machinations of the Temple, and all the stultifying regulations of the Pharisees, there was still a righteous and godly remnant in Israel whose worship was true and pure and spiritual, and who had not bowed the knee to Mammon or religious bigotry or formalism.

'The redemption of Jerusalem.' Compare here Isaiah 52.9 which speaking of the future deliverance declares, 'YHWH has comforted (consoled) His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.' Note how here it ties in with Simeon's 'consolation of Israel'. Both have in mind the activity of the Messiah. Redemption in the Old Testament regularly meant deliverance by the exertion of power, but Isaiah 52.9 is immediately followed by the description of the Suffering Servant Who will suffer for the sins of many (Isaiah 52.13-53.12). Thus it includes the deeper significance of deliverance by the payment of a price.

So are described God's two witnesses to the coming of the One Who will bring consolation and redemption to Israel, the two witnesses necessary for the acceptance of their testimony. And from those two witnesses the word goes out to all whose hearts were especially right towards God in Jerusalem.

2.39 'And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.'

Once they had fulfilled the requirements of the Law they eventually returned to their own town, to Nazareth in Galilee. The emphasis is on the fact that they had remained in Bethlehem so that they could 'accomplish all things according to the Law', before eventually finally returning to Nazareth, (from which they had set out prior to the birth), rather than on the date when they actually arrived in Nazareth. For Luke's concern is to bring out that they pleased God in every way.

But either he deliberately ignores the visit of the Magi, and the stay in Egypt (Matthew 2.1-12), or more probably it took place on a later visit to Bethlehem in the following year when, for example, they went up again from Nazareth for the Passover. Bethlehem was only five miles from Jerusalem so that a visit there was quite likely on such occasions, probably prior to going to the feast. And as it would seem that, whenever they could (it would not be possible in Egypt), they went to Jerusalem regularly for at least one of the regular feasts, as any good Jew would, a further visit to Bethlehem to see their relatives is not at all unlikely.

Thus whether they went immediately to Nazareth, or whether in fact their going was after a few years, (he is only interested in the fact that they finally landed up there ready for the next passage), depends on when the visit of the Magi took place (Matthew 2.1-12). This could not have taken place before the forty days of purification were completed for immediately after the Magi's visit they fled to Egypt (thus their visit could not have been on the 'twelfth night'), and the result then would have been that Joseph and Mary would have been nowhere near Jerusalem at the end of the forty days. They would have been in Egypt. So either there was a period after the forty days in which they continued to stay in Bethlehem, and during which the magi visited them, followed by a period in Egypt, before they returned to Nazareth, or they returned to Nazareth, and then came back to Bethlehem from Nazareth on another occasion, during which visit the Magi arrived and they fled to Egypt. This latter is quite possible. Bethlehem would contain many of their relatives and visits to Jerusalem for the

feasts would be a regular occurrence. What more natural than to take the opportunity to visit relatives as the children grew up?

It is fully understandable why Luke does not wish to introduce the Magi and the visit to Egypt in his portrayal. He has been at pains to stress that Jesus was welcomed by the meek and lowly, and lived in and returned to an ordinary home. The Magi and the stay in Egypt would merely have distracted from his purpose. It was different for Matthew who emphasises the Kingship of Jesus, and the identification of Jesus with Israel in the filling full of prophecy.

The question must also be asked as to why, if they lived in Nazareth, they remained in Bethlehem for forty days? Had Joseph been an impecunious carpenter struggling to make a living in Nazareth he could hardly have done so under ordinary circumstances, even granted that they received hospitality. Thus their remaining for forty days in Bethlehem (rather than their returning immediately to Nazareth) may have been due to the requirements of the enrolment, or due to a religious zeal that made them wish to present Jesus specifically in the Temple, or due to the pressure of extended hospitality, or due to Joseph having business interests in Bethlehem, or due to the fact that Joseph actually lived in Bethlehem, or any combination of these. After which they may have returned to Nazareth, being back next year for the visit of the magi (Matthew 2.1-12).

Alternately Luke may here be summarising and saying that eventually at some time in the future they returned to Nazareth, which became their own town, the town that in future everyone would recognise them as 'coming from', meanwhile ignoring certain other events which took place in which he had no interest for his book. Luke regularly omits, without comment, what he does not feel essential to his message. Remember how he will later omit reference to resurrection appearances in Galilee, because he wants attention to be focused on Jerusalem, and omits mention of any dissension between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Here he wants attention focused on their presence in the promised land. He wants us to know that Jesus springs from Israel, not Egypt.

A Summary.

As we approach the end of this series of manifestations with regard to His coming we should recognise just exactly what they signify.

- Firstly they reveal to any reader that Jesus has two parents who are both totally faithful to the Law of Moses.
- Secondly they reveal that He has been vouched for by a priest of the Temple, a devout man of the Temple and a prophetess of the Temple. Thus there has been a threefold witness from the Temple.
- Thirdly He has been vouched for by three angelic visitations, one to Zacharias, one to Mary and one to the shepherds, and thus by Heaven itself. There has been a threefold witness from angels.
- Fourthly He has been vouched for by prophecy (if we include the host of angels as prophets) in a threefold way, both before His birth (Zacharias, Elisabeth, Mary) and after His birth (the angels, Simeon and Anna).
- Fifthly the Holy Spirit is said to have given a threefold witness through Zacharias, Elisabeth and Simeon.

So a solid basis for His acceptance is given which is difficult to refute, and it is seen to be solidly Jewish, coming from faithful Jewish parents, from the Temple, from angels, from Jewish prophets and prophetesses, and from the Holy Spirit Himself. Salvation is coming, and it is from God and of the Jews.

Note also the contents of the prophecies:

- Zacharias tells us that He is sending John as the preparer of the way to turn men to

- God (1.14-17 compare 3.4).**
- **Gabriel tells us that the One Who is coming after is the Son of the Most High, the greater David, the everlasting King, the Son of God (1.32-33), the One born through the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit (1.35).**
 - **Elisabeth declares in the Spirit that He is ‘My LORD’ (1.43).**
 - **Mary declares that He will come as the One who puts down the mighty and exalts the humble, and as fulfiller of the covenant with Abraham (1.46-55).**
 - **Simeon tells us that He comes as the One to Whom John will testify, and as the Horn (Mighty Weapon) of Salvation, to save His people from all enemies and to give knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of sins, and as the One Who will bring light out of darkness (1.67-79).**
 - **The unidentified angel tells us that He is the Messiah of the house of David, the LORD (2.10-12).**
 - **Simeon crowns it all by telling us that He will be a light to the Gentiles and a glory to Israel, preparing for the theme in Acts of going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.**

So is the way prepared for what is to come in Luke and Acts.

One more constant we should draw attention to, and that is the emphasis on ‘salvation’. Mary speaks of ‘God my Saviour’ Who has saved her (1.47); Zacharias speaks of ‘a horn of salvation raised for us’ (1.69) and of ‘giving knowledge of salvation to His people’ (1.77); the initial angel speaks of ‘a Saviour Who is Christ the Lord’ (2.11); the host of angels speaks of ‘peace on those on whom His favour rests’ and thus of their salvation (2.14 NEB); and Simeon says ‘my eyes have seen your Salvation’ (2.30). The message of what is coming is therefore very much one of salvation and deliverance.

2.40 ‘And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was on him.’

Meanwhile the child Jesus continued to grow. And He grew strong spiritually, and was filled with wisdom (compare Acts 6.3. 10). And the gracious activity of God continued on His life. John grew strong in Spirit (1.80) but here was One who had the added extra. He was even more exceptional.

We should note what is involved in this. Jesus has not come ‘knowing everything’ and with such heavenly awareness that He cannot be tempted. He has come as a human being, Who has to grow and learn, Who has to think and understand. He has to grow in knowledge and understanding. But the great difference between Him and us is that He has the Spirit without measure and is totally responsive to His guidance. Thus all He does receive and know is truth.

Jesus Goes Up to the Temple and Receives Understanding in the Things of God in His Father’s Presence (2.41-51).

We are now given an example of how He has developed through the years, for He meets up as a twelve year old boy with the great teachers of Jerusalem, and they are amazed by His questions and responses, and by His understanding. We are also made to see that He is like no other and claims a special relationship with ‘His Father’.

We may analyse this passage as follows:

- **a And His parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the passover (41).**
- **b And when He was twelve years old, they went up after the custom of the feast, and when they had fulfilled the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and His parents knew it not (42-43).**
- **c But supposing Him to be in the company, they went a day’s journey, and they sought for Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance (44).**

- **d** And when they found Him not, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking for Him, and it came about, after three days, that they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them, and asking them questions (45-46).
- **e** And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers (47).
- **d** And when they saw Him, they were astonished, and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have you thus dealt with us? Behold, your father and I sought you sorrowing” (48).
- **c** And He said to them, “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?” And they did not understand the saying which He spoke to them.
- **b** And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and He was subject to them, and his mother kept all these sayings in her heart (51).
- **a** And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men (52).

In ‘a’ Jesus’ parents reveal their piety in their faithful attendance at the Passover, and in the parallel the result of their piety is that Jesus grows up in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man. In ‘b’ they go up to Jerusalem but are careless about keeping a check on Him, and in the parallel they go back down to Nazareth but the mother is now more thoughtful. In ‘c’ they sought for Jesus in the company and in the parallel He asks why they sought Him when they should have known where He was. In ‘d’ they found Him in the Temple listening to the great teachers, and in the parallel they were astonished to find Him so and rebuked Him. And in ‘e’ central to the passage is the fact that all who heard His questions and replies were astonished at them. His growing wisdom and understanding is revealed.

2.41 ‘And his parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the passover.’

Year by year Jesus’ parents went up to the Passover. This does not mean that they only went up at Passover time, for this is rather an introduction to a particular Passover visit. We in fact know from elsewhere that the family also went up at other times (John 7.2-10). Originally all male Jews were called on to go to the Sanctuary three times a year for the three great feasts, but those who now lived further away were excused from this duty. They were, however, still expected to make an effort to attend in Jerusalem at least once a year, and their being accompanied by their womenfolk had become the norm.

Thus we continue to learn that Jesus’ parents were faithful to their belief, and regularly attended the Passover. No wonder then that He grew up increased in wisdom and in favour with God and man (verse 52).

2.42-43 ‘And when he was twelve years old, they went up after the custom of the feast, and when they had fulfilled the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and his parents did not know it.’

Every Jewish boy came of age at thirteen from which point on he was looked on as a responsible adult and expected to fulfil his religious responsibilities, becoming ‘a son of the Law’. Thus the Rabbis recommended that boys who were approaching that age be brought to the feasts so that they could become acquainted with the atmosphere and with what went on.

So when Jesus was twelve His parents took Him up to the Feast of the Passover, and once the seven days of unleavened bread were over they set off to return to Nazareth with a large group of Galileans.

What happened appears to indicate that on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, on which would also be all their relatives, it was quite normal during the festivities for boys of twelve, who were seen as almost mature, to go around together enjoying the festival (compare modern older teen-agers who would not want to be tied to their parents), and when hungry or tired, to stay with one or other of their relatives whose son(s) would be one of them. Then, of course, when it was time to go back home, whoever they were with could be expected to see that they were

included in the caravan. This is really the only explanation as to why Jesus had not been missed, and why they set off without Him. They had had confidence in Him that He would not get up to mischief, and in their relatives that whoever He was staying with would ensure that He was properly looked after and would set off back for Galilee with them. Probably in previous years this had worked very well. What they had not taken into account, and what Jesus considered that they ought to have taken into account, was that now that He was almost 'of age' it was necessary for Him to go to His Father's house to learn of Him.

In such caravans the men would often walk together in a large group, while the women went ahead in front, and this may well have been why they did not ask each other where Jesus was. Joseph may have thought that Jesus had joined up with Mary, and Mary may have thought that He had joined up with Joseph. Or both may have been satisfied that He would be with relatives. But although they did not know it Jesus had lingered in Jerusalem, for He had gone to the Temple and was listening to the great teachers. It seems that He just assumed that when His parents wanted Him they would come for Him there because in His view 'they should know that He was there'.

But we may ask as to whether a boy, even though a 'mature' boy (pais), would really remain in the Temple day and night for three days without going back to His parents. There could only be two reasons why this was feasible; either it was normal for boys of his age to go about with boys of their own age during such festivals, sleeping where they liked and obtaining food from different relatives who would be there, or even from generous pilgrims, so that He did not see this as unusual, or because He had in fact tried to go back to His parents, only to discover that they had disappeared. This would leave Him having to find something to do until they came back for Him. Being what He was He thus went back to the Temple confident that His Father would watch over Him.

2.44-45 'But supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey; and they sought for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, and when they found him not, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking for him.'

As both His parents clearly assumed that He was with them, presumably with his cousins, neither was worried until after a day's journey when they settled down to camp for the night, and at that stage were unable to find Him. But even then they were not too worried. They would think that He must be somewhere among their kinsfolk. It was only when they still could not find Him they must have realised with horror that He had been left behind, and have made straight back to Jerusalem, looking for Him.

Meanwhile Jesus continued to listen to the great teachers, and probably every now and then took a quick snooze in one of the porticoes of the Temple. He does not appear to have been worried, and possibly not even to have considered that He was being missed. After all His parents knew that He could be trusted. And His view was that surely if they had wanted Him they would have sought Him in the Temple, where they ought to know that He would be. (He could not conceive of anything else). He was still only a child, and was possibly not used to the Feasts, and the Temple may well have continued to be so crowded that He did not realise that the Feast was over. They were exciting days and He did not want to miss the opportunities they presented. This would serve to confirm that He knew that His parents would not be worrying when He did not go back to them at nights.

2.46 'And it came about, after three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them, and asking them questions.'

It would take the parents all night, and even some of the next day, to get back to Jerusalem and then they began their search. Nor would they find Him immediately, for they probably went to different places where relatives had been staying to check there. It was thus not until the following day that they found Him in the Temple. He was either completely oblivious of

the fact that He would be missed, or having discovered that they had gone, was making the best of it. (His thought would be that after all, if they wanted Him, they would know where He was. To Him it was so obvious that it did not need to be spelled out).

They discovered Him sitting among the Teachers, and listening to their wise words, and asking them questions. He had soon learned to discern which of them had something worth while to say. It was quite normal for great Teachers (and not so great Teachers) to sit in the Temple speaking to their disciples, and whoever else wished to listen.

‘After three days.’ That is, not on the day they returned, but the next day. Jesus had seemingly spent at least two nights in the Temple. But it was well lit and He had possibly not noted the passage of time, and He would have been able to snooze whenever He needed to. Furthermore at this feast kindly folk would also have gladly given Him food. It was a time for generosity. He meanwhile clearly assumed that His parents must be quite content as they had not sent for Him.

2.47 ‘And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.’

The Rabbis would each sit with a group of disciples round them. They would themselves ask questions of their listeners, and they would then teach and explain and ask for questions. And all to whom He asked His questions, and all who were listening, were amazed at this boy’s understanding, and the answer that He gave when He answered their questions (not to teach but to learn). He had truly grown in wisdom and understanding.

(Had this been an invented story or a legend we would have had Jesus correcting the Rabbis).

2.48 ‘And when they saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you thus dealt with us? Behold, your father and I sought you sorrowing.” ’

Once again His parents were astonished. Firstly to see Him standing in the crowd listening to the great Rabbis, secondly that He appeared to be oblivious of the fact that He had been left behind, and thirdly because they just could not understand why He had been so inconsiderate. This time their amazement was not that of pleasure. And His mother asked Him sternly why He had behaved like this. Did He not realise that they had been looking for Him and had been very worried? The fact that Mary asked Him confirms that He was in a unique position with regard to His mother. Normally the father would take the lead.

2.49 ‘And he said to them, “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” ’

But Jesus was equally astonished. He too uttered a kind of rebuke. Why had they had to search for Him? Surely they must have known where He was? How could they possibly have needed to look for Him? Surely they must have realised that *it was necessary* for Him to be in His Father’s house? (It was so obvious to Him that He could not believe that it was not obvious to them).

There is an interesting parallel between this question ‘how is it that you sought Me?’ and the question of the angels in 24.5, ‘why do you seek the living among the dead?’ There too they sought Him where they should have known He would not be. Both indicate how blind were the eyes of those who loved Him most, because He was so much beyond their understanding.

There is here a contrast between ‘your father and I sought you’ and ‘I must be in MY Father’s house’. He is by this making it clear that supremely God is His Father and He must obey Him, and that it is that filial obedience to His Father which must come first. And the implication is that He would expect His parents to agree with Him. The word ‘it is necessary’ regularly indicates the divine necessity, as it does here. He was not here by chance. Jesus had felt that He had no option but to be here. He was hungry to learn about His Father. That surely was the purpose in coming to the Feast, that He might take every opportunity of learning about His Father. And He had expected them to realise it. He had yet to realise that others were not

guided by the Spirit in the same way as He was.

His astonishment releases Him from blame. It was not that He had been careless or selfish. During the festivities of the Feast many young boys of His age apparently stayed away from their parents days at a time in order to enjoy the festival atmosphere. Their parents knew that they would not get into any trouble and that they were with their friends and that there were relatives all over the place to whom they could look, and generous-hearted people always ready to help youngsters who were hungry. They let them go and enjoy themselves (they were seen as the equivalent of older teenagers today, almost adults). They would come home when they were ready to. And to such boys time would seem to stand still. They would not realise how the days were passing. It had been the same for Him. The only difference between Him and them was where they spent their time. But He had been sure that His parents would know exactly where He must be, and what He must be doing, and that they would therefore have sent for Him when they wanted Him. He just could not understand how they could have been so misguided as to not to have known. He was genuinely puzzled. He did not feel that He was to blame.

‘My Father’s House.’ The Greek is literally ‘the -- of My Father’ but is an expression regularly signifying someone’s house. See Genesis 41.51 LXX where we find the same phrase. However we translate it the significance is the same. ‘The things of His Father’ were to be discovered at ‘His Father’s House’, the Temple. He still at this stage saw the Temple from the viewpoint of a young boy who had heard stories about the Temple in his synagogue, and therefore saw it as something wonderful where all was good. He had not yet learned about its darker side. So how could anyone have not known that if He was in Jerusalem that was where He must be, spending His time in order to learn about His Father and in getting to know His Father? Was that not what the Passover was all about? Why then had they not come for Him? Why had they not realised where he was?

2.50 ‘And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them.’

Meanwhile they did not understand what He was talking about. They could not appreciate the depth of his feeling about being with His Father. It was not surprising. No one else had a son who on coming to Jerusalem spent the week at the Temple learning and asking questions. Other people’s sons saw themselves as on holiday, and as they got precious few of those they made the most of them. And most boys looked mainly to their fathers for teaching about religion. So they could not understand that Jesus had a source of learning that went beyond that. And that that was indeed the secret of His special ‘wisdom’ (verse 52). They could not fathom the Messianic mind.

But for Jesus there was no greater delight than to learn the meaning of the word of God and to hear about His Father, and He had a special understanding that no other had. This brings out the great gulf there was between Him and all mankind. And even though ten or so years before they had learned that He was to be something special, they had not expected it to be quite like this. Even His parents did not understand Him. He had never behaved like this before, because He was too young. But they had failed to appreciate that now He considered Himself ‘grown up’ religiously, and so as needing to be built up by the special wisdom that He could receive from His Father, something beyond what His father could teach Him. Thus He had felt a new sense of needing to know His Father more intimately. But such a concept was beyond them.

And so in a quite unemphasised way we learn of the uniqueness of this young boy Whom no one understood, a young boy Who lived in such close touch with His Father that He could not understand why others did not do the same. He called Him ‘My Father’ and saw Him rather than Joseph as His father when it came to religious matters. That demonstrated His sense of the unique relationship that there was between Him and God. Perhaps He did not yet fully realise that He was His Father’s only Son in the full sense. It may be that that understanding

would come later as He matured. But if He did not He was well on the way to it. He knew that His relationship to God was unique (note the 'My', and compare its use in 10.22; 22.29; John 10.29-32; Matthew 10.32; 11.27; 25.34; 26.42, all of which indicate a unique relationship with God).

Note also how this incident links Jesus with the Temple. Indeed the whole of these first two chapters stress connection with the Temple. The point is being made that the message of Jesus did not start out with a bias against the Temple, but rather that He and His witnesses had the closest of relationships with the Temple. He was approved by the choice souls who frequented it, and He Himself sought truth there. And when listing the temptations Luke placed the last crucial one in the Temple (4.9-12). All this stressed that He came from the very centre of Israel's worship. Salvation was very much of the Jews (John 4.22). It was only later in Luke that He would have to warn of the destruction of the Temple (13.35; 21.6) because He had found out what it was really like (19.45-46), and even then He still preached there (19.45, 47; 21.37, 38). It was, however, finally the Temple that rejected Him (22.52). (Yet even so the Apostles end up praising God in the Temple (24.53), and the first acts of witness in Acts will be in the Temple).

The same thing happens in Acts. The Apostles continue regularly to preach and pray in the Temple. And it is only when the Temple rejects first the Apostles, and then Paul, that they go elsewhere. Christianity was thus to be seen as springing from all that was good in the Temple (compare Ezekiel 47.1-12). In a sense it was like the chicken from the egg. But once the chicken had come forth, the new Israel from the old, the eggshell could be thrown away. It was no longer needed.

2.51 'And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and he was subject to them, and his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.'

Responding immediately to His parents Jesus went down with them to Nazareth (going from Jerusalem is always 'down', even for those who go up). And there He continued to be subject to them. There had been no intention of rebellion. He had merely been doing what He saw to be right. And His mother kept in her heart all the things that were said, (and when she was asked by Luke, unburdened them to him. And by then she had gained a little more understanding). But Mary was still only a teenager herself. While she pondered she did not fully understand. And later, when she felt that she must save her boy from Himself, possibly egged on by His brothers (Mark 3.21, 25), she was only doing what was natural for a mother. But it is a reminder to us that she too was human and so very much like us.

2.52 'And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.'

Meanwhile Jesus continued to grow in wisdom and in physical strength, and in favour with God and men. He did not at this stage need to go into the wilderness for He was guided in a way that even John did not know, and His goodness protected Him. All acknowledged His godliness, and loved Him for His open-heartedness and genuine kindness. The people loved Him and God was with Him. For John it was a harder struggle. He had to fight himself.

Note that this description is based on 1 Samuel 2.26, but that here we have the addition of 'wisdom'. Jesus grew like Samuel, but with the addition of special wisdom. Luke probably expects his readers to notice the addition and interpret accordingly.

We can add further that by the time He was 'about thirty' His father had died, and He Himself was a carpenter following in His father's footsteps; He had a number of brothers and sisters; and He had for some time probably been mainly responsible for providing for the family. Once, however, He had been able to train up His brothers, He would be able to leave the welfare of the family to them.