

# LUKE—WEEK 3

## THE BABY MESSIAH



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is The Adoration of the Shepherds by Giorgione  
(1477–1510) on display at The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC*

Jesus is born and it seems like everyone already knows who He is.

Some folks even know some rather disturbing details. Mary bears the burden of all this.

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Thank you.

Luke 2:1–40 — The Baby Messiah  
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1 Luke 2:1–7 (ESV)

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

Okay, let's be honest; this is horrible. It's a good thing that Mary's faith is solid as a rock. She needs that to keep going.

But there's a marvelous lesson in God not sparing Mary from suffering. As if traveling by foot or on a donkey to Bethlehem while nine months pregnant isn't suffering enough, then she can't find lodging and gives birth in a barn. Yuck!

And it's not going to get any easier. Mary will witness things that no mother should ever have to endure. Sure, her life will have its moments. Shepherds and wise men will show up to honor her child. She will know, for absolute certain, that all her pain is part of God's plan.

But there is unimaginable pain coming.

The Bible isn't about avoiding trials; it's about God never leaving us as we go through them.

This is essential to anyone who, in anguish, asks, "Why is this happening to me?"

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Trials come in all shapes and sizes. Even a small trial can be tough to get through if you can't see God's hand in it. The big tests of faith come, not from the biggest trials, but from the ones that don't make sense.

For example, after running a marathon you can be in tremendous pain, but because it's expected, it's not scary. The same level of pain, without any explanation, might activate your church's prayer chain.

This is where Christian fellowship can be priceless. When we can't see God walking with us, there's nothing better than a friend we can see.

This is one of the Christian roles that anyone can be called to. We all have friends. Those friendships can turn into ministry opportunities at any time. One minute you're just hanging out, talking football or whatever, and the next minute, you're on your knees praying for them.

When this lands, notice what it is. You are called. If you think you're not ready, you're wrong. Being a friend is being ready. You don't need any instructions, just do what comes naturally.

Except being shy. Don't do that.

2 Luke 2:8–14 (ESV)

*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

*“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

This passage is widely misquoted and misunderstood. We often hear these angels quoted as saying, “Peace on Earth, goodwill towards men\*.” That misses an important point. The song verse is closer—“Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on Earth.” The key difference is, “His.”

There’s a word in the Greek (*eudokias*) that must not be ignored. It is often translated as “of good will.” The translation, “peace on earth to men of goodwill,” is preferred over, “peace on earth, goodwill towards men.” The blessing isn’t for everyone.

The foremost Greek lexicon (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker—BAGD) takes this even further. It says that *eudokias* is properly translated as “good pleasure or favor.” In other words, BAGD says this should be translated, “peace on earth to men God favors,” or, “peace on earth to men on whom God’s pleasure rests.” The limited blessing is based on God’s choice, not anyone’s merit.

That’s not as warm and fuzzy as a universal blessing, but it’s what the Bible says. Peel away the sugar coating, and you’ll find reformed doctrine every time. This is hard learning, but worth the work.

The “no sugar added” doctrine is healthier too.

\*Note: the word “*anthropois*” is translated here as “men,” but means people, not just males.

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The angels also said, “*I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*” So, despite the limitations on the peace blessing, there is good news for all.

This says two important, even radical things.

First of all, Christianity will benefit everyone, even non-Christians. Yes, only some will get God’s peace, but the whole world will gain some benefit.

But the second meaning is the radical one—this *will be for all the people.*

“All the people” means all the races or nations.

That means Gentiles.

3 Luke 2:15–21 (ESV)

*When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

*And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

Right in the middle of the Christmas story, Luke inserts this curious aside—“*But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*” What’s that all about? Why did Luke insert this in there?

One of the wonderful things about the Bible is that its heroes are real people. Mary isn’t superwoman; she doesn’t instantly figure everything out. She’s nine months into the most incredible sequence of events imaginable, and new stuff is popping up every day.

Many wonderful things are happening, but she’s still stuck in a barn with a newborn and no better place to lay the child than in a manger. Who wouldn’t feel confused in that situation?

Mary doesn’t know what we know, namely what’s going to happen next. Imagine her panic if she did! God is preparing her for the road ahead, and Luke makes a point of telling us here that she’s busy taking it all in.

It gives us a glimpse of how she’s walking her road.

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This is model for us. The lesson here is to always pay attention and to think. That sounds obvious, but it’s not. When you’re in the middle of a trial, the last thing you feel like doing is “taking notes” and meditating on what’s going on.

But that’s exactly what you often need to do. In all things, seek God’s will. Not everything that happens is a sign from God, but always be open to that possibility. Anything extraordinary (good or bad) should get your attention.

The goal in a trial isn’t just getting through the trial; it’s also discerning God’s will and learning whatever it is He’s trying to teach you. This translates into a different kind of prayer.

When frustrated, have you ever looked heavenward and prayed (or even screamed), “Is there a point to this?” That may not be an ideal prayer, but it connects in a way that simply asking for favors doesn’t.

If you think God’s up to something, talk to Him.

4 Luke 2:22–35 (ESV)

*And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon 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 Christ. And he came in 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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,*

*“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”*

*And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”*

The story seems straightforward enough at first. Simeon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares that he has finally seen the Christ. But then he says that Jesus is, “*your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.*”

All peoples? Gentiles? His parents knew He was the Christ, but not like this. *And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.*

Then Simeon really takes it up a notch and says, “*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.*”

Wow. Every time Mary turns around, she gets hit with another warning. And notice that *Simeon blessed them*, and then added this note just for Mary.

Blessings in the Bible can be weighty.

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What does it mean to be blessed? By our standards, was Mary blessed?

Not if our standards are reflected by what we typically pray for. There is not a single indication anywhere in scripture that Mary got any of the things we normally think of as blessings. Did any of her kids become doctors? Lawyers? Were any of them successful in any traditional way?

No, instead she walks one of the toughest roads in human history. She even has to watch her firstborn put to death by the state. It also appears that she was widowed early on.

Yet Mary is considered one of the most blessed people in history. The Kingdom of God is different.

5 Luke 2:36-40 (ESV)

*And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

*And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.*

Anna's life story is important. If she got married at 17 (which wasn't early in that era), she would have been a widow for 60 years. That's harsh. Life in the first century was like *Les Miserables* for many folks.

But she's actually incredibly blessed. Being a prophetess means she has a direct channel to God, and now she has seen the Christ child. She gives a beautiful testimony to that.

*And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

There's not an ounce of self-pity anywhere in Anna. Others may see her as an object of pity, but not she does not.

That's why *she did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.*

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Prophets don't so much see the future as they see the truth. This enables them to ignore the silly things that we can't ignore. They aren't distracted from what's really important by the things that scream at us all day.

This is why quiet times are called quiet times. You can't get close to God while the phone's ringing.

How can you make your quiet times holy to the Lord? Is there something you need to get rid of to make your quiet times more productive? Is the time right? The place? Are the electronic distractions as far away as they should be?

It's important to be strategic about your time with the Lord. It should be a first fruit, not an afterthought. Spend some time meditating and praying about how to make your quiet time most productive.

Note: it's okay to fall asleep during a quiet time. Not everyone has the time for that, but when you do, this can be a blessing.

Some people make a habit of praying themselves to sleep when they go to bed.

