



Type: Book Chapter

Luke Chapter 2

Author(s): S. Kent Brown

Source: *The Testimony of Luke*

Published: Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2014

Page(s): 133–169

Abstract: A commentary on the events of Luke 2, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



BYU Studies is collaborating with Scripture Central to preserve and extend access to BYU Studies and to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon and other Restoration scripture. Archived by permission of the author S. Kent Brown and BYU Studies.

<http://byustudies.byu.edu/>

Luke Chapter 2

INTRODUCTION

Amidst these lines, the Savior emerges into view, first as an infant and then as a youth. As if perched with a bird's view, we see Jesus' parents' arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem not only to meet their civic duty of enrolling for taxes but also to beat the biological clock that is ticking inside Mary. For she is about to give birth to her Jesus. With the shepherds, we behold the infant "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (2:12), a helpless child dependent on youthful, inexperienced parents. With a few in the temple, we see Simeon and Anna miraculously find his parents in the vast temple grounds and there, representing others who will come later, offer their praises and worship to God's son (2:25–38). With the "doctors" of the law and others (2:46), we witness the youthful Jesus sitting in their midst as "they were hearing him, and asking him questions" (JST 2:46). With the youth's neighbors, we see him "subject unto" his parents in his Nazareth home (2:51). (For further discussion, see the introduction to chapter 1.)

JESUS' BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM (2:1–7) (Compare Matt. 1:18–25)

King James Translation

¹ And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ² (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³ And all went to be taxed, every one

New Rendition

¹ And it happened in those days that a writ went out from Caesar Augustus for the whole empire to be registered. ² This first registration happened when Cyrenius governed Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own

into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

city. 4 And Joseph too went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea into the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was from the house and descent of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, who was pledged to him and expecting a child. 6 And it came to pass while they were there, the days of her pregnancy were brought to completion. 7 And she delivered her firstborn son and swaddled him and laid him in a feeding trough, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.

Notes

2:1 a decree: Luke preserves the only notice for this decree. Without success, scholars have scoured ancient literature to find a second reference to this imperial decree, and many note that such a decree would probably not apply to vassal states and client kingdoms like Herod's. But evidence exists from other sources for a reorganization of Roman administration by Augustus, and this may be what Luke is referring to.¹

all the world: The expression, better rendered "the whole world," customarily refers to the civilized world known to the Greeks and Romans and therefore points to the world that Luke knows. The Joseph Smith Translation renders this phrase "all his [Augustus'] empire" (JST 2:1). Typically, however, such tax registrations occur in provinces, not throughout the whole empire.²

taxed: The sense of the Greek verb *apographomai* is "to register (oneself)" for tax purposes. Hence, we are to think of a registration or creation of local tax lists.³

2:2 this taxing was first made: Grammarians differ whether the Greek term for "first" (*prōtē*) is adverbial in its force, as in the KJV, or whether as an adjective it modifies the word for "taxing" or "enrollment," which is the proper meaning of the term.⁴ Most early manuscripts place "first" so that it modifies "enrollment." In contrast, Nigel Turner suggests that the expression

1. Morris, *Luke*, 90.

2. Schürer, *History*, 1:401–4, 407.

3. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 194–95; BAGD, 89; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §317; Marshall, *Luke*, 98.

4. BAGD, 732–34.

means, “This census was *before* the census which Quirinius, governor of Syria, made” (emphasis added).⁵ If this sense holds up, then we should think of other censuses, including the one that catches Joseph and Mary, that occur before Quirinius pursues his census in AD 6 (see the next Note).

Cyrenius . . . governor: A difficulty arises here with the chronology of known governors of Syria. Cyrenius—more properly the Latin name P. Sulpicius Quirinius—serves as legate of Syria from AD 6 to AD 7, too late for Jesus’ birth, which Matthew places during the reign of Herod—who dies in 4 BC. Josephus writes that Quirinius conducts a census in AD 6, which is also noted in Acts 5:37, when Herod’s kingdom is reorganized after his son Archelaus is deposed.⁶ Because of the discrepancies in dates and because no other record survives attesting the census noted by Luke, most scholars dismiss the notation here as historically inaccurate.⁷ But this view does not take into account that Herod, who introduces all things Roman into his society, most likely adopts the Roman approach to census-taking and taxation as well—village scribes (Greek *kōmogrammateus*) who handle such matters are attested in Palestine in this era⁸—even though no ancient source notices such acts by Herod. Though unrecorded, this king certainly orders regular tax-collecting efforts to support his extensive building projects. Luke’s pointer to Quirinius may arise because his census, after Archelaus is deposed, inflames Jewish resistance against Rome and therefore becomes a memorable moment.⁹ Quirinius may be following a pattern already established, as provincial census records in Egypt from AD 20 to 270 seem to suggest.¹⁰

2:3 into his own city: It may seem odd to modern readers that people are under obligation to return to their home towns in order to participate in a census and its attendant taxation. But researchers have run across such directives that oblige people in Egypt during a slightly later period to return home.¹¹

5. Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1965), 23; cited in Morris, *Luke*, 91.

6. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.1.1, 2.1 (§ 1–2, 26); 20.5.2 (§102).

7. Schürer, *History*, 1:258–59, 399–427; Brown, *Birth*, 412–15, 547–56; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:392–94; Johnson, *Luke*, 49.

8. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1018; Josephus, *B.J.* 1.24.3 (§479); Josephus, *A.J.* 16.7.3 (§203).

9. Brook W. R. Pearson, “The Lucan Censuses, Revisited,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (April 1999): 262–82.

10. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1927), 271; Morris, *Luke*, 91–92; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:400.

11. Cited by Morris, *Luke*, 91–92; Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 156–57, 172.

2:4 went up . . . unto . . . Bethlehem: The language of ascent typically ties to Jerusalem (see 19:28; 2 Sam. 19:34; 2 Kgs. 12:17; 18:17; Acts 15:2; 21:12; 1 Ne. 3:9–10). But in this case, Joseph’s destination is Bethlehem. For one traveling from Nazareth through the Jordan valley, Bethlehem is high in the hills, and an author might think it proper to write of ascending to the town. However, because only in this passage do we see the language of ascent tied to Bethlehem, we should rather understand that the town is thought to belong to Jerusalem’s territory because it lies only five miles southward. Incidentally, Luke’s notation may shed light on Alma 7:10, which says that the Redeemer “shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem.” Authors who have dealt with this apparent inconsistency have suggested that one ascends not only to Jerusalem but also, more broadly, to “the land of Jerusalem” (1 Ne. 3:9–10). The notion of ascending to the region that surrounds Jerusalem does not show up in the Bible, except in Luke 2:4 (and possibly in 2 Kgs. 12:17 where Gath, then under control of Jerusalem’s government, is attained by ascending). Luke writes that “Joseph went up . . . into Judea, unto the city of . . . Bethlehem.” The evident implication is that one ascends to Judea, which is an elevated territory, within which lies both Bethlehem and Jerusalem, a fact that Luke himself knows by experience (see the Introduction II.E and V.C).¹²

the city of David: In the Old Testament, this title is reserved for Jerusalem. This verse and both 2:11 and 2:15 offer exceptions. For Jerusalem as David’s city, see 2 Samuel 5:7, 9; 2 Kings 9:28; 12:21; Isaiah 22:9.

2:5 with Mary: Mary’s family, which is of Davidic descent (see 1:32; Rom. 1:3; compare Rev. 22:16, “I Jesus . . . am the root and the offspring of David”), very possibly comes initially from the area of Bethlehem because King David’s family originates there. Though some see Joseph tied to Bethlehem and Mary originating in Nazareth (see 1 Ne. 11:13),¹³ we are justified in holding that Mary descends in part from David (see the Note on 3:36). Whether she is going for the taxation enrollment remains unclear because in Egypt women are exempt, and in Syria they are not.¹⁴ Of course, a high possibility exists that the family of Mary or Joseph, or both, still owns property in the town (see “the house” where they eventually come to live

12. Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, and William J. Hamblin, “On Alma 7:10 and the Birthplace of Jesus” FARMS Paper (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1995); Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 16–17.

13. Brown, *Birth*, 287

14. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, 158; Schürer, *History*, 1:403.

in Bethlehem—Matt. 2:11). In a related vein, is it possible that the phrase “with Mary” goes with “Joseph also went up” (2:4) rather than with “to be taxed” (2:5). But it seems that one reads the closer verb “to be taxed” as the one that governs the phrase “with Mary.” Hence, as other women in antiquity, she may well be a landholder or land-inheritor in the Bethlehem area, even though she resides distantly from the property.¹⁵

espoused wife: At issue is the legal, and therefore the exact, relationship between Joseph and Mary at this juncture of the story. The term means that Mary is betrothed to Joseph. Luke does not say elsewhere that they are married in the sense that their union has been consummated. However, the relationship between the two is such that they feel comfortable traveling together to a distant town, doubtless in the company of others and on foot (see the Notes on 2:44; 24:17).¹⁶

2:6 the days: The expression “the days” is unusual. What does it mean? Does it mean that Mary and Joseph have been in the town some days before Jesus’ birth? Possibly. But it may be a Hebraism for the completion of time.¹⁷ See the same expression in 2:43.

2:7 brought forth . . . wrapped . . . laid: All these verbs describe Mary’s actions. None apply to Joseph, leaving us to surmise that she is strong enough to carry out simple physical tasks before and immediately after giving birth.

firstborn son: The clear implication is that Mary later becomes mother of other children (compare Matt. 1:25).

wrapped him in swaddling clothes: The verb (Greek *sparganoō*) refers to the act of wrapping a baby with bands of cloth.¹⁸ This term points to the ordinary nature of Jesus’ infancy, because he is swaddled, as is customary.¹⁹ Swaddling therefore points to the reality of the condescension of God to become a baby, helpless in every way.

15. Schürer, *History*, 1:407; Yigael Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome* (New York: Random House, 1971), 233–49, especially 241 wherein the woman Babata declares her property because of a census in AD 127; Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, 66, 70–71, 73; Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 94–99; Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 37–39.

16. Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 41–43, 49–50.

17. *TDNT*, 2:950, n. 42.

18. BAGD, 768.

19. For a description of such customs, see Soranus, *Gynecology* 2.15.42.

manger: Jesus' first bed is a cattle trough (Greek *phatnē*), setting off his humble origin from the regal, important Augustus (see 2:1). This first crib also signals the path of humility that he will follow: "the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (9:58),²⁰ as well as forming a verbal echo of Isaiah 1:3 ("The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know") where the Septuagint repeats the term *phatnē* for "crib." Perhaps, on a symbolic level, we understand that Israel begins to know her God when the shepherds arrive and go away bearing witness (see 2:16–17).²¹

there was no room for them: One suspects that the large crowd in Bethlehem has to do not only with those who have come for the tax registration but perhaps, because it is spring, with visitors for the Passover (see the Note on 2:8).²²

inn: The term translated "inn" is the same as that translated "guest chamber" in 22:11 (Greek *katalyma*). Luke's narrative mentions "the inn"; the Joseph Smith Translation reads "the inns" (JST 2:7). The Greek term carries several possible meanings. In the meaning that Christian tradition has preserved, an inn is a caravanserai, a place of lodging that rents stalls to guests who might be traveling with animals, as well as private rooms on the second floor to those who can afford them. Another meaning is "guest room," usually an extra room within a well-to-do home such as the one where Jesus spends the Last Supper with his Apostles (see 22:11). A further addition to the Joseph Smith Translation can support either view: "there was no room for them" becomes "there was none to give room for them" (JST 2:7). An extensive literature exists on the meaning of the term translated "inn" and what it might reveal about the circumstances that led Mary and Joseph into a place with animals.²³

Analysis

In these memorable lines, Luke paints the broad imperial setting for following events, highlighting an important moment in the Roman Empire, the tax enrollment in the eastern provinces, particularly in Syria-Palestine. In our mind's eye, we see streams of people trudging to their hometowns

20. *TDNT*, 9:53–55.

21. Brown, *Birth*, 419.

22. On the difficulties of finding accommodations for the Passover in Jerusalem and its environs, see Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 60–62.

23. References are found in Brown, *Birth*, 399–401; M. Bailey, "The Crib and the Exegesis of Luke 2,1–20," *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 100 (1963): 358–76, cited in Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:414; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:408.

to enter their names on tax rolls. Then Luke beams light on one young couple, Mary and Joseph, who make the hundred-mile journey from Nazareth through the Jordan Valley to Bethlehem where, in humble surroundings, they welcome their first child.

As we have noted, a major issue has to do with the timing of the census. No Roman written source points to a tax enrollment—either local or empire-wide—that occurs at the time of Jesus’ birth. Hence, some dismiss the accuracy of Luke’s notation and, thereby, hold that Mary and Joseph are already living in Bethlehem, with no need to travel from Nazareth.²⁴ But there are three cautions to advance against such a view. First, it is not uncommon that a single surviving source preserves important information about the ancient world. One thinks immediately of the anonymous *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, composed about AD 50, which survives in a single manuscript—in Heidelberg from the tenth century AD—and offers an important account about seaborne trade between Arabia and the Roman world, opening a view onto antiquity that no other source preserves. Concerning the census in Luke’s report, whether it is accurate or not, it stands as the only source. Second, it is largely a series of accidents that preserves most ancient sources, except perhaps those that are inscribed on a durable substance such as stone. Those written on perishable materials—papyrus, leather—are at risk to loss from water, insects, fire, and humans. In the eastern and southern Mediterranean area, the dry climate of Egypt and the Dead Sea has sheltered a wealth of documents, virtually all of which have been discovered in unexpected places. Third, Luke’s story fits what is known about Roman taxing practices from a century or so later, as census records from Egypt show. Hence, Luke’s account does not stand out as unique, an aspect that would make it suspect.

This said, the actual dating of the census that Luke reports continues to present scholars with a chronological challenge because of the ten-year difference between the birth of Jesus during Herod’s reign (dies in 4 BC) and the only known census when Quirinius governs Syria (AD 6–7). Perhaps only the discovery of fresh historical evidence will bring a solution (see the Note on 2:2).

Although it is uncertain whether Mary or Joseph, or both, owns or stands to inherit property in or near Bethlehem, it is certain that Joseph’s family originally comes from the town and it is most likely that Mary’s family originates there as well because of her descent from David (see Rom.

24. Brown, *Birth*, 176.

1:3). Moreover, the fact that the youthful Mary can readily find her cousin Elisabeth (see 1:39–40) indicates that she is familiar with the region and, when a child, must have visited there with her parents. These observations carry the further likelihood that Mary’s family is tied to the Bethlehem area through living relatives or property. However, if relatives of the couple reside in or around Bethlehem, it seems that Mary and Joseph are late-coming guests to their home because of the location of Jesus’ birth—in a stable, which typically takes up the home’s lower floor, or sits in a cave. This humble beginning for God’s Son, born to parents who are without a permanent home in Bethlehem, stands in marked contrast with the grandeur and opulence that encircle the Roman emperor whose decree sends Mary and Joseph scurrying to Bethlehem.²⁵

THE SHEPHERDS

(2:8–20)

(Compare Matt. 2:1–12)

King James Translation

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

New Rendition

8 And there were shepherds in that countryside living outdoors and keeping the night’s watch over their flock. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord glowed around them, and they were terribly afraid. 10 And the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I announce to you good news of great joy, which will belong to all people, 11 because today is born for you in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 And this is your sign: you will find the infant swaddled and lying in a feeding trough.”

13 And immediately with the angel were scores of the army of heaven praising God, saying,

25. Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 52–53, 104–5.

14 Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace,
good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

14 “Glory in the highest places to God,
and peace on earth
among men of good favor.”

15 And it happened that, when the angels withdrew from them into heaven, the shepherds began to say to one another, “Well, let us pass through to Bethlehem and see this event that has taken place, of which the Lord has made us aware. 16 And hurrying, they came and found both Mary and Joseph and the infant laid in the feeding trough. 17 When they saw, they made it known concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this child.

18 And everyone who heard marveled at what was spoken to them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these sayings to ponder in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they heard and witnessed, just as it was told to them.

Notes

2:8 in the same country: The phrase points to Bethlehem as a locale for raising sheep, agreeing with evidence that the region of Judea sees large numbers of sheep and goats that find their way to the markets of Jerusalem, where some become sacrifices in the temple.²⁶ The Gospel of John mentions a sheep market that lies north of the temple complex which was active until 1993 when a municipal decision moved it to another locale (see John 5:2).

abiding in the field: Said another way, the verb means to live out of doors, exactly the activity of adult shepherds during the lambing season.

keeping watch over their flock by night: The Greek expression reads literally, “guarding watches of the night over their flock.” Because the nighttime hours are divided into three or four watches in antiquity, the language implies that the shepherds are with their flock all night (see the Note on

26. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 46–48.

12:38). The nighttime scene points to the lambing season, the springtime. Usually, a child or young teenager in the family stays with the sheep rather than an adult (see 1 Sam. 16:11 and 17:15, where the Hebrew text reads that David goes “to watch over his father’s sheep”). Luke’s notation suggests generally the time of Jesus’ birth: the spring of the year. This interpretation is disputed.²⁷ The question is, Why does Luke specifically mention “abiding in the field” and “keeping watch” if these observations merely describe normal life among shepherds and therefore are really not noteworthy? Even today, children of Middle Eastern shepherds mind the sheep through the night, whereas the adults spend nights out of doors only during the birthing period or during a crisis. A further dimension may have to do with Jesus’ birth at the time of lambs’ births. This may be one of the few times that Luke links Jesus to the idea that Jesus is the Lamb of God (see the Note on 22:7).

2:9 the angel: The connotation of the KJV translation is that the angel is Gabriel (see 1:19, 28). But the Greek text lacks the definite article “the” (*ho*) and the JST agrees, reading simply “an angel.” Whoever the angel is, the honor of announcing the birth of God’s Son is singular, unique.

came upon them: The verb means literally “stood over.” Its sense is “to stand near” or “to approach” (Greek *ephistēmi*).²⁸ The JST properly renders the passage “appeared unto them.” In classical literature, the verb ties regularly to the appearances of divine beings in dreams and visions.²⁹ Incidentally, the same verb appears in 20:1 where the intent of “the chief priests and the scribes” who “came upon” Jesus is hostile (see the Note on 20:1).

the glory of the Lord shone round about them: The contrast between the brightness of this heavenly manifestation and the night is notable, signifying the palpable insertion of celestial light into a darkened world, a light that surrounds and embraces common shepherds and, in the same moment, signals a uniting of heaven and earth.³⁰

2:10 Fear not: This reassuring expression repeats the words spoken to Zacharias and Mary (see 1:13, 30), underscoring the continuity between the appearances. The greeting, along with the manifestation of radiant light (see 2:9), must have together conveyed the sense of a happy message (see the Notes on 1:11 and 1:30).

27. Brown, *Birth*, 401–2; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:409.

28. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 745; BAGD, 330–31.

29. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:409.

30. *TDNT*, 2:749–50; also 5:519.

tidings of great joy: The phrase is the same as that from the angel to King Benjamin in the New World (see Mosiah 3:3; also Alma 13:22; Hel. 13:7; 16:14; D&C 31:3).

2:11 this day: In scripture, this word (Greek *sēmeron*) links to special moments in the history of the children of Israel inaugurated by God (see 4:21; 5:26; 13:32–33; 19:5; 23:43; the Note on 19:9).³¹

the city of David: As already seen, calling Bethlehem the city of David is unusual, and here it holds our focus on the ties—both familial and geographical—between the ancient king and the newborn infant. Luke’s earlier association of Bethlehem and David prepares the reader for the angel’s words here (see the Note on 2:4).

Christ the Lord: This title is unique in scripture and, presumably, is strange to the ears of the shepherds. But the angel’s term “Saviour” properly establishes its sense. In addition, this divine title, conferred on the child Jesus, frames the way that Luke intends his audience to understand his Gospel account about the Savior: Jesus is both the present Christ (Messiah; see the Notes on 9:20; 24:26) and the Lord of Israel’s past (Greek *kyrios*; see the Notes on 5:8; 7:31; 24:26; Mosiah 3:8; Hel. 14:12).³²

2:12 a sign: Properly “the sign,” the meaning seems to have little to do with the traditional sense of the term; that is, a miracle or spectacular event (see 11:30; 21:11; the Notes on 11:16, 29; 21:7, 25). Instead, the angel evidently intends the term to serve as an assist for finding the child in Bethlehem and as a signal to Mary about Heaven’s interest in this birth (see the Note on 2:16).³³

2:14 in the highest: The sense has to do with place, specifically where God dwells,³⁴ although the form in Greek is ambiguous. *En hupsistois* is generally read as a neuter plural, “in the highest places,” but it can also be masculine plural, “among the highest ones.” Further, we cannot dismiss possible ties to the title “Most High” as applied to God (see Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8; 2 Sam. 22:14; Ps. 7:17; etc.; the Notes on 1:32 and 1:76).³⁵

good will toward men: A better rendition is “good will among men.” The term “good will” points toward God’s good will, not that of people for one another. Some Greek manuscripts older than the Textus Receptus

31. TDNT, 7:270–71, 274.

32. BAGD, 459–61; TDNT, 3:1058–62, 1086–93; TLNT, 2:347–50.

33. TDNT, 7:231.

34. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:410.

35. BAGD, 857–58; TDNT, 8:614–20.

used by the King James translators preserve a reading that carries the meaning “peace among men of good will” or “among men with whom God is pleased.”³⁶

2:15 go even: The verb (Greek *dierchomai*) at base means “to go through,” perhaps with the sense of passing through the intervening countryside to reach Bethlehem.³⁷

Bethlehem: For Bethlehem as the city of David, which the shepherds understand from the angel’s words, see the Notes on 2:4 and 2:11.

made known: The same verb appears in 2:17, describing the activities of the shepherds after seeing the child (Greek *gnōrizō*).³⁸ One meaning is that the shepherds follow the Lord’s instruction and inform others, thereby serving as his witnesses.

2:16 found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe: The expression hints strongly that the shepherds have to search for the infant and his parents. As is typical still in Middle Eastern villages, there are no street addresses. One finds the home of an acquaintance by asking villagers (see Acts 10:17). The “sign” offered by the angel (2:12) indicates an unusual circumstance—an infant lying in a trough for cattle—which will tell the shepherds that they have found the right family. Thus the sign will also be a guide of sorts in their hunt for the child. To illustrate the difficulty of finding people in a town or city because of the lack of contacts, we need only think of the three days that Jesus’ parents hunt for him in Jerusalem (see 2:46).

2:17 when they had seen: The words hint at spiritual sight as well as physical (compare 2:20). Thus, we conclude that they receive a spiritual witness on this occasion which forms one of the bases for making “known abroad” what they learn “concerning this child.”

they made known: The shepherds now join the rolls of God’s witnesses, adding their voices to those of the friends and neighbors of Zacharias and Elisabeth (see 1:58–59, 65–66) and, six weeks later, Simeon and Anna (see 2:25–38; the Notes on 1:21, 65; 24:48).

2:18 all they that heard: The expression repeats what we read in 1:66 and points to the Lord extending the numbers of those who now realize that something unusual is afoot, augmenting those who witness Zacharias’s

36. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament*, corrected ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 133; Brown, *Birth*, 403–5; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:410–12.

37. BAGD, 193.

38. BAGD, 162.

inability to speak at the temple and those who witness his miraculous cure (see 1:21–22, 65–66). Further, because the expression mirrors that in 1:66, where people say of the infant John, “What manner of child shall this be!” there is an implicit sense that people will come to say this of Jesus.³⁹

wondered: Frequently, the sense of the verb (Greek *thaumazō*) has to do with wonder or marveling caused by divine means (see 1:21, 63—this latter verse refers back to 1:13; 2:33; 4:22; 8:25; 9:43; 11:14; 20:26; 24:12, 41).⁴⁰

2:19 But Mary kept all these things: In contrast to those who hear news from the shepherds and wonder (see 2:18), Mary cherishes (Greek *syntēreō*) in her memory what she experiences in order to penetrate its deeper, celestial meaning.⁴¹ If the meaning of the plural of the Greek noun (*rhēma*) is “things,” we see a pointer to the totality of her experiences, beginning with the approach of the angel and ending with the unexpected visit of the shepherds, and whatever they tell her about their own experience with the angels. If the meaning is “sayings,” then she is holding onto the stunning news from the shepherds about their meeting with the angels (see 2:51; the Note on 3:2).

her heart: The appearance of the Greek term for “heart” (*kardia*) in this chapter (see 2:51) and near the end of the Gospel (see 21:14; 24:25, 38), with the meaning of the heart as the place of a person’s understanding, frames a literary *inclusio* that speaks to the unity of Luke’s story, tying the whole together (see the Note on 24:25).⁴²

2:20 heard and seen: Such experiences, hearing and seeing, constitute the foundation of a sure witness. See 1 John 1:1—“That which . . . we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes.” The order of these verbs—“heard . . . seen”—may hint that sounds or words make the first deep impression, followed by sights (e.g., 5:1–8; 3 Ne. 11:3–8).

Analysis

The episode with the shepherds raises to view the matters of humility and, again, birth. Humility has to do with the social status of shepherds. We can dismiss the later rabbinic judgment in the Mishnah, the second-century composition of Jewish law, that shepherds are “sinners,”⁴³ a judgment that the angels’ appearance calls into question. Even so, shepherds stand on

39. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:412–13.

40. BAGD, 352–53; *TDNT*, 3:29, 31, 37–39.

41. BAGD, 800; Marshall, *Luke*, 113; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:413.

42. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

43. See *Kiddushin* 4.14; *Baba Kamma* 10.9.

one of the lowest rungs of society and draw a certain amount of disdain, particularly those hired as herdsmen.⁴⁴ Hence, Luke's retelling of the story of the shepherds links the birth of Jesus both to humility and to a certain level of social discrimination. The story thus hints that those who despise shepherds will come to despise him. Further, because the shepherds are of a lower class, their inclusion in the celestial celebration of Jesus' birth may anticipate Jesus' willingness to work with lower classes, as does his first bed in an animal trough, the "manger" (2:12). But the account also points to the one famous shepherd, the youthful David (see 1 Sam. 16:11; 17:15; 2 Sam. 5:2), whose return is the subject of prophecy (see Ezek. 34:23). By going to "the city of David" to find the infant Jesus, the shepherds were effectively visiting one of David's sons, one born in his city (2:4, 11). Hence, Luke subtly underscores Jesus' genealogical link to David before reporting it (see 3:31; also 1:32) and brings us to the rich irony which stands forth in the combination of Jesus' royalty and shepherd-like humility. The story also discloses a similar contrast between the humble character of the shepherds and the unparalleled, brilliant manifestation of angels from heaven.

Birth also weaves itself into this part of the report, renewing a theme that already appears both in the prophetic promises of the births of John and Jesus and in their actual births. Because, as is evident, the adult shepherds are out of doors at night when the angels find them, it is the season when lambs are born. We also suspect that, just out of sight, stands death. Passover, which is celebrated in the spring, requires the sacrifice of tens of thousands of lambs (Josephus's number of more than 255,000 is surely an exaggeration, but suggests a very large number).⁴⁵ Thus, in the season of Jesus' birth many thousands of lambs die at the temple, where they are ritually slaughtered.

We must also grasp that God is adding to his pool of witnesses. Certainly news of unusual events spreads across segments of the priesthood population, because the events that engulf Zacharias will be known both to those of his order, owing to his sudden inability to speak and hear after officiating in the temple (see 1:21–22), and to his acquaintances near his home who witness or hear of his miraculous recovery (see 1:58–59, 65–66). To these God adds the lowly shepherds who dwell away from Jerusalem but

44. Mikhail I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), 1:77–78, 203, 294–95; 2:783; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 303–6; Jack W. Vancil, "Sheep, Shepherd," in *ABD* 5:1187–90.

45. Josephus, *B.J.* 6.9.3 (§§423–25).

evidently near Bethlehem. Thus, people in the two most important towns of Judea know that something special is occurring.

Finally, to this point Luke’s report firmly establishes revelation as the mode chosen by God to interact with earth’s inhabitants, with much of the focus resting on angels as carriers of God’s message. We need only think of the angel who appears to Zacharias and changes the direction of his life. A few months later, he shows up in Mary’s home, revealing the imminent birth of God’s son. Within a few more months, an angel comes by night to shepherds to disclose the Messiah’s humble birth. Such angelic manifestations recall God’s early efforts to turn people from their wicked ways (see Moses 5:58; 7:25–27). From another source, we learn that “the beholding of angels” is a spiritual gift (Moro. 10:14).

CIRCUMCISION AND PURIFICATION (2:21–24)

King James Translation

21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; 23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) 24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

New Rendition

21 And when eight days for his circumcision were fulfilled, then his name was called Jesus; it was so named by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the days for their purification were fulfilled, according to the law of Moses, they brought him up into Jerusalem to present him before the Lord, 23 just as it was written in the law of the Lord that, “Every male who opens a mother’s womb shall be called holy to the Lord,” 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was spoken in the law of the Lord, “Either a pair of turtledoves or two young doves.”

Notes

2:21 *eight days . . . for the circumcising . . . his name was called:* As is apparent here and in 1:59, both circumcising and naming a male child occur on the eighth day. Among ancient sources, only Luke preserves this linkage.

conceived in the womb: The force of this expression is to say that Jesus comes to birth as other children do: in a natural manner. He is fully and physically a part of this world and is not a metaphysical, mythological creature.

2:22 purification: A woman is to pay a five-shekel tax and offer sacrifice for ritual purity after giving birth to her firstborn—forty days after a male child and eighty after a female (see the Note on 2:23). Until she does so, she is judged to be ritually unclean. The sacrifice is to consist of a lamb and either a young pigeon or a turtledove. For the poor, the sacrifice is to be either two pigeons or two turtledoves, the offering that Luke affirms in 2:24 (see Ex. 13:2, 11–13; Lev. 12:2–8).⁴⁶ Importantly, the best manuscripts read “their purification” rather than “her purification.” The discussion is whether the pronoun “their” points to Mary and Joseph or to Mary and Jesus as needing purification.⁴⁷ In light of the plural “their,” if Luke obtains his information from Mary about her experience, then he misunderstands it.

according to the law: The concern with the law here and in later verses has to do with the respect for law and custom that Joseph and Mary exhibit. It also has to do with reverencing the Mosaic law in particular, giving this legal code its due respect as law from God (see the introduction to chapter 1, section C, and the Analysis on 2:21–24 below).

they brought him: This action of bringing the infant Jesus to the temple recalls Hannah’s act of bringing her son Samuel to the sanctuary (see 1 Sam. 1:24). This sort of action is implied in Jesus’ later journey to the temple with his parents (see 2:42), thus forming connections between this account and Hannah’s story.⁴⁸

to Jerusalem: More properly, “up to Jerusalem,” preserving the notion of the sacred, elevated geography of the city.

to present him: As the next verse implies, the intent is to offer the five shekels that redeem the firstborn (see Ex. 13:2, 11–15; 34:19–20; Num. 18:15–17), as is hinted at in 2:27. To be sure, Jesus is already dedicated to God by the words of the angel (see 1:31–33), perhaps mirroring the pattern of Hannah (see 1 Sam. 1:11).

46. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 756–65; Christine Hayes, “Purity and Impurity, Ritual,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2d ed., 22 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA in association with the Keter Pub. House, 2007), 16:748.

47. Marshall, *Luke*, 116; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:424.

48. Brown, *Birth*, 357.

2:23 *Every male that openeth the womb:* Even though Luke mentions the need to redeem the child here, the offering noted in 2:24 is not the redemption offering of five shekels. Instead, it is the purification offering made by poor people for a new mother (see the Note on 2:22). The verb “to open” (Greek *dianoigō*) appears in the Septuagint tied not only to the first, sacred manifestation of life from a female, whether a woman or an animal, underlining its link to holiness (see LXX Ex. 13:2, 12–13, 15, 34:19; etc.), but also to the opening of celestial understanding (see LXX Gen. 3:6, 8; also LXX Hos. 2:15). It is in this latter sense that the verb appears later in Luke’s narrative, highlighting the Risen Jesus as the one who opens the understanding and holds the keys to opening the scriptures (see the Notes on 24:31, 32, 45).⁴⁹ Moreover, because this verb occurs only here and at the end of Luke’s account, it forms an *inclusio* that emphatically underscores the unity of the whole Gospel.⁵⁰

holy to the Lord: Although it is true that the firstborn child belongs to God and thus parents must redeem the child by offering sacrifice, as underlined in the Exodus story (see Ex. 13:2), also implicit in this passage stands Jesus’ holiness, as well as the holiness of children in general, which is respected and preserved when the angel of death passes over the homes of the Hebrew slaves (see Ex. 11:4–5; 12:12–13, 23, 27).

2:24 *A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons:* For these purification offerings, see Leviticus 12:6–8. In accord with this law, Mary offers a gift of the poor, costing an eighth of a denarius per bird (see the Note on 7:41).⁵¹ She holds her infant son while watching the sacrificial process from the Court of the Women where she can see clearly the altar of sacrifice and the sanctuary through the large Nicanor Gate that leads from the Court of the Women into the inner courts of the temple.⁵² As an adult, Jesus will return to this same Court of the Women and witness another poor woman, a widow, offer a gift of “all the living that she had” (21:4; see the Notes on 21:1–2 and the Analysis on 21:1–4).

49. *TDNT*, 3:746–48; 7:764, n. 13.

50. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

51. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 111.

52. *TDNT*, 3:236–37; Emil G. Kraeling, *Rand McNally Bible Atlas* (New York: Rand McNally, 1956), 400.

Analysis

At the heart of these verses beats the principle of respect for law. In a concrete sense, Mary and Joseph fit snugly within this picture. It seems that Luke's report takes pains to note that those associated with the momentous events that lead to the Christian movement are, as we might expect, upright and honorable people before the law. Unlike others who revolt when the census is declared (see Acts 5:37), Mary and Joseph comply with the new law.⁵³ Unlike those who seek to kill Jesus (see 22:2; Matt. 2:20), they do not break any of the Ten Commandments. Unlike those who stand as protectors of the law of Moses but break its tenets (see 9:22; 19:47; 20:46–47; 22:2), they obey the law, even its minor points.

A good reason stands behind this portrait. Luke seeks to answer questions about Christianity that have arisen in the larger Roman world, a world that his friend Theophilus represents (see 1:3; JST 3:19; Acts 1:1). After all, within recent memory there has been a bitter war between Jews of Palestine and Roman legions which ends with the fall of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70, as well as Masada a few years later. Romans have long identified Christians simply as Jews. But Luke seeks to set the record straight by clarifying that Christians, and those involved in founding their movement, are very different from other Jews (see 1:6; 2:4–5, 22, 24, 27, 39, 42, 51; etc.; the introduction to chapter 1, section C; the Analysis on 2:21–24 below). Significantly for him in his continuing story, it is Jews who inflame the unruly crowds that oppose Paul and his companions in Asia Minor and elsewhere (see Acts 13:50; 14:2, 19; 17:5, 13; etc.).

In another vein, amidst these verses we meet other possible connections to Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel (see the introduction to chapter 1, section D; the Notes on 1:46–48; the Analysis on 1:5–25). They have to do with the presentation of a child. Only in the story of Hannah do we see a mother bringing her firstborn son to the temple to present him to the Lord. Only in the story of Hannah do we read of a woman offering sacrifice for her new son. Only in the story of Hannah do we witness a parent redeeming a son (see 1 Sam. 1:24–28). Though the law requires these acts of parents, it is only in the stories of Hannah and Mary that we see such actions carried out. The possible echoes are not to be missed.

One further observation needs attention. Jesus comes to the temple very early in his life in the arms of his mother, who is a poor young woman,

53. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.1.1, 2.1 (§§1–10, 26); 20.5.2 (§102).

as her redemption offering of two birds illustrates (see 2:24). The place where Mary brings him is the Court of the Women where she can see both the sacrificial altar and beautiful sanctuary through the connecting Nicanor Gate.⁵⁴ Notably, in one brushstroke, Luke’s Gospel paints Jesus’ life with the color of poverty in a place where the opulence of the temple is stunningly visible. As an adult, literally at the end of his life, with only a couple of days until his arrest, Jesus sits in the same courtyard and sees poverty, this time also in the person of a poor woman, a “poor widow” who “of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had” (21:2, 4). In a literary sense, Luke encloses his report of Jesus’ life within the notices of poor women in the temple’s Court of the Women whose circumstances in life contrast sharply with the visible luxuriousness of the temple. He knows poverty, both spiritual and physical; he comes to help those who seek a way out of their spiritual and economic penury.

SIMEON (2:25–35)

King James Translation

25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. 26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy

New Rendition

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the encouragement of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And revelation had been given to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he should see the Messiah of the Lord.

27 And he came in the spirit to the temple precinct when the parents were taking the child Jesus in so that they could do for him according to the custom of the law. 28 And he took him into his arms and blessed God and said,

29 “Now you are releasing your servant, Master, according to your saying, ‘in peace,’

54. *TDNT*, 3:236–37; Kraeling, *Rand McNally Bible Atlas*, 400.

salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. 34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; 35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

30 because my eyes have seen your salvation

31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for enlightening nations and the glory of your people Israel.”

33 And his father and mother marvelled at the proclamations concerning him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “See, this boy is positioned for the falling and rising up of many in Israel and for a sign to be spoken against 35 (but a sword shall run through your own soul, too) so that the designs of many hearts shall be revealed.”

Notes

2:25 *just*: The term, which is made emphatic by the addition of the word “devout,” is better rendered “righteous,” as in 1:6, where it is applied to Zacharias and Elisabeth (Greek *dikaios*; see the Notes on 1:6 and 23:50).⁵⁵

***waiting*:** Luke writes this same verb (Greek *prosdechomai*) to characterize Joseph of Arimathea, placing them on the same turf. By doing so, he creates a literary *inclusio* that arcs across his record from beginning to end, tying it together (see the Note on 23:51).⁵⁶

***consolation*:** The noun (Greek *paraklēsis*) is related to the term that is translated “comforter” elsewhere (see John 14:16, 26).⁵⁷

***the Holy Ghost was upon him*:** This notation first explains how Simeon is able to find Joseph and Mary in the huge complex of the temple grounds (see the Note on 2:27) and, second, identifies one important result of a righteous life. In addition, Luke’s introduction to Simeon seems to suggest that he is not noisy about this spiritual gift that comes to him but is instead quiet and circumspect, his righteousness and devotion clearly visible to God.

2:26 *it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost*: Luke’s report about the righteous Simeon holds up the eternal principles that revelation can be personal and that it always comes through the Holy Ghost. In Simeon’s

55. BAGD, 194–96; TDNT, 2:189–90.

56. TDNT, 2:58; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

57. BAGD, 623.

case, we do not know whether the revelation comes to him before the angel Gabriel appears to Zacharias and then Mary, or afterward.

the Lord's Christ: The expression preserves the archaic sense of the term Christ, or Messiah: “the Lord's anointed one.”

2:27 came by the Spirit into the temple: A miracle is at work. The temple complex, indicated by the Greek term *hieron*,⁵⁸ is distinct from the sanctuary (Greek *naos*) and is large and generally crowded (see the Note on 1:9). That the Spirit leads Simeon to Joseph and Mary, with their child, is miraculous.

to do for him after the custom of the law: The expression hints at the five shekel payment to be made for the firstborn (see the Notes on 2:22–23).

2:29 now lettest thou thy servant depart: The Greek verb “depart” stands here as a euphemism for “to die,” though it is not the usual term for dying (Greek *apoluō*). Customarily, it means “to send [someone] away,” or “to release [a prisoner]” as in 8:38 (“Jesus sent him away”) and 23:25 (“[Pilate] released unto them [Barabbas]”). The tense is a simple present indicative, “Now you are letting your servant depart,” though it may well carry a modal sense that expresses a strong wish, because it stands in a hymn of praise.⁵⁹ It may also bear a future meaning, “Now thou wilt dismiss thy servant.” The juxtaposition of the terms “servant,” which Mary applies to herself (see 1:38), and “Lord” point to the act of manumission, freeing a slave. This hymn, as recited by Simeon in 2:29–32, is titled *Nunc Dimittis* from the opening words of the Latin version.

2:30 thy salvation: In Hebrew or Aramaic, which Simeon is doubtless speaking, the term “salvation” comes from the same root that the name Jesus does (Hebrew *yāšāʿ*, “to deliver”), thus forming a play on words.⁶⁰

2:31 all people: Simeon strikes a chord that will come to characterize Jesus' (and Luke's) interest in the gospel spreading to everyone (see the Notes on 6:17; 8:26; 10:1, 7, 33; 11:29; 13:29; 17:16; 19:46; 24:47), a point that receives confirmation in the reference to Gentiles in 2:32.

2:32 A light to lighten the Gentiles: The expression recalls the Septuagint readings for Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6, “a light of the Gentiles.” These passages tie to the four prophetic “servant songs” that anticipate the coming of the

58. BAGD, 373; *TDNT*, 3:232–33, 235.

59. BAGD, 95–96; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §359(2).

60. BDB, 446; *TDOT*, 6:443–44, 446; Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, 3 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 2:584–87 (hereafter cited as *TLOT*).

Servant King (see Isa. 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).⁶¹ Simeon’s words can be rendered “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” One finds a similar expression applied to the Apostle Paul in Acts 13:47.

the glory of thy people Israel: In another allusion to Isaiah’s language (see Isa. 46:13, “I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory”), Simeon draws attention to the two peoples whom Jesus’ message will touch, Gentiles and Jews.

2:33 *Joseph and his mother:* The oldest manuscripts read, “his father and mother,” no doubt underlining Joseph as the legal father, rather than biological father, who raises Jesus. Later texts add the name Joseph to remove any ambiguity that Joseph is not the father, a feature of verse 43.⁶²

2:34 *Simeon blessed them:* There seems to be an omission in Luke’s account, for he preserves only Simeon’s blessing of Mary in the next verse, not his blessing of Joseph, or even a combined blessing.

fall and rising again: The image of falling appears also in 20:18. Both passages take up a theme found in Isaiah 8:14–15 where “a stone of stumbling and . . . a rock of offense” cause people to “stumble, and fall, and be broken.” The word translated “rising again” refers elsewhere in the New Testament to the resurrection (Greek *anastasis*). We compare the notions of rising, or ascending, and falling in the earliest mention of the Messiah as “the Rock”: “whoso . . . climbeth up by me shall never fall” (Moses 7:53).

a sign which shall be spoken against: Simeon prophesies that Jesus, who is the sign itself, will face pugnacious opposition, indicated by the Greek participle *antilegomenon*, which here bears the sense of “contested.”⁶³ But that opposition will “be revealed” to others (2:35), an important prophecy about Jesus’ role in exposing this sort of evil (see 6:6–11; John 15:22).

2:35 *a sword shall pierce through thy own soul:* These words, spoken almost as an aside, disclose to Mary that the future of her son will bring pain of soul to her. We imagine that, on occasion, she is a witness to ill treatment of her son by opponents, perhaps by persons whom she knows. We know for certain that she witnesses his death on the cross, an event that brings anguish upon her (see John 19:25–27; compare Matt. 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49).

61. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 340–41.

62. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 134; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:428–29.

63. *TDNT*, 7:239.

that the thoughts . . . may be revealed: This fits with the passage in John 15:22—“now they have no cloak for their sin.” It is not that the thoughts of the wicked will be revealed to God who already knows each person’s thoughts. Rather, Jesus will take away the cloak of sin so that evil doers are exposed to public gaze, including those who contemplate wickedness. Moreover, the sense of Simeon’s words points to thoughts as the springboard for evil acts (see 5:22; 6:8; the Note on 24:38).⁶⁴

Analysis

Our only record of the man Simeon appears in these verses. Attempts to link him to other known persons do not succeed, though he may be tied both to the temple and the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem.⁶⁵ Although we usually assume that he is an elderly person because of his reference to death, he need not be very old.

Simeon’s entry into the story allows Luke to stress a number of important characteristics of this man which fit into a gospel framework. First, Luke emphasizes that Simeon is “just and devout,” aspects that mirror a high degree of self-control and noble motivation. The result of Simeon’s righteousness, of course, is that “the Holy Ghost was upon him” (2:25). This portrait of Simeon’s life of devotion, brought forward in just a few words, underscores what is available to anyone who receives the newborn Messiah. Moreover, to Simeon, who has consciously cultivated a life of devotion, comes the spirit of prophecy, allowing him to reveal something of the Savior’s future. That future will include touching not only Israelites but also Gentiles with the message of salvation. This universalism underlies Luke’s two volumes, his Gospel and the Acts. In addition, according to Simeon’s prophecy, the future will include conflicts that will dog Jesus’ footsteps throughout his ministry.⁶⁶ Further, Simeon becomes a witness of the first rank, both before the infant’s parents and before others, that God has initiated a special effort among his children.

The hymn of Simeon (2:29–32), called *Nunc Dimittis* (“now thou dismisest”), joins those of Mary (see 1:46–55) and Zacharias (see 1:68–79) to form an interesting pattern. In a literary sense, it stands at the end of a cycle that begins with promise (the hymn of Mary) and continues with fulfillment in the birth of John (the song of Zacharias) and ends with a “response

64. *TDNT*, 2:97.

65. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:426; Green, *Luke*, 142–43, 145.

66. Green, *Luke*, 144.

of praise” on the lips of Simeon.⁶⁷ Such praise, of course, also bursts forth in the song of the angels (see 2:13–14) and in the words of Anna (see 2:38). But the angels’ song comes from heaven and Anna’s praise stands unrecorded. Thus, Simeon’s earthly hymn of praise neatly ties off Luke’s presentation of the initial events of God’s imminent salvation, as seen by mortals, showing them to have come to one Simeon who is guided by God’s Spirit.

Simeon’s hymn also discloses threads that tie back to Isaiah’s four Servant Songs (see Isa. 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). First identified by Bernhard Duhm in 1892, these songs point expectantly to God’s servant who will bring the reign of righteousness with him as well as bear away the sins of his people. Hence, the Lord’s servant functions as both King and Messiah, aspects that fit within Luke’s larger purposes. This explains why Simeon’s hymn is important to record.

ANNA (2:36–38)

King James Translation

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

New Rendition

36 And Anna was a prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel, from the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in days, having lived with her husband seven years from her maidenhood. 37 And she was a widow until the age of eighty-four, who did not depart from the temple since she served by fasts and prayers night and day. 38 And she came that same hour, and praised God, and spoke about him to all those waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Notes

2:36 *Anna*: A variant form of Hannah, the name is one more piece that ties back to the earlier Old Testament account of Hannah and her son Samuel (see 1 Sam. 1:1–2:11, 18–21).

67. Green, *Luke*, 143.

a prophetess: Luke’s term elevates Anna and indicates the respect that she enjoys among her peers. Other women known to enjoy the spirit of prophecy are Deborah (see Judg. 4:4), Hulda (see 2 Kgs. 22:14), and the four daughters of Philip (see Acts 21:9).

she was of a great age: The expression is literally “she had advanced many days.” For the term “days” as a common biblical way to describe old age, see Genesis 5:4–5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, etc.⁶⁸

had lived with an husband seven years: Evidently, Anna’s husband dies a mere seven years after their marriage, leaving her a widow, perhaps before she is twenty years old, depending on her age at marriage (see 2:37). One senses the pain of her loss within these words.

2:37 a widow: In a sense, Anna stands for all the widows whom Luke’s Gospel will feature, women of goodness whose place and status in this world are regularly under threat (see 4:25–26; 7:11–15; 18:2–6; 20:47; 21:1–4).⁶⁹

about fourscore and four years: Luke apparently sets out Anna’s age when she meets Joseph and Mary to be eighty-four, though the number may point to the years that have passed since her husband died. In either case, Luke firms up his comment that “she was of a great age” (2:36). A certain symbolism may rest undiscovered here because eighty-four is the product of twelve and seven, two numbers that carry rich metaphorical meanings.

departed not from the temple: The word for temple here is *hieron* and refers to the larger complex (see also 2:27, 46; 4:9; 18:10; the Note on 19:45) rather than to the sanctuary (see 1:21, 22; 23:45; the Note on 1:9).⁷⁰ Commentators are unsure whether Anna is somehow a permanent resident within the temple precincts or whether she comes from a nearby home every day. Residency at the temple for women is not attested in Jewish sources. In any event, she is likely praying inside the Court of the Women, where she enjoys a clear view of the great altar and sanctuary through the Nicanor Gate.⁷¹ According to a second-century text called *Protevangelium of James*, in verses 7:1–8:1, the parents of Mary bring her as a three-year-old child to the temple, where she remains in residence until she is twelve, agreeing with other sources that up to eighty-two girls serve as weavers for

68. *TDOT*, 6:16–17, 21–22.

69. *TDNT*, 9:449–51.

70. *BAGD*, 373; *TDNT*, 3:232, 235.

71. *TDNT*, 3:236–37; Kraeling, *Rand McNally Bible Atlas*, 400.

the veil of the temple.⁷² But we should treat this story about young Mary as legendary.

prayers night and day: This reference to the twice-daily sacrifice and prayer services at the temple makes a case for Luke as a reasonably accurate recorder of Jewish customs. The daily services, of course, include lighting the incense in the sanctuary (see 1:9).⁷³

2:38 she coming in that instant: As with his notice of Simeon, Luke wants us to understand that Anna comes to this spot by the aid of the Spirit, a point made firm by calling her “a prophetess” (2:36). Moreover, she arrives at the end of Simeon’s words, meaning that she does not take her clue about the child from him. Her witness stands independent.

gave thanks likewise: Though we do not possess Anna’s words, the statement draws together her response and that of Simeon, placing them on the same ground. Hers too is evidently an expression of praise, a meaning inherent in the Greek verb *anthomologeomai*.⁷⁴

spake of him to all them that looked for redemption: Two matters become clear. First, Anna becomes a witness of God’s “redemption” through his son, essentially mirroring the other privileged observers. Second, many in her society are looking expectantly for God’s promised redemption. Her words to them will speak to a deeply felt need.

redemption in Jerusalem: Whereas the texts on which the King James Version is based include the preposition “in” (Greek *en*), some of the best early manuscripts read “redemption *of* Jerusalem,” an expression that turns a different light on how and where redemption is to occur. If redemption is to take place *in* Jerusalem, then we look to the last days and hours of Jesus’ ministry, though his deepest suffering and his death occur outside the city walls, in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. If redemption is to be *of* Jerusalem, then the city represents all Israelites, as hinted at in Moroni 10:31—“awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; . . . that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.”

2:39 when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord: Luke’s summary ties the actions of Mary and Joseph to others who are law-abiding citizens, one of his points of emphasis (see the introduction to chapter 1, section C). In addition, he stresses that they keep all the

72. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 25.

73. Edersheim, *Temple*, 152–73; Schürer, *History*, 2:299–303.

74. BAGD, 66; *TDNT*, 5:213.

law. Further, the law belongs to the domain of the Lord; it is divine in character.

they returned into Galilee, to . . . Nazareth: Luke’s report omits the flight into Egypt (see Matt. 2:13–15).⁷⁵ We do not know whether he chooses not to include this event or whether he does not know about it. In either instance, the family in time moves to Nazareth, where Joseph probably finds work during the reconstruction of the city of Sepphoris, the main center of Galilee, rather than staying in the area of Jerusalem where he can earn a much higher wage for his skills.⁷⁶ Sepphoris lies a mere three miles northwest of Nazareth. Its citizens revolt after Herod dies in 4 BC and are soon subdued by Roman legionnaires from Syria under the command of P. Quinctilius Varus, legate of Syria.⁷⁷ During the battle, Sepphoris burns but is later rebuilt.⁷⁸ Naturally, Joseph’s building skills are then in demand. We surmise that Joseph takes Jesus with him to work in the town, thus allowing the youth to learn Greek from Greek-speaking foremen. This circumstance explains why, in the trial before Pilate, Jesus and Pilate do not need an interpreter (see the Note on 23:3).

Analysis

The temple serves as the anchor in the series of stories that begin with the visit of Mary and Joseph to perform the required sacrifices and to offer the redemption gift following the birth of Jesus. Those accounts finally lead us to Anna who is known openly in the city as one associated with the temple and its services. Luke’s record, of course, will bring temple-related activities to a conclusion in chapter 2 with the story of Jesus’ Passover visit at age twelve (see 2:40–52). But a major focus of this chapter rests on events during one momentous day, one on which Jesus’ parents present the Christ child at the temple. Before the end of that day, God leads both Simeon and Anna to the child and inspires them in their praise. Anna’s known gift of prophecy (see 2:36), here manifested within the temple complex, confers on the infant Jesus a visible, palpable stamp of divine approval. To be sure, other events will do the same, but Anna’s arrival and subsequent witness borne to others will carry weight into the minds of bystanders.

75. Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 61–62.

76. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 100; James F. Strange, “Sepphoris,” in *ABD*, 5:1091.

77. Schürer, *History*, 1:257–58.

78. Josephus, *B.J.* 2.5.1 (§68); Josephus, *A.J.* 17.10.9 (§§ 286–89); 18.2.1 (§ 27).

As with Simeon, Anna's praise arises within sacred precincts, linking the unfolding story of the Christ child more tightly to holiness. Her praise, too, rounds off the sense of promise and fulfillment that weave their way through the songs of Mary and Zacharias and the angels. Further, her status as a respected woman elevates the unfurling events, conferring on them a dignity and a feminine quality that they otherwise lack.

Anna's name brings us back to the question of whether the story of Hannah influences Luke's narrative. Even if it does, this does not mean that we should see Anna as fictional, as a mere symbol. Even if much in Luke's narrative here links back to Hannah and her son Samuel, it is plain that Anna is a real person who comes by inspiration to where Joseph and Mary are. That said, summarizing statements about Jesus seem to tie to similar observations written about Samuel (see 1 Sam. 2:19, 26; 3:19). The statements about Jesus read: "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40) and "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (2:52). As an additional piece, Mary's song as she enters the home of Elisabeth resembles that of Hannah (see 1 Sam. 2:1–10; Luke 1:46–55). And, of course, both Samuel and Jesus come as children of promise, dedicated to God.

THE YOUTHFUL JESUS IN THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE (2:39–52)

(Compare Matt. 2:22–23)

King James Translation

39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. 40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. 43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem;

New Rendition

39 And when they had finished everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee into Nazareth, their city. 40 And the child grew and was strengthened, being filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

41 And his parents went to Jerusalem every year for the festival of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, having gone up according to the custom of the festival, 43 when the days were finished, while they were returning, the child Jesus remained behind

and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. 44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. 46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. 47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. 49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? 50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

in Jerusalem. And his parents did not know about it. 44 Rather, supposing him to be in the group, they went a day's journey and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances.

45 And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 And after three days, they found him in the temple sitting in the middle of the teachers, both listening to them and querying them. 47 And all who listened to him were amazed at his intelligence and his answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were shocked. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you behaved like this toward us? Look, your father and I have anxiously looked for you." 49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in the things of my Father?" 50 But they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them.

51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. And his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. 52 And Jesus excelled in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and men.

Notes

2:40 *the child grew, . . . and the grace of God was upon him:* This statement recalls similar statements about the young Samuel: "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him" (1 Sam. 3:19; also 2:21, 26). In the cases of Samuel and Jesus, the scriptural record affirms each child's high status before the Lord. In this connection, the Joseph Smith Translation adds significant content to Matthew's account of the maturing of Jesus, underlining his physical strength and tying him explicitly both to the influences of his home and to his divine mission: "And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake

not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him. And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh” (JST Matt. 3:24–26).

2:41 *parents went to Jerusalem every year:* The verb (Greek *poreuomai*) stands in the imperfect tense, indicating customary, repeated action.⁷⁹ Is Joseph the main participant in these annual trips because Mary is still in her childbearing years and will, under most circumstances, have to take care of small children at home? We cannot be certain. Women, of course, are allowed an exemption not to attend feasts at the temple, and that will be the case especially during childbearing years.⁸⁰ Even so, as a woman she is expected to attend the Passover celebration if she is able.⁸¹ Hannah exercises a right not to attend because of the situation with the infant Samuel (see 1 Sam. 1:21–23). In Mary’s case, during this year she evidently is not pregnant. Whatever her situation is with her other children, she plainly feels a need to accompany her son and introduce him to the sacred character of the temple and its celebrations. Luke’s statement, of course, fits with his interest in the obedient character of the major players in the account (see the Note on 2:22).

the feast of the passover: In that era, as now, the Passover falls in the springtime. Since Jesus’ birth occurs at the same time of year (see the Note on 2:8), he must have just reached his birthday.

2:42 *when he was twelve years old:* Much is made of Jesus’ age. According to the Mishnah, the second-century composition of Jewish law, a child is not obliged to attend the three main feasts that adult males are to attend (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles).⁸² Judah ben Tema, a second-century rabbinic teacher, holds that at five, a boy is ready for instruction in scripture; at ten, for instruction in the law; and “at thirteen for [the fulfilling of] the commandments,” thus becoming a responsible member of society.⁸³ However, a young man “twelve years old and one day” becomes responsible for his vows, indicating that he has reached an age at which his words mean something.⁸⁴ Importantly, the *bar mitzvah* rite does not become regularized for Jewish life until the fifteenth century (see the Note on 18:21).⁸⁵

79. BAGD, 698–99; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§325, 327.

80. *Mishnah Hagigah* 1:1, which responds to the commands that men attend (see Deut. 16:16; Ex. 34:23; also 23:14–15); Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:440.

81. Chaim Richman, *The Holy Temple of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: The Temple Institute and Carta, 1997), 74.

82. *Mishnah Hagigah* 1:1.

83. *Mishnah Pirke Aboth* 5:21.

84. *Mishnah Niddah* 5:6.

85. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1200.

they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast: Based on a date recorded for the beginning of the purification by Diaspora Jews for Passover—“eighth of the month of Xanthicus,” which Josephus holds elsewhere to be directly equivalent to the Jewish month of Nissan⁸⁶—he evidently affirms that pilgrims from the Diaspora arrive in Jerusalem at least a week early in order to purify themselves for the Passover which begins on the fourteenth of Nissan.⁸⁷ The regulation rests on the view that territories outside the land of Israel are considered impure (see Josh. 22:19; Hosea 9:3; Amos 7:17). This rule apparently extends to those of Galilee, whose population includes Jews and Gentiles. Thus, Galileans are required to take special steps in preparing for the festival, steps that local residents of Judea do not have to follow, because the outsiders come from an unclean land. Here we compare John 11:55 concerning people who travel from places outside of Judea: “many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves.” As a further illustration, gentile countries are considered to be among the “fathers of impurity” (Hebrew *abot ha-tumah*) in that they transmit a severe kind of impurity to individuals.⁸⁸ Hence, we should not think of Jesus and his parents arriving on the eve of the seven-day feast, but perhaps a week before. In fact, authorities set up ritual baths outside Jerusalem so that arriving pilgrims can bathe and enter the city in a state of ritual purity (see the Notes on 18:35; 19:29; 23:26). In later times, it becomes a burden to observe all Israelite laws in gentile lands and these rules are correspondingly eased (see the Notes on 10:10 and 23:26).⁸⁹ Significantly, Joseph and Jesus will go to the temple to purchase a Passover lamb and perhaps, after entering the Court of Israel beyond the Nicanor Gate, see it slaughtered and listen to the grand Levite choir sing the *Hallel* songs of thanksgiving (see the Note on 22:8).⁹⁰ This will be Jesus’ first experience with all these special parts of the celebration.

2:43 the child Jesus: Are we to think that “child” (Greek *pais*) describes a twelve-year-old (2:42)? According to Philo, the first-century Jewish savant living in Alexandria, Egypt, this Greek term applies to a youth between ages eight and fourteen.⁹¹ The expression could be rendered “the youth Jesus.”

86. Josephus, *B.J.* 6.5.3 (§290); Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 73.

87. Josephus, *B.J.* 1.11.6 (§229); Semah Cecil Hyman, “Pilgrimage,” in Berenbaum and Skolnik, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 16:154–55.

88. Hayes, “Purity and Impurity, Ritual,” 16:752–53.

89. *Mishnah Yoma* 3:3; Richman, *Holy Temple of Jerusalem*, 71; on the need for such baths before Passover, see Hayes, “Purity and Impurity,” 16:753, 754.

90. Richman, *Holy Temple of Jerusalem*, 75, 78–79.

91. Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 105.

Jesus tarried: Here is the first action verb that describes what Jesus does in his life. The shift in Luke's focus at this point, moving from Mary and Joseph to Jesus, seems to say that, in the temple at age twelve, Jesus comes to stand at center stage, though he will not begin his ministry until age thirty (see 3:23).

Joseph and his mother: As with verse 33, the oldest texts of Luke read "his parents." The name Joseph comes into later manuscripts as a theological attempt to affirm that Joseph is not Jesus' father.⁹²

2:44 in the company: It is typical that pilgrims travel together for the sake of safety (see the Notes on 1:39; 10:30). This group includes "kinsfolk and acquaintance" of Joseph and Mary. Further, it is traditional for poor pilgrims to travel on foot to and from festivals (see the Note on 24:17).⁹³

a day's journey: The distance will likely take the travelers down to Jericho, a town that offers accommodations and refreshment to travelers (see the Note on 19:5 for Zacchaeus as Jesus' host in Jericho). Luke's later account indicates that Jesus reaches Jerusalem in one day from Jericho, though it is largely uphill (see 19:28).

2:45 they turned back again to Jerusalem: If Mary and Joseph make their discovery of Jesus' absence at the end of the travel day, as seems probable, then they must walk most of the night and reach Jerusalem by early morning. Starting their hunt by undertaking such a hard ascent from Jericho, followed by three days of wearying search, may help to explain the pique in Mary's words, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" (2:48).

2:46 after three days: Is there any significance to this length of time? It seems not. The expression means "after three days" whereas Luke's phrase which points to the resurrection is "on the third day" expressed by a dative of time⁹⁴ (see 9:22; 13:32; 18:33; 24:7).

they found him in the temple: The words indicate a thorough search. Most pilgrims, of course, will have already abandoned their lodging and camping sites.⁹⁵ The term for "temple" (Greek *hieron*) refers to the larger temple complex (see 2:27; 18:10; 19:45),⁹⁶ perhaps meaning that Mary and Joseph find Jesus and his hearers shaded under one of the long porches

92. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 135.

93. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 58–60.

94. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1447, 1539–42; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §200.

95. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 60–62.

96. BAGD, 373; *TDNT*, 3:232–33, 235.

that run along the edges of the temple grounds. The fact that Jesus is in the temple binds a sense of established sanctity to his words and actions.

in the midst: This phrase also carries a sense of sanctity, as passages in the Old Testament and other scripture attest (see Isa. 12:6; Micah 5:13–14; 3 Ne. 17:12, 24). Jesus is clearly in the middle of the gathering, and he is the holy one. He thus engenders sacred space from his person.⁹⁷

hearing . . . asking . . . questions: The import is that Jesus is the learner. But the Joseph Smith Translation changes the scene to accord with the next verse (“all that heard him”) so that it is Jesus who is the teacher, becoming a Rabbi of sorts: “they were hearing him, and asking him questions” (JST 2:46).

2:47 *all that heard him were astonished at his understanding:* Although we might be tempted to see a link to the much later *bar mitzvah* ceremony in Luke’s description, that is not the case.⁹⁸ Instead, Luke is telling us that Jesus, but a youth, is staking out his doctrinal ground among the learned of his day, an element that authorities will challenge during his ministry (see 20:1–2).

2:48 *they were amazed:* Even though Mary and Joseph know something about Jesus’ destiny and have been watching him as he grows up in their home, the scene before them, as described by Luke in 2:46–47, astonishes even them. The Greek verb *ekplēssō* conveys a strong sense of surprise, as it does in 4:32; 9:43; and Acts 13:12.⁹⁹

thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing: The points are two. First, Mary wants to convey to her son that she and Joseph have been searching a long time and that they disapprove of Jesus’ apparent indifference. Second, it appears that Luke casts Joseph as Jesus’ father, in contrast to the notion that he will not be born of a human father (see 1:35; the Notes on 2:33; 2:43; compare “his parents” at 2:41). It is possible that Luke does not always keep this refinement in mind.

2:49 *How is it that ye sought me?:* Jesus’ reply must catch Mary and Joseph off guard, especially because it comes from a twelve-year-old. But Jesus immediately softens the force of the question by noting that he is in the temple on his “Father’s business.”

about my Father’s business: The expression is more abbreviated and less precise in the Greek text than it is in the King James rendition, presenting

97. Brown, *Voices from the Dust*, 150–52.

98. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:440.

99. BAGD, 243.

some ambiguity about the exact meaning of Jesus' comment. Literally, we can translate it, "in the things of my Father," conveying the idea that Jesus has now engaged himself in his Father's affairs. Another possibility is "in my Father's house," pointing to where he has been spending the last three days.¹⁰⁰

2:50 they understood not: Commentators have puzzled over this statement, wondering how Mary and Joseph cannot grasp the significance of what Jesus is doing in the temple, especially in light of the earlier heavenly communiqués they have received about him. But Luke's notation may simply point to Jesus having enjoyed a normal childhood and is now stepping out of that mold and beginning to shoulder the divine responsibility that is his to lift.

2:51 went down with them . . . and was subject unto them: Luke's report, though featuring Jesus' first flight of independence by remaining at Jerusalem after the festival, signals the youth's willing obedience to return home, honoring the earthly family order as the Greek verb *hypotassō* indicates (see the Note on 10:17).¹⁰¹ Moreover, the appearance of the pronoun "them" indicates his respect for Joseph as the father in the home. In a word, Jesus is not rebellious, not insolent, not angered when required to curb his god-given abilities. On the contrary, he is willingly obedient to his parents, illustrating in his actions the need to honor father and mother (see the Notes on 4:38; 18:20).¹⁰² On traveling downward from Jerusalem, see the Note on 2:4.

came to Nazareth: The verb is singular ("he came to Nazareth"), as is the verb "went down," pointing directly to Jesus. Here Luke consciously and firmly shifts the subject of his narrative from others to the Savior.

was subject unto them: This statement, more than any other, underlines Jesus' youthful attitude toward his parents, illustrating that he fully adapts himself to his earthly situation (see the Notes on 4:16 and 8:21).¹⁰³ Further, the statement hints broadly at his attitude toward his society. Like his parents, he is respectful of authority (see the Notes on 2:22–24). The Joseph Smith Translation subtly adds ballast to this observation when introducing Jesus as a learner of a trade: "he served under his father" (JST Matt. 3:25).

his mother kept all these sayings in her heart: Of the growing treasure trove of experiences with her son, the incident at the temple must stand

100. Marshall, *Luke*, 129.

101. BAGD, 855–56; *TDNT*, 8:43.

102. Balla, *Child-Parent Relationship*, 127–28.

103. *TDNT*, 8:43.

out in Mary's mind as a defining moment and remain with her long afterwards (Greek verb *syntēreō*).¹⁰⁴ At last, the angel's memorable words are being fulfilled, even though her son is just twelve years of age: "He shall be great, and . . . he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever" (1:32–33). Mary especially will be looking for signs of the approach of his grand mission. Significantly, the event at the temple discloses his mission to be one of teaching, not of revolting or conquering.

heart: Along with other passages, the meaning of the Greek term *kardia* here has to do with the heart as the seat of a person's understanding (see the Note on 2:19).¹⁰⁵

2:52 increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man: Besides mirroring what is said about the youthful John (see 1:80), this assertion reflects very clearly the statements about young Samuel: "the child Samuel grew before the Lord"; "the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men"; and "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him" (1 Sam. 2:21, 26; 3:19; comp. Judg. 13:24). Besides these obvious ties to the revered prophet and judge, a link to David also appears, expanding how we should understand the youthful Jesus: "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him" (1 Sam. 18:14). Noting these connections allows us to see Jesus as both the inheritor of the ancient and respected prophetic and judicial mantle as well as the honored crown of Davidic royalty. Even in his youth, Jesus stands within the celebrated circle of prophets, judges, and kings.

Analysis

Although some commentators see the story of the youthful Jesus' visit to the temple as an independent account that ties to little else that comes before or after it,¹⁰⁶ in reality it stands as a connecting bridge between Luke's first two chapters and what follows. First, the temple as the center of divine activity holds the early reports together. Within the temple complex, the angel appears to Zacharias; the parents of the infant Jesus present him there; Simeon and Anna find him with the aid of the Spirit; and Simeon prophesies about the infant. This account of the youthful Jesus continues and ties off these temple-centered events. At the other end of the Gospel story, when Jesus comes to the temple as an adult, he is no stranger

104. BAGD, 800; *TDNT*, 8:151.

105. *TDNT*, 3:612.

106. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:435–36.

and, significantly, exhibits unabashed ownership when he takes control of the grounds, rids the sacred precinct of those who have made it “a den of thieves,” and calls it “My house” (see 19:45–47).¹⁰⁷

Second, the connections to the story of Hannah and her son Samuel persist. As we have seen, this story finds ties in Mary’s song (see 1:46–55); in Anna’s name; in the fact that Samuel’s father “went up out of his city yearly” to the sanctuary (1 Sam. 1:3) as does Joseph “every year” (2:41); and in the summary statements about John and Jesus, who both fulfill Luke’s subtle message (see 1:80; 2:52). Moreover, a link to David surfaces in Luke’s words. In his own way, Luke is saying to his readers, “A prophet greater than Samuel has come among us” and “A king more noble than David has stood with us.” Later in the Gospel story, just as Samuel gives a king to his people (see 1 Sam. 8:5–22), so Jesus gives a king to his people—himself (see 19:37–38).

Third, the themes of seeking and finding stand out as vivid threads throughout these accounts. For example, Mary senses the implied command that she find her cousin Elisabeth, who will offer comfort and understanding to the young bride-to-be; the shepherds seek and then find the infant by following the unusual “sign” from the angel; Simeon and Anna find the child with the aid of the Spirit; and Mary and Joseph seek and then find Jesus teaching in the temple. Later, during his ministry, Jesus recites a series of parables about seeking and finding, which include the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, as well as the Prodigal Son (see 15:3–32). Moreover, in a dark reversal, Judas finds Jesus at Gethsemane (see 22:47–48). In the most important scene of this sort, those who go to find Jesus in the tomb are met by the words of an angel: “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen” (24:5–6). In this light, the one who finds Jesus finds salvation.

Most importantly, Luke’s story of Jesus in the temple brings the focus of his narrative fully onto this extraordinary youth. From this point on, Jesus is not the object of prophecy or adoration, but the subject of Luke’s report. In a few deft words, Luke characterizes Jesus’ ministry as one of teaching. The earlier words of the angel to Mary, “He shall be great” and “he shall reign over the house of Jacob” (1:32–33), are open to wide interpretation. But this account tells readers how Jesus will accomplish this end, in the role of a teacher. As the disciples will later be stunned by Jesus’ revelation that he will die (see 9:22; Mark 8:31), so Mary and Joseph must be surprised at seeing Jesus teach “the doctors” in the temple and then tie

107. Johnson, *Luke*, 60.

this activity to his “Father’s business.” It is no wonder that his mother, his closest observer, “kept all these sayings in her heart.”

In narrating the return of Joseph and Mary to Nazareth, it does not matter whether Luke purposely passes over the story of the flight to Egypt. Rather, we imagine that the many witnesses of the special events associated with the births of John and Jesus raise dark questions in the minds of some who hear, bringing a few to “seek the young child’s life” (Matt. 2:20). One of Luke’s points seems to be that, in returning to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph will be able to raise this special child far from the halls of power in Jerusalem, out of the gaze of hateful and influential eyes (see Matt. 2:19–23).¹⁰⁸

We cannot leave chapter 2 without a comment on geography. On one level, we are reading a tale of three cities, Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem. The emphasis on place arises with the mention of the three cities and what Jesus does there or what happens to him in such places. Naturally, Nazareth is the place of Jesus’ earthly origin (and that of his parents), of his nurture and that of his siblings, and of his rejection after he teaches in the local synagogue (see 4:16–30). Bethlehem, of course, is the prophesied place of Jesus’ birth (see Micah 5:2) and the place of Herod’s infanticide (see Matt. 2:16). Here birth and death emphasize one another by their juxtaposition in time, though not in Luke’s Gospel because he does not refer to the reprehensible events in Bethlehem, only to Jesus’ birth. The Jerusalem connection is important. In effect, all that has happened beforehand is confirmed in visits to the city. For example, the family comes to Jerusalem for Mary’s purification following Jesus’ birth (see 2:22). While there, Simeon and Anna bear exalted testimony about the infant and his majestic importance (see 2:25–38). In a second scene, Jesus teaches in the temple (2:47; JST 2:46–47). Reversing this order (almost as chiasmus), Jesus will come the last time—significantly, his mother will be in the city, as in the earlier instances—in order (1) to teach in the temple and (2) to redeem sinners. Moreover, Jerusalem is the focused destination of Jesus’ journeying in the central part of the Gospel (see Luke 9:51, 53; 19:11, 28), for he knows that it is to be the place of his death (see 9:31; 13:33).

108. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 110.