

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSE

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LESSON 17 • The Life of Jesus

Reading: Luke 2

"And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:30-33)

What a message the angel brought to the virgin Mary! But there was one thing that puzzled her. She was told that the baby, to be called 'Jesus', was to be the 'Son of the Highest'.

Mary asked the angel, "How shall this be?" The angel told her that God would use His power, the Holy Spirit, to bring about the conception of His Son. No man was to be involved. Jesus would be the Son of God Himself.

Read the story of the birth of Jesus in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and in Luke 2. You will find that there is no mention in these passages that Jesus existed in heaven before his birth. Such an idea would contradict the Bible account of his conception and birth.

The baptism of Jesus

The Bible tells us very little about Jesus as a child. It moves quickly on to his baptism by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. This baptism was not a sprinkling with water. It took place in the river, and afterwards they came up out of the water (Mark 1:10). The heavens were opened, and God sent His Holy Spirit to Jesus. There was a voice from heaven which said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

By being baptized himself, Jesus showed us how important baptism is, and God added His approval.

After his baptism, we read that Jesus went into the wilderness, where he was "tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4:1).

Was it a real devil that tempted Jesus?

What really happened in the wilderness? Was there a superhuman being present? Let us have a careful look at two of the three temptations.

"... And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me: and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine" (Luke 4:5-7)

There was no high mountain in the region where Jesus was, or indeed in any part of the world, from which you could see 'all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time'. So Jesus could not have been taken to such a place. Besides this, the Bible says that the world is under God's control, not the devil's. For example, it says in Daniel 4:32: "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." So we need to think carefully about the meaning of this temptation.

Now let us look at another of the temptations.

"And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Luke 4:9-11)

Is it likely that the Lord Jesus would really follow a superhuman evil being out of the wilderness all the way up to Jerusalem and then climb to the pinnacle of the temple, only to say when he got there, "It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"? (Luke 4:12). Surely, if there were a literal devil, Jesus would have recognised him straight away, and would have had nothing to do with him.

If we cannot understand these temptations as taking place in this literal manner, how are we to understand them?

Jesus knew that he was God's Son, and that he was to rule over all the kingdoms of the world. He would picture these kingdoms and their glory in his mind when he was in the wilderness. But Jesus also knew from the Old Testament that he had to die first, before he could rule the world.

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He could have thought that throwing himself down from the temple would be a good way to draw attention to himself, and to prove that he was God's Son. That would make his work of preaching easier. But that was not the way God wanted it to be.

So we suggest that these temptations took place in the mind of Jesus while he was in the wilderness. The Holy Spirit had just been given to him at his baptism. He had great power, and it would be a big temptation to try out this power, even if it were only to make bread out of stones.

But Jesus knew that God's power must be used properly. By talking of the devil the Scriptures are simply representing in a powerful way the force of human nature, the temptations that arise in all our minds to do evil. Jesus had these temptations just as we do-but he never gave in to them.

What nature did Jesus have?

Jesus' father was God, but his mother Mary was a human being. Was Jesus divine, or was he a human being like us?

HUMAN NATURE (like us)

We are born

We can be tempted and we sin

We die

DIVINE NATURE (like God)

God has always existed (Psalm 90:2)

God cannot be tempted and He cannot sin

God cannot die. He is immortal

Jesus had human nature because:

1. He has not always existed. His life started when he was born.
2. He was tempted. (But, unlike us, he did not sin.)
3. He died. (But, because he was sinless, God raised him from the dead.)

Although he was the Son of God, and had the Holy Spirit, or the power of God, he was still a man. As we saw in the previous lesson, the following references clearly show this: Hebrews 2:9,14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5; Acts 2:22. We cannot really understand how Jesus had a divine Father and a human mother. We should just accept what the Bible says of him. The Bible also tells us of how exalted and glorious Jesus now is (read Philippians 2:9-11) and we must accept this too.

The Ministry of Jesus

After his baptism and temptation in the wilderness we read that Jesus travelled "throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him".

Now let us think about his teaching, his miracles, the way he lived, and the way he faced death.

1. Teaching about how we should live

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew are full of wise teaching. These three chapters are known as 'the Sermon on the Mount'.

Notice the first thing Jesus said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Because Jesus spoke of the 'kingdom of Heaven', people think that the Kingdom is in heaven. But look at the fifth verse of this chapter: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." 'Kingdom of heaven' means 'heavenly Kingdom'. Look at the words of the Lord's prayer, in Matthew 6:10, where Jesus tells his disciples to pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven". The kingdom of Heaven will be on earth.

Here are some of the other things Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He told the people that:

they should love their enemies

they should not judge others

looking on a woman lustfully (with desire for sex) was as bad as committing adultery + they should let their light shine out (that is, to show their faith in their lives)

when they gave, it should be done in secret

they should not worry about the things of this life, but trust God to provide for their needs

they should seek first God's Kingdom.

Jesus also warned them - and us! - in Matthew 7:13-23:

that few would find the way that leads to life

that many would be disappointed when they found they had no place in God's Kingdom (even though they had done wonderful things in His Name).

2. Teaching by parable

Matthew 13 is full of parables. You will notice that many of these are about the

Kingdom. The parables in Luke 15 show us how much God wants us to renounce the world, and find His truth.

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Matthew 24 is a prophecy that Jesus gave because his disciples wanted to know when the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed, as Jesus had said it would be. (This happened in A.D.70.) They also wanted to know what would be the sign of Jesus' coming and of the end of the world. (This was discussed in Lesson 8, which should be read again.) Much of Jesus' teaching was about God's coming Kingdom.

The Miracles of Jesus

1. Miracles of healing: The Gospels are full of wonderful works of healing which Jesus did. He had pity on the people, and wanted to help them. His power was so great that he could even raise the dead.

2. Other miracles: Jesus turned water into wine, walked on the sea, fed thousands of people. He always used his power to help - never just to impress people or 'show off'. The miracles were signs of his power and authority gave opportunity for teaching and showed his kindness and compassion.

Jesus' way of life

The Son of God was born in a stable. Often he had nowhere to live. He said: "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). Just before his death, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. This task was usually done by a servant. Although he was the Son of the great Creator of the whole world, Jesus did not live a life of luxury. He taught us to be humble and serve others.

The Lord Jesus spent much time in prayer to his heavenly Father. Before he chose his twelve disciples he spent all night in prayer. He did not pray openly, to show people how good he was. He condemned the way the religious leaders did this. He condemned their hypocrisy, and told them so. He was never afraid to be unpopular!

Preparation for death

Once (Luke 9:27-36) Jesus took three of his disciples with him up a mountain. As he prayed there, he was 'transfigured', or changed. Moses and Elijah appeared with him, and they talked about Jesus' coming death in Jerusalem. This vision of Jesus in glory was a picture of him in the kingdom, and it must have helped him to look forward to that kingdom, as he faced his coming death.

He knew from Old Testament prophecies that he would die a cruel death. (Psalms 22 and 69, and Isaiah 53 are some of the prophecies of his death.) Jesus warned his disciples that he would have to suffer and die, but he told them too that he would rise from the dead (Luke 9:22).

The religious leaders were always trying to catch him out, and Jesus knew they hated him. They tried to stone him twice, but "his hour was not yet come". It was not yet time for him to die. But -

"When the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).

He was not afraid to die. He knew it was the only way he could help sinful men. But he could only help them in this way if he were sinless himself. He battled daily against sin - and won! He left us a wonderful example. And he told his disciples that they should follow him:

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Chapters to read: Matthew 5, 6 and 7; Luke 9

A verse to learn: Luke 1:32

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David."