

Luke's Story of Jesus's Birth and Early Life – Luke 1:5 – 2:52

The birth announcements of John and Jesus – 1:5 - 38

After a formal literary preface and dedication to the patron, Theophilus, the author of the Gospel of Luke narrates the parallel birth announcements of John “the Baptist” and Jesus. Both are modeled on the birth announcements of important people in the Old Testament, such as Isaac, Ishmael, Samson, and Gideon. The point is to demonstrate that God’s new covenant with humans brought about through Jesus does not cancel out the previous chapters in God’s story; instead, the story of Jesus continues God’s story begun in the Old Testament.

Find these various elements of the formula of the biblical birth announcement in the two sections:

	<u>John (1:5 – 25)</u>	<u>Jesus (1:26 – 38)</u>
Angel appears	1:11	1:26
Person reacts		
Person’s name		
“Fear not”		
Birth announcement		
Child’s name		
Prediction about child		
Objection or doubt		
Sign or reassurance		
Response		

John and Jesus are shown to be in continuity with the Biblical pattern of history, but at the same time, Jesus is predicted to be greater than John.

Interlude – Meeting of Elizabeth and Mary - 1:39-56

Mary’s visit to Elizabeth is the occasion of John’s first prophecy of Jesus’s greatness---he “leaps” in his mother’s womb. It is also the scene of Mary’s poem of praise, which is modeled in part on the prayer of Hannah in 1 Sam 2:1-10. Mary’s prayer is traditionally called “*Magnificat*” because that is the first word of the prayer in the Latin Bible (Vulgate). In liturgical Christian traditions it is used in the service of evening prayer.

**According to Mary's prayer, to what sort of people does God show favor and what sort of people does God lower in status?
Where have you seen this reversal of status earlier in God's Story?**

The births of John and Jesus – 1:57 – 2:20

Again the stories have parallel components:

	<u>John (1:57 – 80)</u>	<u>Jesus (2:1-40)</u>
The son is born		
Circumcision		
Name given to boy		
Prophecy about boy		
Positive evaluation	1:80	2:52

In the famous story of Jesus's birth found in Luke 2:1-20, do the angels **sing** "Glory to God in the highest . . ." The words that are often translated "the heavenly host" indicate the heavenly army. The Roman empire had its legions that often cheered their generals, but the infant ruler has his own unseen legion.

Imagine this scene without harp-strumming angels in white dresses. How does that change the story for you?

The required sacrifice, when an animal is offered to God in exchange for the first-born son, should have taken place at the same time as the purification offering for the mother. However, the only sacrifice specified in the scene of Mary and Joseph in the Temple with the baby Jesus is the sacrifice of purification after childbirth (2:24). Luke 2:23 reminds the audience that the first-born son must be dedicated to the Lord without any mention of the required sacrifice of redemption. This may suggest that Jesus's life is not "bought back" from God; he is fully dedicated to the service of God like the boy Samuel.¹

The 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple – 2:41-52

Among all the portents marking Jesus a remarkable, history-changing person, the story of his precocious performance among the teachers in the

¹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 36.

Temple is the final one in the birth narrative. This is the only story in any gospel that describes Jesus between his birth and his adult ministry.

Besides the obvious point that Jesus is wise beyond his years and amazes his elders, what else do you think this story in 2:41-52 is supposed to make the audience consider?

What do you think about the statement in 2:52 that Jesus “matured in wisdom”? Does that suggest that there were some things that Jesus had to learn---that his humanity means that he did not know everything during his earthly life? Look at Philippians 2:5-11 where Paul says that Christ “emptied himself.”

Thoughts on Christian maturity

When you look back over your own story, do you see aspects of your early life that “predicted” your adult life? How did God use your family of origin to prepare you for the life you are living now? Can you see ways that God has used some difficult things in your life to make you more mature?