

Unit 2

The King Arrives!

Unit Outline

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Lesson 1

The King Is Born!

Luke 1:26–56, 2

The Gospel of Luke offers the most detailed account of the beginning of Jesus' story. Luke explains the miraculous events of Jesus' birth, first setting the historical context. Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire; Herod acted as Judah's local ruler. Since the close of the Old Testament, the Jews had been living in a period of silence—God had not spoken through prophets or angels for hundreds of years.

Yet something was stirring! Mysterious angelic visitors began to visit ordinary Jews and tell them of momentous events on the horizon. The elderly priest Zechariah received a glimpse of coming glory when the angel Gabriel gave him the news that he and his barren wife would have a special son.

Gabriel quoted from the closing verses of the Old Testament to explain the role John

would play: he would be the promised prophet like Elijah whom God would send to prepare people's hearts "before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes" (Malachi 4:5–6). When the Old Testament prophets spoke of the "day of the Lord," they meant a future time of



Seeing Shepherds by Daniel Bonnell.

redemption for Israel and judgment on God's enemies. All things would finally be put right on the day of the Lord! And this redemption would come through a messiah, or an anointed one. The Old Testament had different anointed offices, such as prophets and priests, but by the time of Jesus, *messiah* primarily meant "anointed king." It was clear from the prophets that, first and foremost, the messiah would be a king from the line of David.

Unfortunately, Zechariah initially doubted the angel's message. But later, when people asked, "What is this child going to be?" Zechariah was able to explain that this child would be a prophet preparing the way for the Lord (Luke 1:76). He prophesied that God was finally coming to redeem Israel by raising up "a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (v 68–69). The promised king would soon appear.

Immediately following this prophecy, Luke tells us about an unexpected twist that forced Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem just before Jesus' birth. The Roman census required Joseph to travel to the town of his ancestry, which happened to be Bethlehem, the town where King David had been born. It is only fitting that Jesus, King David's long-expected heir, should also make his entry in Israel's royal birthplace. God was making the message clear: Jesus is the anointed King of Israel, come to save his people.

Yet . . . how could this poor baby be the long-awaited king? The conditions of his birth were anything but royal. He was not born in Herod's palace, or announced by heralds, or attended by servants. Instead, he was born in the worst of conditions to parents who were temporarily homeless. Mary and Joseph had to use an animal's feeding trough as his cradle. They could present only a poor family's offering when they brought Jesus to the temple for his dedication.

Nevertheless, Jesus' birth was miraculous and glorious enough to show that he was no ordinary peasant. From the angel's announcements to Mary and Joseph, to the host of angels who appeared to shepherds, God was beginning to reveal his Son's glory. The angels spoke in no uncertain terms, saying: "The Lord God will give [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32–33). This Jesus was the promised King, the Messiah (Luke 2:11).

How amazing that the King of all kings would humble himself—not only by giving up the glories of heaven, but even by renouncing the comforts of this world. Rather than enjoying kingly riches and power, Jesus identified with the vulnerable and down-and-out of this world. What a different sort of king he is—a king so humble he would take on all the world's suffering and woe, yet so powerful that he would defeat it once and for all.

Reflection

1. *Both Mary's and Zechariah's songs of praise (Luke 1) speak of God helping Israel and remembering his promises to them through this coming baby, Jesus. In what way does Jesus relate to Abraham's descendants, the people of Israel? How was he going to help them?*
2. *Simeon's song of praise (Luke 2:29–32) quotes from Isaiah 49:6. What did Isaiah promise? How does Jesus relate to this promise?*
3. *Instead of beginning with Jesus' birth, the Book of Matthew begins with Jesus' genealogy. To which two special people does Matthew link Jesus, and why do you think that is? Why was Jesus' lineage from these two individuals important? (See Matthew 1:17 for help.)*

Lesson 2

Jesus Relives Israel's Story

Matthew 3–4:11

The Gospel of Matthew tells of the events leading up to the start of Jesus' public ministry. Matthew explains that two important events preceded the start of Jesus' preaching: his baptism and his temptation in the wilderness.



John prepared the way for Jesus by preaching and baptizing.

John the Baptist began preparing the people of Judea for Jesus' ministry, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (3:2). He preached that judgment was coming to all who did not repent, even calling out the spiritual leaders (Pharisees and Sadducees) for their lack of true faith and true repentance. He offered a baptism symbolizing confession of sin and repentance (3:6, 11).

We understand, then, why John was so surprised that Jesus came to be baptized. Jesus had never sinned, so why would he need to be cleansed with water? Yet Jesus gave this reason for desiring baptism: "It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15).

We notice this language of "fulfilling" many other times in Matthew. For instance, Matthew says that Jesus left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum "to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah" (4:14). Jesus obviously knew the Old Testament Scriptures and believed that he needed to fulfill them.

In the opening chapters Matthew speaks five times of Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament prophets. But this is not the sort of “fulfilling of prophecy” we might think of. The prophets Matthew quoted were usually not making a prediction about a future messiah. Instead, they were explaining events in Israel’s history: how God had called Israel his son, how he had rescued Israel from Egypt, how Israel’s mothers had watched their children carried away or killed in the exile, etc.

Now Matthew quotes the Old Testament prophets to show that Jesus is fulfilling these events in a much greater way. Just as Israel was called God’s son, so Jesus is uniquely and eternally God’s Son (Matthew 3:17). But whereas Israel was a sinful and rebellious son, Jesus is the righteous and ultimate Son. Matthew shows Jesus reliving Israel’s story but doing so perfectly, to fulfill all the righteousness they had failed to achieve. Jesus, just like Israel, was called out of Egypt (Matthew 2:15). He, too, lived through a time of Israel’s mothers weeping (Matthew 2:17). And he, like Israel, was tested in the wilderness—his 40 days in the desert were reminiscent of their 40 years. That generation of Israelites failed their wilderness test by rebelling against the Lord. Jesus withstood far greater testing, yet he emerged from it completely righteous. He was fulfilling all that Israel should have done the first time around!

Jesus does not just fulfill, for example, 200 Old Testament predictions about the messiah, but he fulfills the entire Old Testament story. The roles of prophets, priests, and kings—he fulfills those. The sacrifices, laws, symbols, and festivals—he fulfills those. But even more, he fulfills the whole story of Israel that stretches from Genesis to Malachi. Israel—this nation called to be God’s son, called to be a light to the Gentiles—failed to remain faithful to God. But Jesus, God’s perfect Son, resisted every temptation. He alone was able to fulfill the mission given to Israel.

Reflection

1. *Other than what was mentioned, summarize at least three things that God desired Israel to be or to have—goals he had in mind for them. How did Jesus fulfill those perfectly?*
2. *Why do you think John criticized the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3:7?*
3. *John speaks of Jesus coming with a “winnowing fork” in Matthew 3:12. Explain what this image of winnowing wheat and chaff is meant to convey. If you need help, look at the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13.*