



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

New Testament Survey

Lesson 2 – Jesus as a Child

Background

The last Old Testament prophet was Malachi. He lived about 420 BC. He predicted the sudden coming of the Christ: **“The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant”** (Malachi 3:1). But for 400 years the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One), did not come. Meanwhile the land of Palestine had become part of the huge Roman Empire. This was the time of which the prophet Daniel had spoken. He had predicted four world kingdoms: Babylonia, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome. Daniel had said: **“In the days of these kings (Roman) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed”** (Daniel 2:44).

And so, it came to pass. In the days of the powerful Roman Empire, God set up His everlasting kingdom by sending His own Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. He sent Jesus to be born as a baby, to grow up, and to suffer and die and rise again. In this way Jesus came to establish God’s kingdom of forgiveness, which we also call the New Testament. This New Testament is God’s agreement or promise to forgive sins for Christ’s sake. Jesus kept the holy Law of God in our place, and He suffered the punishment that our sins deserve and rose again from the dead to conquer death for us.

The Rulers in the Land of Jesus

During the time of Jesus and the New Testament the following emperors ruled over the Roman Empire:

Caesar Augustus or Octavian (27 BC - 14 AD) – In his reign Jesus was born.

Tiberius (14-37 AD) – In his reign Jesus died and rose again.

Gaius Caligula (37-41) – He was a madman during part of his reign.

Claudius (41-54) – During his reign Paul made his mission journeys.

Nero (54-68) – In his reign most of the New Testament books were written. Nero was the first emperor to persecute the Christians.

Galba (68-69)

Otho (68-69)

Vitellius (68-69)

Vespasian (69-79) – In his reign Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed.

Titus (79-91) – Titus was the Roman general who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Domitian (91-96) – In his reign the apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos.

Nerva (96-98)

Trajan (98-117) – Under Trajan the Roman Empire reached its largest extent.
Other rulers in Palestine during this period include:

Herod the Great, a descendant of Esau (37 – 4 BC) – He wanted to kill the baby Jesus.

Herod Archelaus (4 BC - 6 AD) – He ruled over only Judea and Samaria.

Herod Antipas (4 BC - 39 AD) – He ruled over Galilee and Perea. He ordered the
beheading of John the Baptist. Jesus called him a fox.

Annas (6-15) – He was high priest for a time and had a big influence on those who
followed him.

Caiaphas (18-36) – He was Annas' son-in-law; he was the high priest who condemned
Jesus to death.

Pontius Pilate (27-37) – He was the Roman governor of Judea who permitted Jesus'
crucifixion.

Herod Agrippa I (41-44) – He ruled over all Palestine. He executed John's brother James.

Herod Agrippa II (50-100) – He ruled over parts of Palestine. Paul talked to him.

Felix (52-58) – He was the Roman governor who had meetings with Paul when Paul was a
prisoner.

Festus (58-60) – He was the Roman governor who sent Paul to Rome to be judged by
Caesar.

Using a Harmony of the Gospels

In our study of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) we shall use what is called a harmony of the four Gospels. A harmony is an attempt to put together one single account of Jesus' life from all four Gospels. It means that we will be studying all four Gospels at the same time. We will compare one Gospel with the others. We should not regard a harmony as being written by the Holy Spirit. It is our attempt to gather all the words from the four Gospels into one account. Because the Holy Spirit did not lead the Gospel writers to record events in the same order, we cannot be sure that the order of events in our harmony is absolutely correct. The value of a harmony, however, is that we study what all the Gospels say about each event.

There are many Bible teachers today who say that the four Gospels contradict one another. But we believe this is impossible, because we believe that the Holy Spirit breathed out the words of all four Gospels. The Holy Spirit certainly does not contradict Himself. What we have in the four Gospels is four accounts of the life of Jesus. Each account is presented from a different viewpoint and with a different audience in mind:

- **Matthew** wrote particularly for Jewish Christians.
- **Mark** wrote for Roman Christians.
- **Luke** wrote for Greek-speaking Christians, with the whole world in mind.
- **John** wrote his Gospel after the other three Gospels had already been in use for some time. Thus, John generally does not repeat what has already been told, but he presents other events and background information that are not in the other Gospels.

When four people record the same event, they will not all stress the same points. What they write will depend on where they were when they observed the event. What they write will depend on the audience that will read what they have written. What they write will depend also on what aspect of the event is most important or most interesting to them. The Holy Spirit chose to use four different authors to give us the account of the life of God's Son on earth. These four authors do not claim to tell us everything they knew about Jesus. John, the last of the four to write, says at the end of his Gospel: **"Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book"** (John 20:30). **"There are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written"** (John 21:25).

We shall be using a harmony of the Gospels that was prepared by a Lutheran scholar named William Beck. His harmony is entitled *The Christ of the Gospels*. If you have access to this book, it may be helpful to have it at hand for our study of the four Gospels, but it is not necessary. We will read all four Gospels in our study, and we will use Beck's harmony as a possible order of events. The headings of these lessons are taken from Beck's harmony.

Jesus as a Child

In this section Luke presents Jesus' birth and childhood from Mary's point of view. Matthew presents the events from Joseph's point of view. John takes us behind the scenes so that we see that Jesus was God before He became human flesh and blood.

Read the listed passages as you study each of the events below:

Introduction (Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-4; John 1:1-18)

John takes us back to eternity and teaches us that Jesus is eternal God. Before He became a human being, He was the eternal Son of God, Co-Creator of the universe. He created the universe together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Note that the Gospel of John begins just like Genesis.

The Son of Man (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-28)

Matthew gives Jesus' legal ancestry through Joseph.

Luke gives Jesus' blood ancestry through Heli, the father of Mary.

The angel Gabriel comes to Zacharias, the priest (Luke 1:5-25)

The priest's son, John, was to be a Nazarite, like Samson and Samuel were. See Numbers 6.

John was also to be Jesus' forerunner. This was foretold by Isaiah and Malachi.

Since Zacharias did not believe God's promise, God removed his ability to talk until after John was born.

The angel Gabriel comes to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

A virgin is a girl or woman who has not had sexual relations with a man.

Jewish betrothals were as binding as marriage and could be broken only by divorce.

Notice that Jesus had no human father. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb.

In contrast to Zacharias, Mary believed the angel's amazing message.

Mary visits Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56)

Elizabeth rightly calls Mary "**the mother of my Lord**" (v. ____ – Mary is the mother of Him who is God).

Mary's song is called the *Magnificat* (Latin for "magnifies").

John is born (Luke 1:57-79)

Zacharias' song is called the *Benedictus* (Latin for "blessed").

An angel comes to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25)

Since Mary was expecting a baby, Joseph suspected that she was living with another man.

Because he did not want to ruin her reputation, he intended to divorce her secretly.

Joseph at first did not know that Mary's child was "**of the Holy Spirit**" (v. ____)

Jesus is born (Luke 2:1-7)

According to Caesar's law, all citizens had to register in their family town.

The shepherds (Luke 2:8-20)

God announces the good news of Jesus' birth to poor, humble shepherds, not to the mighty.

The Gospel is the Good News of salvation for all people in the world.

The shepherds were also missionaries; they told others the Good News about Jesus.

In the Temple (Luke 2:1-39)

All Jewish boy babies had to be circumcised on the eighth day.

All mothers had to be purified after the birth (boy babies: after 40 days; girl babies: after 80 days).

The firstborn child was to be sanctified through an offering.

Mary's offering was two turtledoves or two pigeons because she was poor (see Leviticus 12:8).

Simeon's song is called the *Nunc Dimittis* (Latin for "now you let us depart").

Although Jesus is God and therefore above all law, He willingly kept all the Old Testament laws as our Substitute, so that He would be perfect in every way. See Galatians 4:4-5.

The wise men (Matthew 2:1-12)

An unreliable tradition says that these wise men (Magi) were three kings and gives them each a name. The Bible, however, does not say how many wise men came to find Jesus. It also does not give their names.

The wise men were astronomers or stargazers. Regarding the star, see Numbers 24:17.

Jesus may have been as old as two when these wise men came, living in a house in Bethlehem.

To Egypt! (Matthew 2:13-23)

Herod the Great was a very suspicious man. He had killed many of his own family members because he was afraid they would take the kingdom from him.

Since the wise men called Jesus a king, Herod killed all the babies in Bethlehem.

God protected His Son, our Savior, through Joseph's dreams.

After Herod the Great died in 4 BC, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to Judea.

Because Herod Archelaus was ruling Judea, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus moved to Nazareth.

Herod Antipas was the ruler in Galilee, where Nazareth was located.

The boy Jesus (Luke 2:40-52)

Although Jesus was the Son of God without sin, He grew up as a true boy: **"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men"** (v. ____)

We know no details about Jesus' childhood, other than his trip to Jerusalem at age 12.

Mary calls Joseph Jesus' father, even though Joseph was not His biological father. Jesus gently corrected His mother by referring to God as His Father.

Jesus obeyed the 4th Commandment by being perfectly obedient to His earthly parents. His obedience was part of His work of substitution for us sinners, who cannot be obedient.

Questions

1. Who was the Roman Emperor when Jesus was born?
2. Who was the Roman Emperor when Jesus died?
3. What is meant by a harmony of the Gospels?
4. Why can we be sure the four Gospels do not conflict with one another?
5. What is the difference between the age of Jesus as God and the age of Jesus as man?
6. How did Mary react differently from Zacharias to the message from the angel Gabriel?
7. How did Elizabeth greet Mary when Mary visited her?
8. How did the baby John in Elizabeth's womb react to Mary's visit?
9. Why was it important that Jesus be born in Bethlehem?
10. What did Joseph think when he learned that Mary was pregnant?
11. Who were the first people to be told about the birth of Jesus?
12. Why was Jesus taken to the Temple when He was forty days old?
13. How did the wise men learn that the new-born King was in Bethlehem?
14. Why did Joseph and Mary move to the land of Egypt?
15. Why did Joseph and Mary live in Nazareth rather than in Bethlehem?