

Jesus' Temple Dedication

Have you ever wondered why the Holy Spirit told us about the shepherds at the time of the birth of Jesus? Was it not enough to tell us that Jesus was born? Yet, the Holy Spirit tells us in Luke 2 that an angel appeared to a group of shepherds. We do not know how many shepherds were present or if they were kind, short, or fat. That was not important. God only wanted us to know that angels had visited the shepherds and that they then visited Jesus. Why? I believe the answer is simple. He wants us to know that the birth of Jesus was a cosmic event. Did angels announce your birth? They sure did not announce my birth. But the angels announced Jesus' birth because God came to earth in human form. He was the Savior of the world. The angel said, ". . . for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior . . ." The angel did not say that Jesus would become the Savior. No, he said that Jesus was the Savior. God had already planned His death, and it was so certain that one could already say that He was the Savior. The stunning event of the angels and the shepherds was a sign that God was intervening in human history. God was among us.

NAMING OF JESUS. After the shepherds found Jesus, they left and delivered their flocks to Jerusalem and then returned home. Eight days later Mary and Joseph had their baby boy circumcised and named him Jesus.

And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. (NASB) Luke 2:21

John the Baptist had also been circumcised and named on the eighth day (Luke 1:57-66). Both sets of parents were obedient to God's command about circumcision in Leviticus 12:3. It was the custom of the time to name a male baby on the day of his circumcision. Modern medicine indicates that the eighth day would have been the best time for the circumcision to be performed.

Just like Zacharias and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary named their baby boy according to the command of the angel Gabriel. Joseph and Mary were faithful parents. The event of the shepherds would have been an encouragement to Jesus' parents that He was in fact someone very unusual. Just as their obedience was a sign that they believed and trusted God, our obedience proves the same thing. Our obedience proves that we believe God is not just a myth

but that He is real. Otherwise, why would anyone want to obey?

JESUS' DEDICATION. About 33 days after Jesus' circumcision, or 40 days after His birth, His parents took Him to Jerusalem to be dedicated to the Lord. According to Leviticus 12:4-5, every male child was to be brought to the temple in Jerusalem for dedication to the Lord at the completion of a mother's purification.

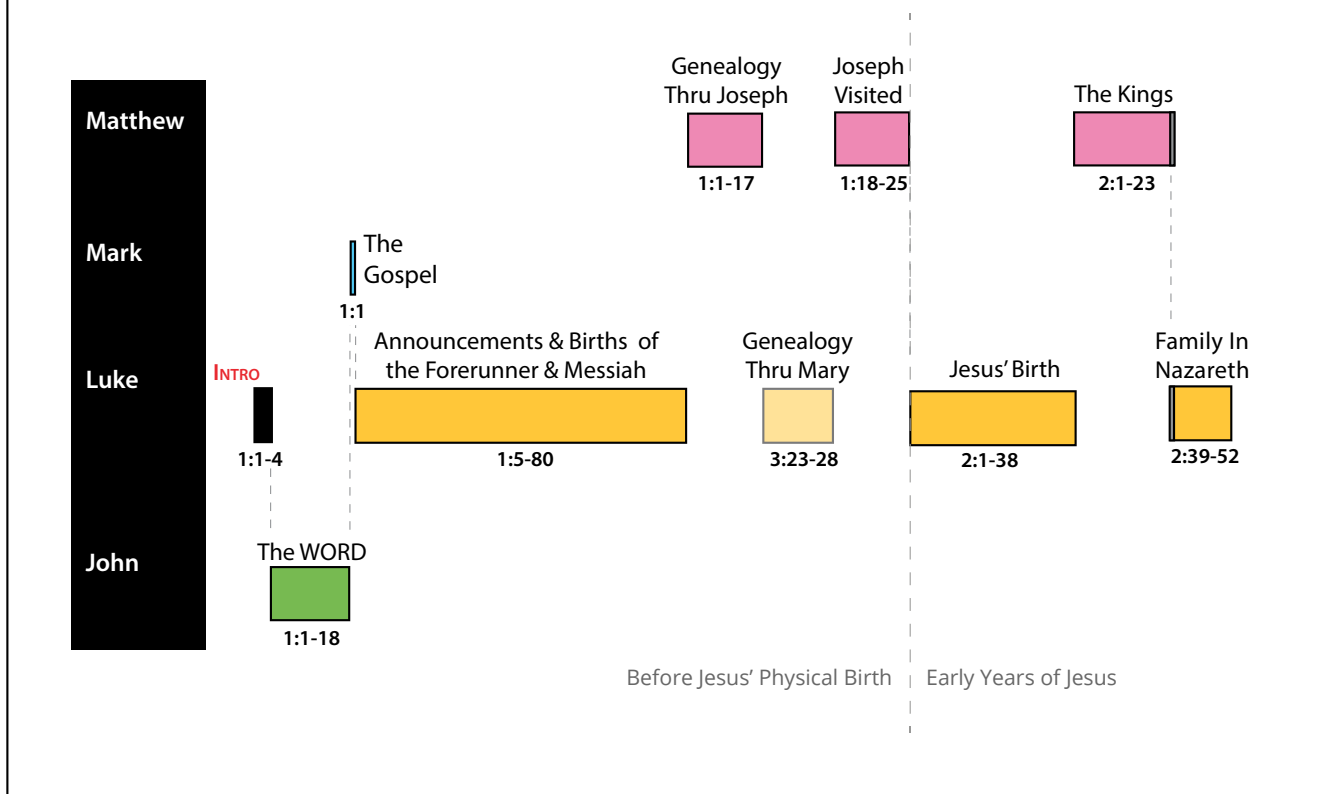
And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." (NASB) Luke 2:22-24

Once again His parents were being faithful to the Lord. His dedication to the Lord God involved the sacrifice of some animals. Leviticus 12:7-8 says that Joseph and Mary could have offered either a lamb or two turtle doves or two pigeons.

Then he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for

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her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, whether a male or a female. “But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtle-doves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.” (NASB) Lev. 12:7-8

The offering was an atonement for Mary’s purification, and it was to be performed by a priest. The atonement was apparently not for a mother’s sin, but was symbolic of a mother’s “uncleanliness” due to her bleeding.

THE POOR. What kind of sacrifice did Joseph and Mary offer at the temple? The Holy Spirit says that they offered some birds and not a lamb. This means that they were poor. When we look at the gospel events, we discover that Jesus’ ministry was not primarily to the rich but to the poor. He healed the poor and warned the rich. He said that it was

hard for the rich to enter heaven because they were content with their riches and themselves. The scriptures indicate that God has great compassion for the poor. Throughout scripture God encourages us to help the sick, widows, orphans, and those in prison. Is that why Jesus was born to poor parents? He was born into a poor family. He died as a poor man, and was buried in a rich man’s tomb. Jesus knows what it is like to be poor. God loves the poor and rejects the cold hearted, self-righteous rich man. God wants us to care for those who have less than we do. He cares for the poor.

SIMEON - A SPIRIT FILLED MAN. Next, we are told that while Joseph and Mary were at the temple, a man named Simeon found them.

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been

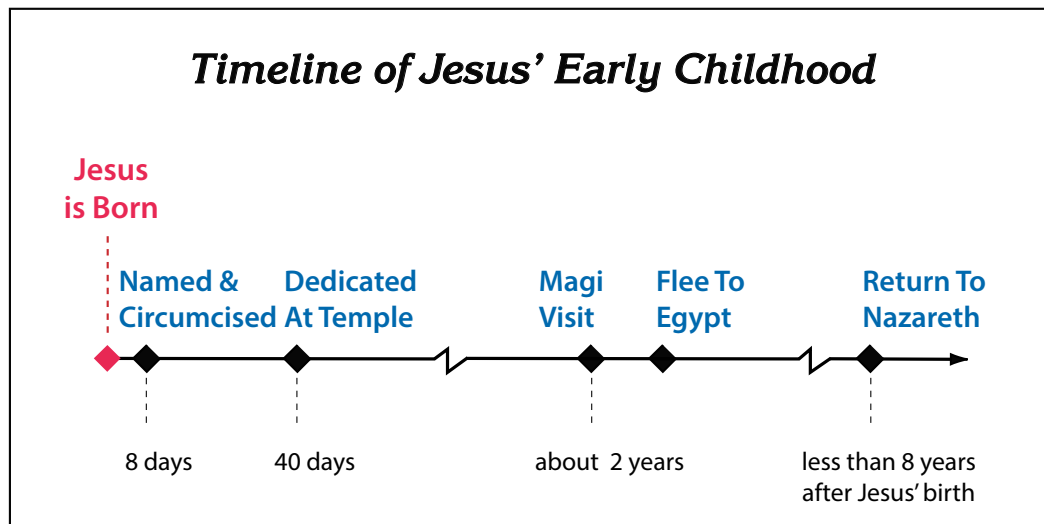
revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (NASB) Luke 2:25-26

He had been looking for the Messiah or the consolation of Israel. He was full of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit had told Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Messiah or the Lord's Christ. God loved Simeon! God cared about the man so much that He promised this man that he would live until he saw Jesus. God is in the business of answering prayers and making promises. Simeon is just one example. God answered prayers yesterday, and He is answering prayers today of people around the world. He provides greater blessings than slot machines, gambling casinos, hospitals, and gifts at birthday parties. His blessings are from His heart to your heart.

glory of Your people Israel." (NASB) Luke 2:27-32

Now that is being sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Would you like to be that sensitive to the Holy Spirit? Notice that Simeon was described as being a righteous and devout man. He was looking for the Messiah. Are you righteous? Are you devoted to God? Do you love God so much that you are looking for His return? These are traits of a godly man or woman. A godly, devout man or woman wants to meet God and to see Him. That was true of Simeon.

Did you notice that Simeon said Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles? Of all the various faiths, Christianity is the only one that provides prophecy and historical facts to authenticate its spiritual message. No other sacred book compares to it. The message of God is unique. It would need



SIMEON'S BLESSING. So Simeon came to the temple not because he thought it would be a good day to visit but because he was led by the Holy Spirit.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the

to be. The Bible is light because it is truth!

When Simeon found Jesus, he held Jesus in his arms and blessed Him. Simeon understood that the baby in his arms was the Savior for sinners and the King of kings. This was no ordinary baby. It would have been fun to have watched the face of Jesus' parents while Simeon blessed Him. How did Joseph and Mary respond? What did they think?

And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. (NASB) Luke 2:33

God was blessing and reassuring this poor couple one more time that this child was very unusual. He was unique. Joseph

needed to hear this again. His wife had told him the truth. Mary needed reassurance.

SIMEON'S WARNING. Then Simeon turned and warned Mary. He must have been looking at her face - looking into her eyes when he gave her this warning,

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (NASB) Luke 2:34-35

Jesus was going to be rejected by many and die a painful death. She would suffer greatly, and that all came true when she stood at the foot of the cross 33 years later looking up at her first born dying on a wooden cross. She did not understand Simeon completely but she would some day.

Most of us understand these comments except for the last one, "to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." What did Simeon mean? He was saying that the true motivations and intentions of peoples' hearts toward Jesus would be revealed at the end. Yes, Jesus would have followers. Yes, many would be healed during His ministry and rejoice in His teaching. Some would welcome Him as king one day with palm leaves on the ground, but many of them would not really care about Jesus. They would only care about themselves, what they could get. They could just as easily ask for His death and they did one day when it pleased them. Many were fickle. They were heartless, forgetful folks. Yet, there would be those like His mother and others, including a thief on the cross, who would want a Savior who would rescue them from their sins. They knew in their hearts who He was. They believed that He was the Savior of the world. He was the King!

ANNA - THE PROPHETESS. Had Joseph and Mary asked God to encourage them? We do not know, but God planned to encourage them with both Simeon and now a faithful and devout woman named Anna. She was 84 years of age.

And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with

her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (NASB) Luke 2:36-38

We are told that she was from the tribe of Asher. Now for those who wonder about the "ten lost tribes of Israel" from the northern part of the land of Canaan, this passage tells us that the tribes were not lost. Asher was one of those tribes in northern Israel. Now if Anna was from Asher, God did not lose them, and they were not lost in Jesus' day. God knows where they are.

Anna was dedicated to God. We are told that she never left the temple. She was a prayer warrior. Probably few women have been more committed to prayer than this godly woman. Somehow God told her that her Messiah was in the temple, and so she approached Jesus and began to thank Him. She knew the baby was her Messiah! We do not know what she said to Jesus' parents. It would have been wonderful to have been there and to have listened. Then Anna started telling others about the One she had waited for - her Messiah!

CONCLUSION. Angels appeared, offered praise to God, and shepherds visited a baby - God in human flesh. Those are great cosmic birthday announcements. The Holy Spirit spoke; Simeon honored Jesus with praise, and a mother's heart was warned about a sad day to come. The Holy Spirit helped an 84 year old woman know that her Messiah had arrived, and then she told everyone who would listen that her Messiah had come.

Why did God do this? Why did God speak to a group of shepherds, a prophet, and a prophetess? Why? He did it for the shepherds, for Simeon and Anna, and He did it for a poor couple - Joseph and Mary. God cared about them. The God of the universe cares about us. He took time and paid special attention to some longing hearts - hearts longing to know the Messiah. Maybe they did not realize that their Messiah was God in the flesh, but they would some day. In the process, God revealed His heart. He revealed that He

loves us. He cares about individuals - men and woman. He loves the poor as well as the rich. God has a compassionate heart. He granted an old man's request and ministered to an old woman's heart. Wow! Wouldn't it be great if today's pastors cared more for the older generation than they do today? Recently, a pastor told me that his church was designed for the 20-30s generation. He would not even be interested in meeting the need of a Simeon or Anna in his church. But God is and does! God calls us to honor the aged in Lev. 19:32.

The visit of the shepherds and the events with Simeon

and Anna are not afterthought additions to the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. They reveal God's heart and they point us to Jesus. Jesus was the God-Messiah. He was not just any normal human baby. Jesus is God who came in human flesh. Jesus is the Christ. There was no other. There is no other. He is the One! Jesus is the One!