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John is Born (1:57-66)

57 Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.

58 When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to

her, they rejoiced with her. 59 So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to

circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father,

Zacharias. 60 His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." 61 But they

said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." 62 So

they made signs to his father—what he would have him called. 63 And he asked for a

writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled.

64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising

God. 65 Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were

discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. 66 And all those who heard them

kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the

Lord was with him.

- Notice how Zacharias has accepted that the baby's name **is** John.
- Boys were circumcised on the eighth day, the sign of the covenant.
- In those days people wrote on wax tablets.
- It was obvious that the Lord was with John.

Zacharias' Song: the "Benedictus" (1:67-80)

67 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

68 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, 70 as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, 72 to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, 73 the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, 78 through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

80 So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

- We call this song the *Benedictus*, which is Latin for the word "blessed," which is the first word of the song. It is very much focused on the redemption of Israel.
- The horn of an animal was a symbol of power.
- Zacharias focuses on how this king will rescue the people of Israel.

- This is the ideal that the prophets presented to the people: there will no more war, and every man will sit under his own vine and his own fig tree, with no one to make them afraid.
- He says John will go before the face of the Lord. He will tell people how to be saved by having their sins sent away.
- This prophecy affirms what God had said through the Old Testament prophets about the salvation of His ancient people.
- We have no details about John's youth.

Moving into Chapter 2, what matters are not the facts about Jesus' birth per se, but what is being **said** about Jesus. We will see in Chapter 2 more announcements that magnify Jesus and who He is, from angels, prophets, and from Jesus Himself.

Jesus is Born! (2:1-7)

1 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

- Augustus, the great-nephew of Julius Caesar, was the first true Roman Emperor. After a time of civil war, Augustus ruled as Emperor from 27 BC until 14 AD.
- We know there was a census, but its timing and scope are open questions. Quirinius was not Governor of Syria until later. Luke says that the census first took place when Quirinius was governor, and we don't know what that means.
- The Jewish custom was to return to your ancestral home for a census. Bethlehem being the home of David, Joseph went to be registered there.
- Luke's description of the birth is unremarkable: he simply says that Mary brought forth her firstborn son.
- The famous "inn" was something like a section of a home or even a cave in which animals stayed. Imagine the humility of Christ to be born in this setting!
- The manger was a feeding trough – perhaps the same place where Temple lambs would have been laid to inspect them for blemishes. What a picture!

Shepherds and Angels (2:8-20)

8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

- Notice how Luke loves to connect salvation with joy.
- The angel literally says this news is to all the people. This tells us that the Gospel message, so far, remains centered on Israel. This child is born to them.
- Notice the unique three-fold description of Jesus: Savior, Christ, and Lord.
- Everyone knew that Messiah was prophesied to come from David's birthplace. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).
- There is always much debate about the meaning of the angels' song. Most translations seem to favor the idea that they are saying there is peace for those upon whom God's favor rests.

15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

- The shepherds, filled with faith, find everything just as had been told them. Not everyone believed, but everyone was amazed.

- Again we see Mary pondering in her heart.
- Lowly and despised people were the first ones to get the greatest news ever!

The Presentation (2:21-24)

21 And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

- In the Law of Moses, God had commanded them to perform certain ceremonies whenever a child was born. The first was circumcision.
- After childbirth, a mother was required to go into seclusion. If she had had a boy, she was considered impure for 40 days.
- Firstborn males were holy to the Lord. Firstborn male animals that were eaten were sacrificed, but working animals were redeemed.
- Every firstborn baby boy was also holy to the Lord, and was redeemed by the payment of silver. “Redeeming” in this sense simply means “buying back.”
- Mary was required to bring a sacrifice for her purification. The reference to two turtledoves or two pigeons tells us that Joseph and Mary were relatively poor.

Simeon and the “Nunc Dimittis” (2:25-35)

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 29 “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; 30 for my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

- Luke says Simeon was waiting for the Consolation, that is to say, the Messiah. He had the Spirit upon him and a truly wonderful promise from God!
- We call his prayer the *Nunc Dimittis*. Simeon says that has seen the salvation of God. This is the significant announcement here.
 - By seeing Jesus, he is actually seeing God’s salvation!
 - He will be the glory of Israel.
 - He will be a light to bring revelation to the non-Jews of the world.

- Jesus will cause some to fall in judgment, but cause others to be raised to life.
- A sword (broadsword) will pierce Mary's soul as well. What is the meaning of this? In what ways would Mary suffer?

More Prophetic Testimony; Jesus Grows (2:36-40)

36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

39 So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

- The elderly Anna is specifically called a prophetess, which is unusual. Her ancestry demonstrates that there were no completely "lost tribes."
- Jesus grew physically and He grew in wisdom. Jesus' development as a person is certainly another great mystery of the Incarnation.
