

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 2

Jesus' Birth Proclaimed

Introduction

- The Gospel story opens with a small group of people experiencing special visitations – frightening, disturbing – what did it all mean? What was happening? Was this what they had been waiting for so long?
- For many, many years, their God in heaven above had been silent – reigning as King, sovereignly guiding all history, watching over all that was happening, preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah
- But most of God's people were not aware of what God was doing behind the scenes – how active He was in helping them, also guiding the affairs of their nation – all they knew were the stark and dark realities of daily life = living without their freedom, living under a corrupt, ruthless, pagan, foreign power – as if God was allowing them to be mistreated by their enemies, as if He didn't care – all they thought was that He was “silent” – no prophets had come speaking God's Word to them since Malachi (about 400 years earlier) – “He must be angry with us!” – when would God speak and do things like He had done in the past, like when He delivered His people from Pharaoh and the Egyptians, like when King David & King Solomon led such a powerful nation and the people lived at peace, with great glory – when would it be like that again?
- God's nation on earth below – waiting to hear from God – waiting for God to act, to intervene in order to set them free from the yoke of their enemies, the oppressor nation of Rome – questioning why God is silent and why doesn't God come to help us???
- Yet some of them had not given up waiting – they believed the OT promises that one day, some day, God would break through and send His Messiah, His

anointed One, the One Who would rescue His people from all their troubles – to bring in the Kingdom of eternal peace and prosperity – they kept on hoping, waiting for God to fulfil His promise that He would comfort His people (Isaiah 40:1).

- This is the scene and these are the feelings and thoughts of God’s faithful people as we open the NT. And among those living then were Zechariah and Elizabeth.
- Suddenly Zechariah was visited by an angel – God’s messenger, Gabriel, sent from God to announce amazing good news – his wife, all her life barren, now already old and beyond child-bearing age, would conceive and give birth to a baby boy. Unbelievable!
- Over the coming months, God would send His messenger, Gabriel, to speak to those who would have key roles in the carrying out of His salvation drama – His Spirit would also take control (= “fill”) of some people and speak through them:
 - Zechariah
 - Mary
 - Zechariah
 - Shepherds
 - Simeon
- In all these situations, God spoke, indicating that He had not forgotten them, fulfilling His promises, showing love to His people – the messages He communicated to them had a number of similarities, also their responses were similar, eg in praise of God’s holiness and glory.

1) God spoke to Zechariah through the archangel, Gabriel

- Zechariah, while going about his priestly duties, is visited by the archangel Gabriel: Luke 1:5-25, ** Vs.13-17

Key themes / message:

- Gabriel declares God’s faithfulness in hearing prayer – v.13
- The announcement from heaven: Your wife will have a son – v.13

- God giving the son his name – v.13 “John” from Hebrew means “The LORD is gracious”; EBCNT = "John" (*Ioannes*) combines in its Hebrew form the name of God with the word *hanan* ("to show favor" or "be gracious")
- God’s divine work will bring joy & gladness to Zechariah & Elizabeth – v.14 – God delights to bless His people with joy – He does not delight in their miseries – He is compassionate and merciful
- The promise of the filling of the Holy Spirit in John since birth – v.15
- God is at work to prepare His people for the coming of their Messiah – to turn their hearts back to Him – vs.16-17
- God’s announcement is linked with their nation’s past – what He is about to do has been foretold by prophets – v.17
- The announcement is **Good News** – v.19
- Zechariah’s responses:
 - fear – v.12
 - questioning and unbelief – he suffers God’s judgment for his unbelief – v.18
- God’s promise is followed by fulfilment – vs.23-25 (N.B. God isn’t frustrated in carrying out His plan by Zechariah’s temporary lapse into unbelief)

2) God spoke to the virgin Mary through Gabriel

- Mary visited by Gabriel: Luke 1:26-38
- Mary visits Elizabeth and praises God: Luke 1:39-56

Key themes / message:

- God chooses Mary, a humble, righteous virgin, pledged in marriage to Joseph
- God delights to show favour – v.28 (“grace”)
- God gives the name this special Child is to be called = JESUS – v.31 – cf. Matt.1:21

The name Jesus (Joshua) had been common in OT times and continued to be a popular name through the first century A.D. (TDNT, 3:284-93). [Matthew 1:21](#) provides an explanation for giving the child a name that contains, in its Hebrew form, the word "saves" (yasa): "because he will save his people from their sins." (EBCNT)

- God's acts in the present are deeply rooted in what He has said and done in the past – v.32-33
- God will bring His Deliverer through supernatural act of intervention – v.35
- The work of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Trinity, will be central to God's saving activity – v.35-37; cf. v.41
- Mary's responses:
 - Bewilderment – v.29
 - Fear – v.29-30
 - Asking questions (a legitimate question seeing she wasn't yet married – not asked from a heart of unbelief) – v.34
 - Submission / belief – v.38
 - Praise & adoration of God – vs.46-55:

N.B. Theme of praising God in Luke's Gospel:

Doxology

The prominence of the Ascension in Luke contributes to his "theology of glory." It has often been observed that Luke has emphasized the resurrection, ascension, and vindication of Christ (taking into account also the early chapters of Acts). The descriptive term "glory" (doxa) is also appropriate because there is a sense of doxology--i.e., of ascribing glory to God--throughout Luke's work. Those who observe or benefit from the healing power of Christ are filled with wonder and bring glory to God (e.g., [Luke 5:25-26](#); [Acts 3:8-10](#)). Other examples of praising and blessing God in Luke are [1:46-55, 68-79](#); [2:13-14, 20, 28-32](#); [7:16](#); [10:21](#); [18:43](#); [19:37-38](#); [24:53](#). (EBCNT)

- rejoicing in God – v.46
- declaring that God is HOLY – v.49
- praising God for His justice – in raising up the humble and bringing down the powerful & proud – vs.51-53
- God's mercy – vs.50,55
- God's faithfulness to His covenant promises – v.50,54
- Hope realised in the fulfilment of all that God had spoken to Mary – vs.39ff

3) God spoke through Zechariah to others

- Zechariah becomes “filled with (fully under the sovereign control and guidance of) the Holy Spirit” (v.67) and then prophesied: Luke 1:67-80; see also vs. 57-66
- Zechariah who earlier had responded in unbelief to Gabriel now sings a song of praise to God after he witnessed the great miracle that God had performed.

Key themes / message:

- Praise to God ... for His great redemption – v.68
- God fulfilling prophecy – vs.69-70
- God bringing salvation – vs.71,77
- God acting in mercy not judgment – vs.72, 78
- God working in keeping with His promises – vs. 72-73
- God creating light amid the darkness of His nation’s history – vs.78-79
- God working to guide His people’s feet in the way of peace – v.79

4) God spoke to ordinary shepherds through an angelic choir

- The shepherds represent the humble, ordinary people of God – they were chosen by God to receive the special angelic announcement of their Saviour’s birth: Luke 2:1-20

Key themes / message:

- Angelic praise of God for His mighty deeds – v.13-14
- Announcement of good news for everyone – v.10
- The heart of the announcement is the coming of a Saviour, God’s Messiah – v. 11
- These divinely orchestrated events take place on earth (not just “spiritually”) – v.11
- Shepherds’ responses:
 - Fear – v.9
 - Faith in action – v. 15
 - Witness to others – v.17
 - Praise to God – v.20
- God’s message confirmed by their visit to Joseph and Mary with Jesus – v.16

5) God spoke to Simeon through His Spirit and then through Simeon to Mary and Joseph

- By His Spirit God revealed His saving purposes and plan to Joseph and Mary:
Luke 2:26-27
 - Simeon's response to God's revelation of Jesus and His mission – see vs.28-32
 - His words further enlightened the minds of Jesus' earthly parents as well as encouraged their hearts

Key themes / message:

- The presence and activity of God's Spirit – v.26-27
- God at work fulfilling His promise – v.29
- God's work resulting in peace for man – v.29
- The holy Child as the provision of salvation – v.30
- God's gift as "Light" for all the nations and the "glory" for the Jews – v.32
- Rejection (judgment) & acceptance (blessing) according to the response given to God's revelation – v.34
- Human responses:
 - Praise to God – vs.28,38
 - Awe and amazement – v. 33 (Joseph & Mary)
 - Declaration and announcement to others of God's Good News – v.38

Conclusion

- The birth and coming of God's Son, Jesus, was the Good News for all men / nations. It was Good News which the Father would announce in various ways to His chosen ones.
- Before His birth God had spoken to His people through His servants, the prophets, announcing the wonderful day ahead when He would send His Messiah. Now at the great Advent of His birth, He spoke to ordinary people revealing His extraordinary plan and purposes.
- But all of this was but preparation for the moment when Jesus, the WORD from God (John 1:1-13), God's beloved Son, would speak on behalf of His

Father to men – announcing God’s message of hope and Good News – through His life, His powerful acts, His words / teaching and ultimately through His death and resurrection.

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