

# LUKE 2



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*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

Luke 2

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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## Introduction to Luke 2

Luke 2 is one of the most loved passages of Scripture, because it tells, in glorious and wondrous terms, the birth and early childhood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke sets his story in the real world – where human history depends on divine providence in a cosmic and eternal order ruled by the sovereign Word of God. Angels break through from the heavens. God becomes flesh. Humble shepherds declare eternal truths. Aging believers have their persistent faith abundantly rewarded. And a Child baffles His elders, foreshadowing a life and ministry that will shortly unfold.

Welcome to Luke chapter 2. Joy to the world!

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We hope you find this study of the gospel of Luke instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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## 1 The Fullness of Time

*Pray Psalm 2.7-10.*

“I will declare the decree:  
The LORD has said to Me,  
You *are* My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will give *You*  
The nations *for* Your inheritance,  
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron;  
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’”  
Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.

*Sing Psalm 2.7-10.*

(Agincourt Hymn: *O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High*)

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!  
From heav’n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.  
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

*Read and meditate on Luke 2.1-7.*

*Preparation*

1. Why did Joseph and Mary go up to Bethlehem?
2. What was Jesus’ first bed?

*Meditation*

The apostle Paul wrote, “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4.4). Jesus came to earth at just the right time. The Roman Peace governed most of the world. Greek was a universal language from India to Britain and Gaul to North Africa. Transportation was good and safe. Rome tolerated local religions. Millions lived in squalor, misery, slavery, or all three. All the promises, types, prophecies, and symbols of a coming salvation had long since been completed. God had not spoken to His people in 400 years, and many were longing for yet another Word.

All these conditions made the world ripe for the Dayspring of salvation to be born.

Luke provides the historical setting in which Jesus came into the world. The names of rulers and the registration line up to around 4 BC (vv. 1, 2). Early historians got it slightly wrong. Joseph and Mary had to travel from Galilee to Bethlehem to be registered in his place of birth (vv. 3, 4). The point of the registration was to update Rome’s tax rolls. In Bethlehem no proper accommodations could be secured, so Joseph and Mary took to a stable, where Jesus was born, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger (vv. 5-7).

The world had never seen such a miracle: God becoming Man through the medium of natural birth. Luke treats it like an historical event, which indeed it was. The fullness of the times now would begin overflowing with the grace of God.

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*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.*

“And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (Lk. 2.1). Imagine if that happened today. Everyone would be affected and no doubt angry, and we Christians, sadly, would be screaming about infringed upon religious freedoms and righteously indignant. And in that state of indignation would search for more reliable supreme court justices and more church-friendly politicians. Oh my. The outcry would be tremendous.

But God carefully manages history and all of life. We must learn to rely on Him in that Real World.

“For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south.

But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another” (Ps. 75.7). He does, we don’t.

We would be better served by focusing on the great exalted One we serve; and studying how to serve Him as we should. This Triune God, has always been; He came to earth in the form of Jesus Who died for us, and rose from the dead that we might truly live. He then sent His Holy Spirit to live in us that we might proclaim His Story.

“The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let God be exalted, the Rock of my salvation! (2 Sam. 22.47).

“Be still and know that I AM God; I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth! (Ps. 46.10).

“For You, LORD, are most high above all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods” (Ps. 97.9).

“Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted;

His glory is above the earth and heaven” (Ps. 148.13).

“Therefore God also has highly exalted [Jesus] and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2.9-11).

And what should we do in the light of this knowledge and truth? As Peter said to his interlocutors: “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5.29-32).

It is patently obvious that God does not need our help in ruling the world. He has this under control. He has a whole lot of experience, as He has been doing this since the beginning of time.

What He requires is that we fear Him, love Him, serve Him, learn about Him through His Word and creation, trust and obey Him, and do the good works that He has prepared for us to do in our Personal Mission Field.

Ezra taught us how to pray our way into a better mindset. After repentance, we turn our hearts, minds, dependence and hope back to Him, saying: “And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage...God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us...to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins... (Ezra 9.6-9).

Every day is the fullness of God’s time. He was in control then; He is in control now. We can rest in Him and trust Him completely. He’s got this.

*For reflection*

1. How can we know that God still controls the nations and events of the world in our day?

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2. How should knowing this affect the way we serve God each day?
3. Whom will you encourage today to rest in God's sovereign rule of the world and its peoples?

*The fullness of time was now come, when God would send forth his Son, made of a woman, and made under the law. The circumstances of his birth were very mean. Christ was born at an inn; he came into the world to sojourn here for awhile, as at an inn, and to teach us to do likewise.* Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Luke 2.1-7*

*Pray Psalm 2.11, 12.*

Thank God for sending Jesus in the fullness of the times, and for His saving mercy to you. With whom will you talk about the Good News of Jesus today? Pray for them.

*Sing Psalm 2.11, 12.*

(Agincourt Hymn: *O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High*)

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!

Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

## 2 Joy to the World!

*Pray Psalm 22.23-25.*

You who fear the LORD, praise Him!  
All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him,  
And fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!  
For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;  
Nor has He hidden His face from Him;  
But when He cried to Him, He heard.  
My praise shall be of You in the great assembly;  
I will pay My vows before those who fear Him.

*Sing Psalm 22.23-25.*

(Darwall: *Rejoice, the Lord Is King*)

All you who fear the Lord, now praise His holy Name!  
You children of His glorious Word, declare His fame!  
We stand in awe of our eternal God, and on His mercy call.

For He has not despised the anguish of our King,  
nor from Him hid His eyes, Who knew such suffering.  
Let praise arise from all who love and serve the Ruler of the skies!

*Read Luke 2.1-20; meditate on verses 8-20.*

*Preparation*

1. What did the angel announce to the shepherds?
2. How did the shepherds respond?

*Meditation*

Why shepherds? Why not to the high priest? Or Herod? Or anyone with some power to influence others? And what if the angel *had* appeared to some religious or political big shot? We saw how Herod responded to the knowledge of Jesus' birth (Matt. 2). And throughout the whole course of His ministry, Jesus was hounded and opposed by religious leaders who feared losing their place if His work should succeed.

The lesson of the shepherds is clear. God revealed the Good News of great joy that had come to earth in the birth of Jesus to ordinary folk like you and me. Angels performed the praises of God to their wondering eyes, and His Word unfolds those same praises to us day by day. The shepherds received no instructions of any kind, except for the indirect announcement of verse 12: "You will find a Babe..." Our mandate is rather more direct: "You shall be My witnesses..." (Acts 1.8).

But the shepherds knew what to do. First, they encouraged one another: "Let us now go..." (v. 15). Then they "came with haste" to where Jesus lay (v. 16). Having seen, they "made widely known" the glorious Good News they had heard and experienced (v. 18).

We are all like those shepherds. God surprised us with His grace by bringing us to faith in Jesus, and we daily look into His Word to see how beautiful and much to be desired He is. We need to encourage one another in our faith, so that we will be ready with a word of Good News to anyone who asks a reason for the hope that is within us. We are God's joy bringers to a desperate world! What a glorious privilege and calling!

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*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

The Babe would not be hard for the shepherds to find or identify properly. How many newborns are wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying, snuggled up in a manger?

Everything about this birth was spectacular, unique, and orchestrated by God. And God chose shepherds, who lived outside with their sheep, to be the first visiting party to meet His dear Son.

And this was such a successful trip for the angel! His third announcement aroused no questions. His message was just totally accepted and rejoiced upon. Although, as per usual, he struck fear in the hearts of his beholders, but that was to be expected. Afterward, this crew responded only with joy and a desire to see this Wonder firsthand and then to tell others in their Personal Mission Field the Good News.

Jesus, in His ministry years, exemplified the humbleness of His manger cradle as an example for those who wanted to be considered “great” in the kingdom. He called His disciples close and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10.42-45).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came as a humble baby in a truly rough situation. He was wrapped in scratchy cloths in prickly hay, in a less than sterile feeding trough. For you and me. And all the world.

So, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2.5-7). God did this for us (Jn. 3.16).

“The LORD is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens.  
Who is like the LORD our God, Who dwells on high,  
Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in  
the heavens and the earth?” (Ps. 113.4-6). Who? Our Triune God.

And we, like Mary, will forever ponder this incredible Word of Good News in our hearts: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2.11). Born to us!

“Joy to the World!”

*For reflection*

1. How are the humble circumstances of Jesus’ birth instructive to us as His followers?
2. What do we learn from the shepherds about working our Personal Mission Field?
3. How will you take the joy of the Lord into your Personal Mission Field today?

*...the shepherds resolved to set out, immediately after the angels had departed. This conveys an important lesson. Instead of allowing the word of God, as many do, to pass away with the sound, we must take care that it strike its roots deep in us, and manifest its power, as soon as the sound has died away upon our ears. It deserves our attention, also, that the shepherds exhort one another: for it is not enough that each of us is attentive to his own duty, if we do not give mutual exhortations. Their obedience is still farther commended by the statement of Luke, that they hastened, (ver. 16;) for we are required to show the readiness of faith. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Luke 2.15*

*Pray Psalm 22.26-28.*

Pray for the spread of the Gospel and the healing power of grace in every nation. Pray for revival in the



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churches of the Lord and for a great awakening to faith among the lost.

*Sing Psalm 22.26-28.*

(Darwall: *Rejoice, the Lord Is King*)

Then all the poor shall eat and praise with us the Lord.

Forever we His praise repeat and trust His Word.

Praise God above, all you who keep His vows and who His mercies love!

All nations shall repent and hasten to the Lord;

All those to whom His truth is sent shall praise His Word.

The Lord is King! His sovereign rule on high now we His people sing!

### 3 Faithful

*Pray Psalm 119.1-4.*

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,  
Who walk in the law of the LORD!  
Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies,  
Who seek Him with the whole heart!  
They also do no iniquity;  
They walk in His ways.  
You have commanded us  
To keep Your precepts diligently.

*Sing Psalm 119.1-4.*

(Ode to Joy: *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee*)

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God's Law,  
who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.  
These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.  
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

*Read Luke 2.1-24; meditate on verses 21-24.*

*Preparation*

1. What two acts of obedience did Joseph and Mary perform?
2. What was the basis for their doing these?

*Meditation*

Poor Mary and Joseph. Still trying to earn their salvation by keeping the Law.

Wrong. Mary and Joseph were the recipients of God's grace. He entrusted His Son to them, and they named Him Jesus, because they knew He would save His people from their sins (v. 21; cf. Matt. 1.21). Joseph and Mary submitted themselves *and their Child* to the Law of God in grateful obedience, not in some slavish attempt to earn the favor of God.

The Law required that male children be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth (Lev. 12.3), a sanctifying rite that was older than the Law and embedded in God's covenant (Gen. 17.12), and thus, connected to His promises. Further, after Mary's purification was complete – according to the Law, 40 days after the child's birth (Lev. 12.1-4) – Joseph and Mary came to present Jesus to the Lord, bringing with them the sacrifice required of those who were impoverished (Ex. 13.2, 12; Lev. 12.6-8). Those 40 days recall the 40 years of wandering unclean in the wilderness before being delivered – by Joshua, our Old Testament Jesus – into the land of promise. The two people most favored in the eyes of God – perhaps for all time – submitted themselves and their Child to the Law of God, not to earn salvation, but to demonstrate faith and gratitude for the gift of grace. This is the way to greatness in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5.17-19).

These days it is fashionable among certain pastors and theologians to insist that Christians no longer need to obey the Law of God. All we need to do is love. Like Jesus did. But Jesus loved according to the Law of God, as He Himself explained in Matthew 22.34-40. And He said that love grows cold when people do not keep the Law, because how can they know love apart from it (Matt. 24.12)?

Do not listen to those who tell you that the Law no longer matters, that you're under grace and not under Law. Imagine them trying to make that argument to Mary and Joseph.

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*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Mary and Joseph followed the Law of God. They brought the required burnt offering and sin offering allowed for those who were impoverished. “And if she is not able...then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons” (Lev. 12.8).

But really, didn't she bring more than was required? For the quintessential offering was a lamb (Lev. 12.6) within its first year of life, and one turtledove or pigeon. And Mary brought Jesus, her Son, Who was The Lamb of God. Truly she brought an offering sufficient for all mankind!

Thirty years later John the Baptist would say when he saw Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1.29). And many years after that the disciple John wrote about the vision he saw in heaven, with these same angels, who appeared to the shepherds with ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands and thousands of them saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5.11, 12)

God used Mary and Joseph to deliver the best Gift ever to all the world. The Gift of forgiveness through His beloved Son. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3.16).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6.23).

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn. 4.9-11).

Mary and Joseph followed the Law of God and goodness flowed through them to all the earth.

Jesus. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9.15)

*For reflection*

1. Why does it make sense that keeping the Law is a way of showing gratitude to God?
2. Can we know how to love God and our neighbors apart from the Law? Explain.
3. What can you do to become more familiar with the Law of God?

*Nor is it without a good reason, that Luke so frequently repeats the statement, that Joseph and Mary did what was written in the law of the Lord. For these words teach us, that we must not, at our own suggestion, attempt anything in the worship of God, but must obediently follow what he requires in his Word. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Luke 2.21-25*

*Pray Psalm 119.5-8.*

Pray that, like Joseph and Mary, you may live blamelessly before the Lord today, keeping all His commandments and rejoicing in His Presence and power.

*Sing Psalm 119.5-8.*

(Ode to Joy: *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee*)

Let my ways steadfastly keep to all the statutes of Your Word.  
Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!  
With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.  
I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side!

## 4 The Work of the Spirit

*Pray Psalm 121.1, 2.*

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—  
From whence comes my help?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth.

*Sing Psalm 121.1, 2.*

(Duke Street: *Jesus Shall Reign*)

I lift up my eyes up to the heights: Whence comes my help by day, by night?  
My help comes from the Lord above! He made creation by His love!

*Read Luke 2.1-35; meditate on verses 25-35.*

*Preparation*

1. What had been revealed to Simeon by the Spirit?
2. What did Simeon say to Mary?

*Meditation*

This passage shows us how the Spirit of God worked throughout the period of the Old Testament. He hovered “upon” people whom God favored (v. 25). He revealed God’s Word to such people, so that they understood His promises and set their hearts to wait for them (v. 26). The Spirit further empowered and guided those whom God favored for their daily walk with Him (v. 27). Finally, He enabled them to see Jesus, if only in prospect, and to proclaim the Good News of His coming (vv. 29-35).

Simeon was “just and devout” because he believed the Word of God and looked forward to the coming of Israel’s “Consolation”. He communed with the Spirit and lived within the orbit of His Presence and power. He waited patiently until the day he held Jesus in his arms, then he burst into proclamation of the salvation of the Lord in Jesus: “For my eyes have seen Your salvation” (v. 30). God also revealed through him that many would be saved by the Child of Mary, and that she would know sorrow in her heart. All this was the work of the Spirit.

Since the Spirit was so powerful to work on, with, and through those whom God favored throughout the period of the Old Testament, how much more powerful must He be since He has come to dwell in all who believe in Jesus? What blessed ability to understand the Word of God is ours! What power for bearing virtuous fruit and exercising gifts for ministry! What boldness is ours for bearing witness because of the indwelling Spirit of God! And what energy He exerts to transform us increasingly into the likeness of Jesus!

Do we expect the Spirit of God to work with us like this? We should. We must wait on Him daily and walk the path He has marked out for us so that we may know His exceedingly abundant power at work within us to will and do of God’s good pleasure (Eph. 3.19, 20; Phil. 2.13).

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

How many times during his long life do you think Simeon prayed, “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law”? (Ps. 119.18) And now, because he was just and devout and had been eagerly waiting to see Jesus, the Consolation of Israel (Lk. 2.25), his prayer was answered.

As he edged toward the end of his life, his expectation must have increased daily (Lk. 2.26). And then, there He was! The long-expected Jesus. How his heart must have rejoiced. “For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the

glory of Your people Israel” (Lk. 2.30-32).

After Jesus’ resurrection many people shared Simeon’s reaction: Mary Magdalene told the disciples “that she had seen the Lord” (Jn. 20.18); and then the disciples told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord” (Jn. 20.25).

God used this devout, kind, older man of faith to share good news, but some hard news as well, with Mary: “yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Lk. 2.35). God seemed to layer information onto Mary and Joseph about their parenting of His precious Son; words of preparation for their hearts. A joy-filled, albeit difficult road lay ahead of them.

Now that we have seen the Lord, and His Holy Spirit lives in our lives, and we rejoice to know Him; we, too, have some words of preparation to comprehend from Jesus: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16.33).

So we pray, Open our eyes, that we may see wondrous things from Your law (Ps. 119.18), and let us be of good cheer as we live through the power of the Holy Spirit to be, like Simeon, just and devout, as we wait expectantly for Your imminent return to earth (Acts 1.11).

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear Desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king;  
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring;  
By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.  
(Wesley,1744/Prichard,1830)*

*For reflection*

1. Do you look forward to the coming of Jesus? How does that affect your daily walk with and work for Him?
2. How do you experience the Spirit of God, at work in you?
3. Whom will you encourage today to let the Spirit do His work in them?

*Then he entered the temple—but not by chance or naively. He came to the temple in the Spirit of God.... If you wish to hold Jesus, and to embrace him with your hands, and to be made worthy of leaving prison, you too must struggle with every effort to possess the guiding Spirit. Origen (185-254), *Homilies on the Gospel of Luke* 15.1-3*

*Pray Psalm 121.3-8.*

Commit yourself afresh to the Lord as your Keeper and Shade. Call on Him to guard your steps today, to keep you in His grace, guard you from all ill, and give you strength for all your endeavors.

*Sing Psalm 121.3-8.*

(Duke Street: *Jesus Shall Reign*)

God will not let our footsteps fall; He will preserve us all in all.

He does not slumber, does not sleep; God will His chosen people keep.

You are our Keeper and our Shade; You have our debt of sin repaid!

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You will preserve us by Your might; naught shall afflict us day or night.

Lord, You will guard our lives from ill; You will our trembling souls keep still.  
All our endeavors You will guard; eternal praise be Yours, O Lord!

## 5 Waiting

*Pray Psalm 55.16-18.*

As for me, I will call upon God,  
And the LORD shall save me.  
Evening and morning and at noon  
I will pray, and cry aloud,  
And He shall hear my voice.  
He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle *that was* against me,  
For there were many against me.

*Sing Psalm 55.16-19.*

(Bread of Life: *Break Thou the Bread of Life*)  
Lord, I will call on You, answer and save!  
Noon, morning, evening too, my voice I raise.  
Grant me Your peace, O Lord; answer my foes!  
All who reject God's Word He overthrows.

*Read Luke 2.1-40; meditate on verses 36-40.*

*Preparation*

1. How did Anna serve God?
2. What did Jesus do in Nazareth?

*Meditation*

These days we are inclined to think of works of ministry in superstar proportions: big churches, large ministries, well-known evangelists, popular speakers or writers, that kind of stuff. Or even the ministry of our pastor and church leaders. These are the *real* ministers, the *important* servants of the Lord.

But then there's Anna. For years, all she could do was come to the temple, fast, and pray – night and day. Was John Milton thinking of Anna when he wrote, upon becoming blind, "They also serve who only stand and wait"? Anna's ministry was sufficiently pleasing to the Lord that He allowed her to see Jesus before she died. And not just to see Him, but to proclaim Him "to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

In his book, *Finishing Our Course with Joy*, J. I. Packer encouraged all believers, but especially those who have entered the third third of life, to believe that they can always learn something more about Jesus and always lead or serve others in His Name. Anna is the poster child for such a view of Christian life. Together with Simeon, these two "Old Testament saints" teach us to make good use of the time God gives us for seeking Him and His Kingdom by waiting on the Lord patiently for the promises of His Word.

And speaking of waiting, what must those years in Nazareth have been like for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus? They all knew Who He was and that the promised redemption of God was on His shoulders. But they would have to wait, albeit not without purpose. They invested their waiting in helping Jesus become "strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God [increasing] upon Him."

Waiting on the Lord is the most important ministry any of us can do, and we are all called to it, day by day (Ps. 27.14). Through prayer, fasting, longing for His promises, and telling others about Him, we also can become stronger in spirit, wisdom, and grace, as we stand in our faith and wait for the Lord in all we do.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

There is something to be said for living according to God's plan, because God blesses those who do. Not with health or wealth, but with the gift of His Son.

Look at the people God used to unfold this part of His story:

Zacharias and Elizabeth "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Lk. 1.6) Mary, who was "highly favored" and as the angel noted, "the Lord is with you" (Lk. 1.28). Simeon was "just and devout" and "the Holy Spirit was upon him" (Lk. 2.25); and Anna "served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Lk. 2.37).

Solomon wrote wise sayings about how to become people like these in whom God delights:

"Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the LORD,  
but the blameless in their ways are His delight" (Prov. 11.20) Blameless. (Eph. 1.3-6)  
"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,  
but those who deal truthfully are His delight" (Prov. 12.22). Truthful. (Ps. 51.6)  
"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,  
but the prayer of the upright is His delight." Faithful in prayer. (1 Thess. 5.17)  
"The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,  
but He loves him who follows righteousness" (Prov. 15.8, 9). Doing righteousness. (Ex. 20.1-17)

We long to be people whom God can use for His purposes to promote His Kingdom and His will on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6.10). So, naturally, we will want to stay always within the boundaries where God's love can reach and bless us (Jude 21 TLB). That means walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless; striving adamantly to be just and devout; and spending our time in God's Word and in prayer—our fondest delight being in this Law in which we meditate day and night (Ps. 1.2).

Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon, and Anna were all ordinary people used in extraordinary ways because of the relationship that they cherished with God and His Law. We are ordinary folk who long to be used in extraordinary ways to prepare His ways, and to give the knowledge of salvation to His people (Lk. 1.77), and like Anna, to speak about Jesus to all those who look for redemption in Him (Lk. 2.38).

"Through prayer, fasting, longing for His promises, and telling others about Him, we also can become stronger in spirit, wisdom, and grace, as we stand in our faith and wait for the Lord in all we do."

People living according to God's plan.

*For reflection*

1. How do you expect God to use you in extraordinary ways today?
2. What are you doing to prepare for God to use you like this?
3. Whom will you encourage today to trust the Lord for grace to help in all their times of need?

*Anna always dwelt in, or at least attended at, the temple. She was always in a praying spirit; gave herself to prayer, and in all things she served God. Those to whom Christ is made known, have great reason to thank the Lord. She taught others concerning him. Let the example of the venerable saints, Simeon and Anna, give courage to those whose hoary heads are, like theirs, a crown of glory, being found in the way of righteousness. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Luke 2.36-40*

*Pray Psalm 55.1-3, 20-23.*

What burdens are you carrying? What challenges lie ahead for this day? Give them to the Lord. Commit yourself and your day to Him in prayer, and thank Him in advance for the knowledge that He will guard and sustain you and keep you to Himself.



*Sing Psalm 55.1-3, 20-23.*

(Bread of Life: *Break Thou the Bread of Life*)

Hear now my prayer, O Lord, hide not from me.

Answer me by Your Word and set me free!

Wicked men sore oppress; restless am I.

Lord, ease my soul's distress and hear my cry!

Many assail, O Lord, many betray.

See how they draw their sword across my way.

Take up my burden, Lord; strengthen and bless!

Let judgment by Your Word their souls distress.

## 6 Our Father's Business

*Pray Psalm 25.4, 5.*

Show me Your ways, O LORD;  
Teach me Your paths.  
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,  
For You *are* the God of my salvation;  
On You I wait all the day.

*Sing Psalm 25.4, 5.*

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

Make me to know Your ways, teach me Your paths, O Lord!  
My Savior, all day long I wait and seek You in Your Word.

*Read Luke 2.1-52; meditate on verses 41-52.*

*Preparation*

1. What was Jesus doing in the temple?
2. In what ways did Jesus grow?

*Meditation*

It says something about the relationships Joseph and Mary had with their extended family, neighbors, and other traveling companions, that they would assume that Jesus was safe with them as they began the return trip to Nazareth from Jerusalem (vv. 41-44). People who know the grace of God look out for one another, and for one another's children.

But when they did not find Jesus in the troop, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. When they found Him in the temple, He was sitting among the learned theologians, listening, asking questions, and giving answers to questions put to Him. In reply to His parents' query, Jesus said "It is necessary for Me to be about the things of My Father" (v. 49). He assumed that, when they were ready to leave, they would find Him in the temple doing what He was doing. But they didn't understand His explanation.

Back home, all we're told about those years in Nazareth was that Jesus increased – physically, in favor with God, in wisdom, and in favor with the people around Him. That, too, was part of His Father's necessary business.

All this speaks to Jesus' preparation for ministry. He had to learn. He needed to improve His sense of the Father's Presence with Him. He had to acquire wisdom to live a perfect and sinless life. And He needed to learn how to love His neighbors. He was fully God all this time; but because He was a human being, He needed to grow. Growing is a necessary aspect of our Father's business.

And so it is for us as well. If we're not growing in the Lord and in the work of ministry, we're sliding back. There is no middle ground and no plateau. It is the Father's business for us that we grow like Jesus did, and that we apply ourselves diligently to learning all we need to become more like Jesus every day. How will you grow today, and whom will you encourage in this aspect of our Father's business?

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Even the earthly parents God chose to nurture His own Son made mistakes (Lk. 2.44, 45). I find this so comforting. We all long to do the best job we possibly can to love, care for, teach, and keep our dear children safe. But we, like Mary and Joseph, are fallible humans in need of help from God and His holy angels to

accomplish this task (Matt. 18.10; 10.30, 31).

God trusted Mary and Joseph to care for “the Son of His love” (Col.1.13). And He trusts us with the children He gives to us. But He desires that we trust Him to help us with this awesome responsibility.

The birth and growing up story of Jesus exemplifies the way the family should work. The parents trust God, and the children trust the parents. Even the holy and perfect Son of God “was subject to them” (Lk. 2.51). He was obedient to God’s command to “honor your father and mother” (Ex. 20.12; Deut. 5.16), and to “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6.1).

When children are following God’s plan their lives take on an obvious growth glow:

“And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the LORD and men” (1 Sam. 2.26).

It was said of John the Baptist that the neighbors queried, “What kind of child will this be?” and that he “grew and became strong in spirit” (Lk. 1.66, 80).

And then Jesus “grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him” and He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Lk. 2.40, 52).

“Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right” (Prov. 20.11).

Yes, there was something special about Samuel, and John the Baptist, and many of our own children.

But, truly, this One Child surpasses them all. This Child, born to benefit and bless the whole world!

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;

And the government will be upon His shoulder.

And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,

Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end...” (Is. 9.6, 7).

Jesus, the Son of God, Ruler of the world, lived on earth within the boundaries of the Law (Jude 21).

Mary and Joseph didn’t do everything perfectly whilst raising Him, but their heart’s desire was to please God and live within the parameters of the Law. We certainly don’t do everything perfectly, and yet God in His gracious mercy wants us to “know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8.28).

Parents, children, and people of all sorts, sizes, languages, and age are called to our Father’s business. We would do well to get busy doing it according to His statutes (Ps. 119.112).

*For reflection*

1. What is your normal procedure in preparing for a day? How might you improve this?
2. In what ways do you need to grow and increase after the pattern Jesus set in Luke 2.52?
3. Whom will you encourage today to continue growing in the Lord?

*He is said to have progressed in wisdom and age and grace, because he did increase in age and by this increase in age brought more into evidence the wisdom inherent in him further. By making what is ours altogether his own, he made his own the progress of people in wisdom and grace, as well as the fulfillment of the Father’s will, which is to say, people’s knowledge of God and their salvation. John of Damascus (650-750), *Orthodox Faith* 3.22*

*Pray Psalm 25.16-22.*

As you prepare for the day ahead, seek the Lord’s Presence and power. Commit all your activities to Him, that you might serve Him with integrity and in righteousness in all you do.

*Sing Psalm 25.16-22.*

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

Be gracious, Lord, to me; my heart is weighed with woe.  
My troubles and affliction see; let my transgressions go.

Consider all my foes, who hate me all the day;  
and rescue my poor soul lest I should stumble in the way.

Preserve me in Your way, redeem Your people, Lord!  
We wait for You and refuge seek in Your own faithful Word.

## 7 Heaven Came Down

*Pray Psalm 85.7-9.*

Show us Your mercy, LORD,  
And grant us Your salvation.  
I will hear what God the LORD will speak,  
For He will speak peace  
To His people and to His saints;  
But let them not turn back to folly.  
Surely His salvation *is* near to those who fear Him,  
That glory may dwell in our land.

*Sing Psalm 85.7-9.*

(Lyons: *O Worship the King*)

Lord, show us Your love; restore us, we pray!  
And help us to hear the words that You say.  
Speak peace to Your people; in truth let us stand.  
We fear You; let glory and grace fill our land.

*Read Luke 2.1-52; meditate on verses 8-18.*

*Preparation*

1. What Good News did the angel announce?
2. How would this Good News affect the people of the world?

*Meditation*

In our day, most people live what Solomon would describe as “under the sun” lives. That is, they do not believe and cannot see anything beyond the material world. As the late Carl Sagan was fond of putting it, “The cosmos is all there is, or was, or ever will be.” Ours has become a “disenchanted” world, as Charles Taylor explained (*A Secular Age*). Life has no meaning or purpose beyond some level of survival. And even survival is but a blip in cosmic time, “a tale told by an idiot, / full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” (*Macbeth*, Shakespeare).

The Good News announced by the angel and celebrated by the angelic host is that heaven has come down to earth in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, bringing the blessings of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). The eternal, indestructible, unseen, “under the heavens” realm has broken into time. Since the announcement to those lowly shepherds, the Good News of salvation and the Kingdom of God has spread throughout the loaf of this secular world and, in every generation, has worked to make all things new (Lk. 13.20, 21).

Wherever the Good News of Jesus has gone, people have known forgiveness, peace, and life. In Jesus, righteousness and peace, truth and love, hope and promise, meekness and power, grace and glory are all combined. When we have Jesus, we have all this as well. We must not think that the people of our generation are impervious to the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom. They are all made in the image of God and have a certain degree of the knowledge of God etched onto their souls (Rom. 1.19, 20). God can open the heart of even the vilest of sinners – as indeed, some of us know all too well.

Let us, like those shepherds, fully persuaded that heaven has come down to earth, go with wonder and joy to make Jesus known to the people in our Personal Mission Field. Joy to the world! The Lord is come!

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

In 1991 a new Christmas carol written by Lowry and Greene came upon the scene. It is entitled “Mary, Did You Know?” and asks some very good questions. The two that I find most emotionally charged are these: Mary did you know...when you kiss your little Baby you’ve kissed the face of God? And Mary did you know...that sleeping Child you’re holding is the great I AM? When I try to sing along with my CD, I can never quite make it through without tearing up. It is, indeed, a lovely addition to the catalog of carols that we cherish singing and rejoicing in about the birth of our dear Savior, Jesus Christ.

But in some respects, the song seems unfinished. Here is what is needed to complete the idea of that song: People, believers, do you know? Do you know and serve this One, this Son of Mary, and of God? Do you know that we are told through the psalmist that we are to “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little”? (Ps. 2.12).

And do you know that this same Jesus said, “I AM the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”? (Jn. 14.6)

Do you know that He also said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments”? (Jn. 14.15)

We dare not leave Him in the manger, as a dearly loved Baby; but we must serve Him as we ought as the Ruler and King of all the earth—under the sun and under the heavens. This is the One of Whom it is said, “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (Rom. 16.20).

Did Mary know the answers to those questions? Yes, as best she could, she did.

Do we know the answers to the questions? Yes, as best we can, we do, if we believe and act on the promise that “he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 Jn. 3.24). “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Jn. 13.17).

*Heaven came down and glory filled my soul,  
when at the cross the Savior made me whole;  
my sins were washed away and my night was turned to day—  
heaven came down and glory filled my soul!*  
(Peterson, 1961)

*For reflection*

1. What is the significance in your knowing that heaven has come down into your life in the Person of Jesus Christ?
2. What can you do to help ensure that we don’t “leave Jesus in the manger”?
3. Who will you encourage today to a deeper and more personal experience of the Good News of Jesus?

*God’s goodwill to men, manifested in sending the Messiah, redounds to his praise. Other works of God are for his glory, but the redemption of the world is for his glory in the highest. God’s goodwill in sending the Messiah, brought peace into this lower world. Peace is here put for all that good which flows to us from Christ’s taking our nature upon him. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Luke 2.8-14*

*Pray Psalm 85.10-13.*

Thank the Lord for His mercy and truth, His righteousness and peace, and all His daily blessings – all of which come together as one in Jesus. Call on Him to be with you and go before you today, that you might

walk the path He has marked out for you in His Kingdom.

*Sing Psalm 85.10-13.*

(Lyons: *O Worship the King*)

In Jesus God's grace and truth are combined;  
both goodness and peace in Him do we find.  
Truth springs from the earth as He walks in our midst,  
and righteousness flows from the heav'ns as a gift.

The Lord by His grace will give what is good;  
our land will produce abundance of food.  
And righteousness will go before the Lord's face,  
and make of His footsteps a way in this place.

*Luke 2*

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. To whom was the Good News first proclaimed? Why them? How did they respond?
2. What role did Simeon and Anna play in the coming of Jesus?
3. What was His “Father’s business”, as Jesus fulfilled it? What are we to learn from this?
4. What do we mean by saying that, with the birth of Jesus, heaven has come to earth? What is the significance of this for you??
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from our study of Luke 2?

*For prayer:*



## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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