

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 69.8%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Luke 1:26 - 38

Monday: Luke 1:39 – 80

Tuesday: Matthew 1:18 – 25 & Luke 2:1 – 7

Wednesday: Luke 2:8 – 38

Thursday: Matthew 2:1 – 15

Friday: Matthew 2:16 – 23

Saturday: Luke 2:39 – 52

Current # of email addresses in the group: 713

Happy Sabbath!

Last week a number of people wrote throughout the week that they did not receive week 108. Most of these, if not all, were gmail addresses. The single most important thing to do to help your email account not see this reading plan as “spam” is to ensure troy_phelps@ucg.org is added to your contacts. If you find one of these emails has been moved by your email program to spam, you should click on it from your spam folder and “Report not spam”. This trains Gmail’s algorithm that these messages are safe. You can also respond to one of these emails with a quick note to me that you’ve received it, which again, trains Gmail that this is a two-way communication and not mass marketing. I hope that helps.

I hope you enjoyed week 1 of the New Testament and enjoy this new week.

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 109

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 736 – SUNDAY: November 16th

Luke 1:26 – 38

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 26 – In the 6th month of Elizabeth’s conception (compare verse 36). Can we use Elizabeth’s conception, knowing it was six months before Mary’s conception, to determine approximately when Jesus Christ was born? This is important if we want to counter the popular belief that Jesus was born on December 25th. You’ll remember from last week that Zacharias was serving his normal rotation as a priest according to the course of Abijah (Abijah was the 8th course in 1 Chronicles 24:10). Priests served Sabbath to Sabbath according to historians, in one week at a time, with all priests serving during the Festivals. This would likely have Zacharias returning home and conceiving a child with Elizabeth in mid-June. If approximately 6 months later Mary miraculously became pregnant in mid-December, and if we would add the average of 266 days from conception to birth, we arrive very close (if not exactly to the Feast of Trumpets in 4 B.C. in the month of September.

Verse 27 – “Joseph” of Hebrew origin (Iōsēph - Ἰωσήφ) means “let him add” and “Mary” of Hebrew (miryām - מִרְיָם) means “their rebellion”.

Because of Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, Miriam or Mary was an extremely popular name in Galilee and Judea. This appears to be the most popular female name (confirmed through archeological evidence) and why we see so many women named Mary in the English Bible. In the Gospels we see more women with the name Mary than any other female name.

It tells us here that she was “betrothed” to Joseph. Betrothals in the 1st century Jewish world were much different than our modern “engagements”. Once betrothed, she was legally called his wife, though they did not live together or consummate the marriage yet. Breaking the betrothal required a formal divorce. The consummation of the marriage was typically months to a year later, when the groom would take the bride to his home (often in a festive procession).

To become betrothed, the groom or his family paid the “bride price” to the bride’s father as compensation and proof of commitment. From the parallelism with the Jesus Christ and His church: We see that the groom is Jesus Christ; We see that the bride is all the members of God’s church; We see that God the Father called us to marry His Son in an arranged marriage; and We see that the “bride price” that has been paid was Jesus Christ life that He gave for us as a proof of commitment. Next, in many traditions, the covenant was sealed with a shared cup of wine. The groom would offer it to the bride, and if she drank from the shared cup, she accepted the proposal. This seems to be a parallel to the shared Passover cup that Jesus passed to those who would become the Bride of Christ (His Church).

There was often a written contract that became legally binding that promised the groom’s faithfulness, provision and care. This also protected the wife’s rights should the groom die or divorce her.

The groom would then return to his father’s house to prepare a “room” for his bride on the family’s land (this again seems to parallel John 14:2–3). In the Greek, there is a different word for “house” or “home” that is typical if that was being implied. Additionally, the term “mansion” is also not best. In early modern English, the term mansion

did not mean a home of luxury, size and affluence as it does today. The term simply meant a dwelling place. However, it has been picked up in modern christianity that those who go to heaven will receive a mansion by God. This is a false idea of course. The bride would also prepare herself and her wedding garments for her husband. She did not know exactly how long she would have to wait for her husband to come and bring her to his dwelling place (paralleled in Matthew 25:1 – 13). When all was ready, the groom and his friends, would go back to the bride's home announced by a shout and trumpet. Based on my studies, men would typically marry by 18 (Mishnah Avot 5:21 records 18 as the age for marriage), and almost certainly by 20. Women typically married by their early to mid-teenage years.

Verse 28 – What a special honor to be selected by God to be mother to His son.

Verse 29 – John Gill's commentary states: "for it was not usual with the Jews for a man to use any salutation to a woman; with them it was not lawful to be done in any shape or form; not by a messenger, nor even by her own husband; so that Mary might well be thrown into a concern what should be the meaning of this; and especially, that she should be addressed in such language, and saluted as a peculiar favorite of God, and blessed among women," [END QUOTE]

In my research, John Gill's comment is based on later rabbinic writings (post-70 AD), but these customs may have already been in effect.

Verse 30 – The angel calls her by name. Again, this must have made such a profound impact on Mary.

Verse 31 – His name would be "Jesus". This name again is of Hebrew origin (yehôshûa' - יהושע) and means "God saves" or "God is salvation". This is the same name that in the Old Testament is translated "Joshua" in English. There was no "J" sound or letter at that

time. Now with many of these names, I keep mentioning that they are of Hebrew origin. It's important to understand where names come from and their meanings. However, it's also important to understand that when the Gospel accounts were written in Greek (and again there is no evidence whatsoever that they were originally written in Hebrew), they wrote the name in a Greek form. In other words, they wrote the Hebrew name in a form that a Greek person would say it. For example, when yehôshûa' (יְהוֹשֻׁאָ) was brought into Greek, they didn't have the "sh" sound, so the name would be something like "Yesua". However, a name ending with an "a" was a feminine name, so they would change that in Greek to an "us" ending. Therefore, we would get something like "Yesous". Its final Greek form is transliterated as Iesous (Ιησοῦς in Greek). They did this with all names when writing and speaking in Greek.

So is it wrong to say "yehôshûa" or "Yesous" or "Jesus"? No. The meaning is the same, regardless of how we write or say it in our various languages. The problem comes in if we think we have "special knowledge" (Gnosticism) by saying His name a certain way that grants us a special relationship and privilege with God. This is tied to the idea of "sacred names" --- and is a false idea that's been around for a long time. The idea that you have to say the name in its Hebrew form is just not shown in the recording of the New Testament.

Verse 32 – We looked last week at how Jesus would be from the line of David. This was the fulfillment of prophesies that the Jews knew well (compare Isaiah 9:7 & Daniel 2:44).

Verse 35 – Notice that the Holy Spirit is called here the "power of the Highest". This Greek word for "power" (dunamis - δύναμις) has the definition of "strength, power, ability" (Thayers) and "force (literally or figuratively); specifically, miraculous power" (Strong's).

Jesus Christ never refers to the Holy Spirit as His Father. The Holy Spirit is the power of the God Family, not a third being in a Trinity Godhead.

I think this is also a good place to mention that in Catholicism they teach that Mary was a perpetual virgin throughout her whole life (a doctrine known as the “Perpetual Virginity of Mary”). A belief that holds that Mary was a virgin before, during and after the birth of Jesus Christ. They reason this by interpreting the Greek for brothers and sisters as cousins or relatives. However, the plain reading of Mark 6:3 shows Mary had at least four other sons (James, Joseph, Simon and Judas) and multiple daughters. I do want to also mention that while it is not an official teaching of the Catholic church, there are some through time who favored the idea that Joseph may have been older than Mary and had children from a previous marriage, but there is no evidence to support this, and it's fallen out of favor even within the Catholic church.

Verse 37 – What a spectacular statement that we must all remember and have faith in: “For with God nothing will be impossible.”

Day 737 – MONDAY: November 17th

Luke 1:39 – 80

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 41 – The Holy Spirit causes Elizabeth to have knowledge of Mary being newly pregnant, and not only pregnant but carrying God’s Son.

Verse 56 – By this time Elizabeth would be full term and Mary herself would be 3 months pregnant and visibly with child. Based on the next verse, it would appear that Mary left just before Elizabeth gave birth to John, but it's possible that she remained with Elizabeth until after she gave birth.

Verse 58 – On November 8, 2025 I gave a sermon on barrenness in the Bible. Barrenness wasn't something that women went through privately, but in that society was highly visible and was connected with a woman's identity, her perceived spiritual standing with God, her marital stability and her family's legacy. When we read these statements associated with how neighbors and relatives saw that God had shown her great mercy and rejoiced with her, we might miss the great significance that is contained here. If anyone would like more information on barrenness in the Bible, it's profound impact on women of that culture, and how God often used barrenness within significant women of the Bible as a platform for which to work spectacularly in their lives, you may find this sermon interesting:

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/life-empty-places>

Verse 59 – We see in Genesis 17:10-14 that this was the day that sons should be circumcised as part of the Abrahamic covenant.

Adam Clarke's commentary states: "Among the Jews, the child was named when it was circumcised, and ordinarily the name of the father was given to the first-born son." [END QUOTE]

According to what I've read, it seems this might have been more common among a priest's family and certain regions but not universal across Israel. We see in verse 61 that it was expected and common, at least here in this area, that a family name was passed down.

Verse 66 – It's interesting that the people speculated and wondered about what God was going to do through this child. I wonder how many continued to watch his growth, development and life unfold, or whether overtime they forgot these things and failed to hear his message and to see God work powerfully through his life.

Verse 78 – The NKJV uses the word “Dayspring” here for Jesus Christ. The word in Greek means the “rising of Light (Dawn)” (Compare Malachi 4:2 and Isaiah 9:2).

Day 738 – TUESDAY: November 18th

Matthew 1:18 – 25 & Luke 2:1 – 7

Daily Deep Dive:

Matthew 1:

Verse 19 – The NKJV says that Joseph didn’t want to make her a “public example”. This word can also be translated “to expose to public disgrace” (A different inflection of the same word is found in Hebrews 6:6 where it’s translated “open shame”).

In the last part of the verse, the words translated “put her away” can also be translated “to release” (implying divorce or getting out of their betrothal).

Verse 21 – Again, Jesus is of Hebrew origin, which means “God saves”, and Matthew clearly records “for He will save His people from their sins”.

Verse 23 – This fulfilled Isaiah 7:14.

Verse 25 – This scripture clearly shows, as we talked about yesterday, that Mary did not remain a virgin. We see both here and in Luke 1:34 can mean “to know” sexually. Even by referencing her “firstborn” [per NKJV] son, implies other sons. However, I should point out, that some Greek manuscripts include the word “firstborn” (πρωτότοκον), such as the majority text, while others do not.

Luke 2:

Verse 1 – For those who listened to my May 31, 2025 sermon “Which Gospel?” you’ve heard the background to how Rome became an

empire, and how Gaius Octavius became Caesar Augustus. Augustus, a title given him by the Senate, means “the revered one” or “illustrious one”. The name Augustus came from the Latin verb meaning “to increase, to elevate, to make great”. The noun Augustus implied awe, majesty and sacredness. It was closely associated with “divine favor” and “religious sanctity”. It also was meant to imply he was favored by the gods and possessed a kind of semi-divine authority. He was the grand-nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar. Caesar Augustus reigned as Caesar from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D.

It says that he ordered for the “whole world” to be “registered”. This is about the whole world under his rule (the Roman empire). The NKJV says “registered” and the KJV says “taxed”. The Greek means to “enroll” or “register”, but that could be, and very likely was, used for taxation purposes at any later date.

Verse 2 – Who was Quirinius (NKJV)/ Cyrenius (KJV)?

First, the name difference between NKJV and KJV, simply reflect how the Greek names were transliterated between the 17th century and more modern scholarship and correct Latin transliteration.

Quirinius was a close friend and military advisor to Caesar Augustus. At this time, Syria also included Judea and Galilee.

This portion of Luke is often used to debate the accuracy of the Bible --- or in this case --- to try to discredit the Bible. This is because there was a well-known census of Quirinius that occurred in 6 A.D. (far after this time period). At that time in 6 A.D., Quirinius was the governor of Syria. This census is well documented by Josephus and triggered the revolt of Judas the Galilean recorded in Acts 5:37.

So how do we reconcile the two?

First, Luke 2:2 in the NKJV states “This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.” This word “first”, can in the Greek be translated “before” (as it is in John 1:30 and John 15:18). So textually, the Greek can legitimately mean “this census was before the one under Quirinius in 6 A.D.

Additionally, ancient inscriptions show Quirinius held important military and administrative responsibilities around 6–3 B.C. A Latin inscription (the *Lapis Tiburtinus*) describes a Roman official who governed Syria twice — many believe this may refer to Quirinius. Literary evidence shows he conducted a military campaign in the region of Galatia/Cilicia c. 5–3 B.C., meaning he held significant authority close to Syria. Therefore, Quirinius likely had an earlier administrative commission in Syria under which Caesar Augustus ordered a census for client kingdoms (including Herod's).

Finally, I will add that they have found a coin that places Quirinius (or someone of the same name) as pro-consul of Syria within the time frame of Jesus' birth.

Augustus had ordered periodic enrollments throughout the empire that were carried out at different times in different areas. Luke likely refers to an earlier census connected with Augustus' decrees and conducted under Quirinius' earlier oversight, well within the timeframe of Herod's reign.

Verse 3 – Regarding everyone returning to their own city, the JFB commentary states “the city of his *extraction (birth)*, according to the Jewish custom, not of his *abode*, which was the usual Roman method.”

[END QUOTE]

The Preacher's Homiletical states this a bit more clearly: “As Judea was a semi-independent kingdom, the registration ordered by the Roman emperor was carried into effect in accordance with Jewish customs. The Roman custom was to enroll persons at the place of residence.”

[END QUOTE]

What these are both saying is simply, Rome did a census based on where you lived currently, however, they allowed this to be done according to the Jewish census practice, which had people return to where they were born to have their information recorded.

Verse 4 – It's worth noting that when the Bible uses the phrase “went up”, it's not talking about going “north” like we often think in the United States. This meant going from lower elevation to higher elevation. Jerusalem is located along the central ridge of mountains in Israel, therefore almost everywhere in Israel is lower in elevation to Jerusalem. This is important to understand, or we can get confused that it's talking about direction, when it's indicating elevation.

Regarding Bethlehem, the John Gill commentary states: “the place where, according to Micah 5:2 the Messiah was to be born, and was born; and which signifies "the house of bread": a very fit place for Christ, the bread which came down from heaven, and gives life to the world, to appear first in.” [END QUOTE]

Verse 5 – Both Joseph and Mary were of the line of David, so they both had to travel back to where David was from (see 1 Samuel 17:12).

Verse 7 – Twice Luke records this detail that Jesus was “wrapped in swaddling clothes” (also in verse 12). In Jewish, and broader Near Eastern cultures, swaddling was a mark of legitimate care and parental responsibility (compare how in Ezekiel 16:4, Jerusalem is metaphorically shown to be neglected by not being wrapped and rubbed with salt). Luke is emphasizing that Jesus was lovingly cared for and not abandoned, even if his parents weren't wealthy. This would be given as a sign to the shepherds of how to find and identify the “Christ the Lord”.

There may be even another interesting parallel intended by God. According to the Mishna and later writings, sheep kept around Bethlehem were primarily used for Temple sacrifices. These lambs were wrapped in swaddling clothes to prevent blemishes and placed in a manger-like feeding trough for examination. This may have carried the significance to the shepherds that the true unblemished Passover lamb had arrived.

The Greek word for “inn” here in this verse means “guest room” or “guest chamber” (compare Mark 14:14 where the same word is used). There is a different Greek word for “inn” used in the parable of the “Good Samaritan” that is used for a traditional inn.

So what is the “guest room” being mentioned here. Hospitality is a very big part of this culture. Every home, would have at least a small room where guests could stay when visiting. When Joseph and Mary travel back to Bethlehem, they would have had a lot of family likely still in the area, and remember, this is likely around the Fall Feast time and Bethlehem is only 5 or 6 miles to the south of Jerusalem. It appears, with everyone traveling into the area, there is no room in any of their relative’s guest rooms. So instead, they are lodged likely where their family’s animals are housed, possibly below the house, where they will be safe and have room.

For more information here, please reference the below UCG article by Mario Seiglie and Tom Robinson:

<https://www.ucg.org/good-news/good-news-magazine-november-december-2012/was-there-really-no-room-inn>

Day 739 – WEDNESDAY: November 19th

Luke 2:8 – 38

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 8 – I’ve read in multiple commentaries, where they acknowledge that it isn’t likely this would be in December because it would be too cold. I will quote only a couple here.

John Gill’s commentary states: “it is not likely that he was born, as is commonly received, at the latter end of December, in the depth of winter; since at this time, shepherds were out in the fields, where they lodged all night, watching their flocks” [END QUOTE]

Notice what Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “It was a custom among the Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts, about the Passover, and bring them home at the commencement of the first rain: during the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and

day. As the Passover occurred in the spring, and the first rain began early in the month of Marchesvan, which answers to part of our October and November, we find that the sheep were kept out in the open country during the whole of the summer. And as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Lord was not born on the 25th of December, when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could he have been born later than September, as the flocks were still in the fields by night. On this very ground the nativity in December should be given up. The feeding of the flocks by night in the fields is a chronological fact, which casts considerable light upon this disputed point.” [END QUOTE]

Verse 21 – As we saw with John the Baptizer, so Jesus was both circumcised and named on the eighth day after birth.

Verses 22 through 24 – In Leviticus 12:2 – 8 we find this law recorded. Mary was unclean for 40 days total (unclean for 7 days + the blood of her purification 33 days) after giving birth to Jesus. In their complete obedience, they then brought the offering detailed at the end of Leviticus 12 that says they were to bring either a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering and a young pigeon; or turtle dove as a sin offering. However, as we saw in year one of this reading program, when we covered each of the offerings found in Leviticus, that God was very merciful and compassionate on the poor, and built in laws that would make sure that no one was cut off from Him because they couldn’t afford the offerings that were required. So in Leviticus 12:8, we find a “poor provision” or what is sometimes called, the “Offering of the Poor” where the lamb could be replaced by a young pigeon or turtledove.

We see this is what Joseph and Mary could afford as their burnt offering (not a lamb). This tells us that Jesus Christ was born into a family of meager means. They likely had to be very careful with money

--- and didn't have many, if any, luxuries. If this describes your life, then you can be assured that Jesus Christ understands what you are going through and the difficult day-to-day circumstances you face. Regarding the quote contained in verse 23, you can find the background in Exodus 13:11-12 and Numbers 18:15 regarding the redeeming of the firstborn.

Verse 25 – Regarding the term “Consolation of Israel”. Commentaries bring out that this was one of the names for the coming Messiah. This Greek word translated here “consolation”(paraklēsin) is an inflection of the Greek *paraklēsis* (παράκλησις) and is an inflection off the same word where Barnabas is called the “son of encouragement”. They were waiting for the “encouragement” of Israel. These words within their core meaning contains the idea of calling to one’s side in time of need. Israel was in need, and they were looking for the Messiah to come help them.

Verse 26 through 29 - Probably as an answer to his prayers, God reveals to Simeon that he would live long enough to see the Messiah. His parents brought Jesus to the temple, to present Him before the Lord and pay the redemptive money for Him of 5 shekels. And Simeon holds the baby and praises God! What a beautiful moment for him. He is now happy and at peace to have his life come to its natural end, having seen and held the precious Messiah, the Encouragement of Israel, God’s Salvation!

Verse 32 – This appears to be a reference to Isaiah 42:6. Simeon clearly understands from the Old Testament scriptures, or it’s been revealed to him through the Holy Spirit, that the plan has always been to offer salvation to the Gentiles. This eventually becomes a problem for Jews coming to Christianity, but this has always been God’s plan.

Verse 34 – Some saw Christ as their Savior and would become His devoted followers (transformed lives, who would become children of God), others would hate Him. John Gill includes: “the Jews did stumble at his birth, parentage, and education; at the meanness of his person, and the obscurity of his kingdom; at the company he kept, and the audience that attended him; at his doctrine and miracles, and at his sufferings and death: they fell, through their unbelief and rejection of him, as the Messiah” [END QUOTE]

Verse 35 – This verse brought to my mind Hebrews 4:12 where it states: “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Similar to what God’s True Word does in our lives, so Jesus Christ would cause the hidden things of individuals hearts to be revealed. Those that were long marginalized by society, would be revealed to be faithful, obedient and dedicated followers, others, who looked righteous on the outside, would be revealed to be hateful, uncaring, and even murderers.

All of this would impact Mary greatly too. She would watch through the ministry of her Son, both the positive responses, but also the negative. She would have to watch her son be tortured and unjustly killed.

Verse 36 – Anna is a name of Hebrew origin meaning “favored” or “grace”.

While we don’t see many female prophets in the Bible, there were some (Miriam, Deborah and Huldah being recorded).

She was of great age, if we assume she was 12 and ½ years old when she got married (the age Jews considered a young lady marriageable), and we add 91 years (7 years married and 84 as a widow), that would

make her a woman of at least 103 years of age. Obviously, she's even older if she was older than 12 when she got married.

Here she is the second human witness (in addition to Simeon) that God uses to identify Jesus as the Messiah (compare with Deuteronomy 19:15). Just as He will again at the end, God provides His witnesses. Here, Simeon and Anna likely were not the ones people would have picked or expected necessarily, but they were the type of people that God has a close relationship with, who are useable in His hand.

Day 740 – THURSDAY: November 20th

Matthew 2:1–15

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 1 – We covered Herod the Great last Friday.

We don't know much about these wise men and commentaries are a bit all over the place. Thayers Dictionary's first definition of this word Magus ([μάγος](#)) states: the name given by the Babylonians (Chaldeans), Medes, Persians, and others, to the wise men, teachers, priests, physicians, astrologers, seers, interpreters of dreams, augers, soothsayers, sorcerers etc.

We see in the book of Daniel that he was well educated and grouped in with their wise men who covered a range of material, including interpreting dreams --- but who also served as advisors to the king. These are typically thought to be men of science (astrology, medicine, etc...) and advisors to kings. These men were likely from the Babylon area, as that's what is East of Jerusalem. Some speculate that these men were Jewish --- as Judah had been previously exiled in Babylon. While Babylon had fallen centuries before, the city of Babylon was still wealthy and well known at this time.

Verse 2 – Again, commentaries speculation is a bit all over the place with this. Matthew doesn't elaborate. Adam Clarke's commentary states: "Having discovered an unusual luminous appearance or meteor in the heavens, supposing these persons to have been Jews, and

knowing the prophecies relative to the redemption of Israel, they probably considered this to be the star mentioned by Balaam, Numbers 24:17." [END QUOTE]

There's also the possibility, using the symbolism of the book of Revelation, that this "star" is a representation of an angel that moves and stands over the place where Jesus is located.

Verse 3 – Herod was known to be very paranoid (about being overthrown or assassinated), and had murdered family members out of fear of losing his position. We see him here troubled. To the east of Herod (who was a vassal king of Judea within the Roman Empire) was the Parthian Empire (an area that makes up modern Iran and Iraq). These wise men were likely from somewhere in this Parthian Empire. They had come to worship a child born "King of the Jews". The two empires (Roman and Parthian) had battled several times before, with Rome suffering substantial losses. Especially considering they were carrying expensive gifts, these wise men would have likely traveled in a large caravan --- which would include many people and armed protection against bandits. Herod was troubled, and with his reputation of paranoia, everyone else was likely troubled too. We understand that within Judea, there was an expectation that the Messiah would come soon, and with that a new King. Herod and his advisors were aware of this too.

Verse 5 – Micah 5:2 prophesized that the One who would be the Ruler of Israel would come from Bethlehem.

Verse 11 – After the birth, they were now in the house --- and not with the animals. The wise men present gifts that were symbolic:

- Gold – Usually a gift for kings/royalty. In John 18:37 Pilate asked Jesus, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, **"You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world..."**

- Frankincense – Was associated with offerings to God. In Leviticus 2, it was a part of the grain offering. In Exodus 30:34-38, it was apart of the unique blend for the incense (symbolic of our prayers in Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4). It was a symbol of pleasing, willing worship and therefore it wasn't to be on a sin offering (compare Leviticus 5:11). We know from already reading John 1, that the Word was both with God and was God, and that the Word became flesh (Jesus Christ). In addition to His divinity, it also foreshadowed His role as our High Priest, as Frankincense was deeply connected to the priest's roles (compare Leviticus 24:7).
- Myrrh – This was a bitter aromatic resin or gum. It was turned into costly perfume and due to its antiseptic qualities, it was used for embalming (Thayers). Myrrh's bitterness (the root of the Hebrew word for Myrrh means “bitter”) gives it a strong association with pain, hardship and sacrifice. In John 19:39-40, Nicodemus brings myrrh to prepare Jesus for burial. This helped to preserve the body and mask the smell of decay. This gift seems to be associated with Christ's suffering, sacrifice and death.

I want to also note that Jesus was worshipped, as He is throughout the Bible (compare Matthew 14:33, 28:9, 17, John 9:38, Revelation 5:13). He is worthy of worship --- and it is appropriate.

Verse 12 – Remember they were told by Herod to find the Child and bring back word to Herod (verse 8), but God intervenes to keep this from happening. Additionally, we should imagine how much more anxious/paranoid this would have made Herod that these individuals from another land, who came to worship the King of the Jews, now disregarded his command, and have left.

Verse 15 – The prophecy of Jesus being called out of Egypt is found in Hosea 11:1.

Day 741 – FRIDAY: November 21st

Matthew 2:16 – 23

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 16 – The NKJV says that Herod “saw he was deceived by the wise men”. The word translated “deceived” means “to mock” or “to trifle with”. It’s mostly used throughout the Gospel writers about how people mocked Jesus during the process of His crucifixion. This made Herod “exceedingly angry” and he made the terrible order to have all male children under 2 to be put to death in both Bethlehem and all its districts. How cruel and barbaric, yet based on the recorded history of Herod, this fit with his pattern and character. How awful for those families!

Verse 17 – Prophesized in Jeremiah 31:5.

Verse 18 – What does Rachel have to do with Bethlehem? Rachel died in childbirth and was buried alongside the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem (just a little bit north of the city). Her tomb is still there today, and they still honor her memory today as one of the “mothers of the country” (like Sarah and Rebecca). So in the symbolism here, as a mother of the country, and buried here in this area, she is shown to be weeping for her children (her descendants who were slaughtered here in this area where she was buried).

Additionally, the actions here of Herod, are actually the actions and influence of Satan the Devil. In Revelation 12:4 – 5, breaking into the middle of verse 4 it states, “.... And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.”

Verse 19 – Herod dies a few months later. John Gill’s commentary states “The account which Josephus, and from him Eusebius, gives of his miserable death, is as follows; a burning fever seized him, with an

intolerable itching all over his body, and continual pains of the colic; his feet swelled with a dropsy; he had an inflammation in the lower part of his belly: a putrefaction in his privy parts, which bred worms; a frequency and difficulty of breathing, and convulsions in all his members; he had a voracious appetite, a stinking breath, and his intestines abounded with ulcers; when he found that all means made use of were ineffectual, and that he must die, he attempted to lay violent hands upon himself, but was prevented, and soon after expired in a very miserable manner.” [END QUOTE]

Before his death, Herod had given orders that he was to be buried at Herodium. Herodium (a fortress-palace built by Herod about 12 km south of Jerusalem) is well documented as one of his major building projects and likely the intended burial location.

In 2007, archaeologist Ehud Netzer and team announced they had located a mausoleum at Herodium which they identified as Herod’s tomb: a sarcophagus of pink limestone, fragments of three sarcophagi, staircases and water pools near the hillside site. Excavations found that the sarcophagus was smashed into hundreds of pieces. Given Josephus and historical evidence, this is very likely his tomb.

Verse 22 – Who was Archelaus? After the death of Herod the Great, his kingdom, was divided up among his sons, one of which is Archelaus. In Herod’s will, Archelaus received the largest portion of his father’s kingdom. He ruled over Judea, Samaria and Idumea, but with a lower title of “Ethnarch” (not king). Emperor Augustus said he might be given the title of “king” if he ruled well, but he didn’t. Archelaus was also known for his brutality and instability, but unlike his father, he was also known for his incompetence. Eventually, a delegation of Jews went to Rome to ask for Archelaus to be removed as ruler. Caesar Augustus removed him from power, confiscated his wealth, and banished him to Vienna in Gaul (modern France) where he disappears from history. His removal led to major changes in Judea as Rome turned it into a Roman Province --- and it came under direct Roman rule. This is how

leaders like Pilate, and later Felix and Festus, come to rule over this area.

Joseph takes his family to the region of Galilee where Herod Antipas, another of Herod the Great's sons rule. Herod Antipas was known to be milder and not as cruel or tyrannical.

Verse 23 – Why does Matthew say that Jesus would be “called a Nazarene”? You can’t find a verse that says that.

There are multiple ideas about this. One is that this was something “spoken” by the prophets, but not written down. Others wonder about lost books that we don’t have as part of our Bible today.

However, we find in John 1:45 & 46 where it says: “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” And Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

Notice what the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown commentary includes: “The best explanation of the origin of this name appears to be that which traces it to the word *netzer* in Isa 11:1 - the small *twig, sprout, or sucker*, which the prophet there says, “shall come forth from the stem (or rather, ‘stump’) of Jesse, the branch which should fructify from his roots.” The little town of Nazareth, mentioned neither in the Old Testament nor in Josephus, was probably so called from its insignificance: a weak twig in contrast to a stately tree; and a special contempt seemed to rest upon it - “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (Jhn 1:46) - over and above the general contempt in which all Galilee was held, from the number of Gentiles that settled in the upper territories of it, and, in the estimation of the Jews, debased it. Thus, in the providential arrangement by which our Lord was brought up at the insignificant and opprobrious town called *Nazareth*, there was involved, first, a local humiliation; next, an allusion to Isaiah’s prediction of His lowly, twig-like upspringing from the branchless, dried-up stump of Jesse; and yet further, a standing memorial of that

humiliation which “the prophets,” in a number of the most striking predictions, had attached to the Messiah.” [END QUOTE]

This is the best explanation I’ve read.

This seems to continue to show Christ as a normal person, from a normal poor family, from a small unremarkable town.

Day 742 – SATURDAY: November 22nd

Luke 2:39 – 52

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 39 – Notice that Luke just skips the wise men, and the fleeing to Egypt, and takes us to Nazareth. This is the advantage of studying the Gospels in a harmonized chronological sequence in order to capture the full story flow.

Verse 40 – We ended yesterday talking about the word “Netzer” meaning “branch” or “Shoot”, and likely connecting to the idea that Jesus was the prophesied Branch from Jesse, the father of King David. So we see Jesus growing up here in a city that might be called in English, “Branch town” or “Shootsville” (I borrowed that from Scott Ashley’s class). A small out of the way town. He is full of wisdom (well beyond His years), and God’s Grace (favor) fills His life. He has parents that we’ve already seen are obedient to God’s law (following it carefully).

Verse 41 – This is a trip of about 65 to 70 miles if you could go straight there (we say in English: “as the crow flies”), but the terrain and roads would have made it longer. Even at 65 to 70 miles, if they cut through Samaria, it would take about 3 to 4 days to walk. If they avoided Samaria and took the longer and safer route through the Jordan Valley, it was about 90 miles and would take likely 6 to 8 days (resting for the Sabbath). Typically, a person could walk 15 to 20 miles in a long day, but caravans typically covered more like 10 to 15 miles. This is not an

easy trip, but again, we see the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus' family.

Verse 42 – Age 12 was a transition age from being a child to becoming an adult. Boys at age 12 were expected to begin fulfilling the commandments --- and were therefore personally accountable. Based on the previous verse making the statement that “His parents” went every year, but then here when He was 12 that “they” went, it appears this is the first trip that Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Holy Day season. I’ve also read that it was at 12, that they were expected to fast on Atonement the whole day (but they would work over years to increase the number of hours). The JFB commentary states: “At this age every Jewish boy was styled “a son of the law,” being put under a course of instruction and trained to fasting and attendance on public worship, besides being set to learn a trade. At this age accordingly, our Lord is taken up for the first time to Jerusalem, at the Passover season” [END QUOTE]

Before moving on, I think it’s important to address this word “custom”. Some read this word, and say, this is what they did out of custom, but it’s not required anymore for Christians. They will apply this specifically in later books after the death of Jesus Christ. “Custom” is a correct translation of this word in Greek, but it can mean out of habit OR by law. Every Sabbath I go to church and it’s my custom (it’s a habit). But the reason it’s a habit is because it’s God’s law, and it became my habit out of obedience. We should not see this word and think it’s absent of obedience to God’s law.

Verse 43 – Regarding “finished the days” [NKJV], Adam Clarke correctly states: “Eight days in the whole: one was the Passover, and the other seven, the days of unleavened bread” [END QUOTE]

It should be understood that the term “Passover” was often used to represent this whole 8 days (the Passover season), and “Unleavened Bread” can be used the same way, to refer to this whole season of time.

Verse 44 – JFB states: “On these sacred journeys, whole villages and districts traveled in groups together, partly for protection, partly for company” [END QUOTE]

Verse 46 – Could you imagine losing God’s Son? After being worried to death and frantically searching for Jesus, they find him sitting with “teachers” in the Temple. The word for teachers (NKJV)/doctors (KJV) in the Greek can mean “formal teachers” with recognized teaching authority like a rabbi. It can refer to those who guide disciples, not just academically, but morally and spiritually. This term is applied correctly later to Jesus (compare Matthew 8:19 and John 13:13). We also see it used in the New Testament as a role Christians could fulfill in the Church (James 3:1). This term is different from the Greek for “scribe” (a scholar of the law).

Notice here that Jesus is both listening to them as they speak and also asking them specific questions.

Verse 47 – They are astonished/amazed at Jesus’ ability to “understand” (which means in Greek to be able to mentally put it all together) and his answers/responses. As Jesus listens and asks questions, through God’s Spirit, He is able to put it all together to understand and communicate to them His great understanding and it “blows their minds”. It is worth talking about here that these religious leaders were used to boys His age having the Torah memorized. From about age 5 to age 12 they would attend school at the local synagogue. They would learn subjects like history, but everything was through the lens of Israel’s history and God’s law. Additionally, boys were expected as part of this education to memorize the first 5 books of the Bible. Some did. At age 12, those who did could go on to even more study of

God's Word, but those who hadn't would begin focusing on the family trade (craftsmen, potter, workers of metal or leather, etc...). The point I want to make here is that they would not just be astonished by Jesus having all the Torah memorized, His knowledge and biblical reasoning far exceeded anyone His age ever!

Verse 48 – The NKJV says “anxiously” where the KJV says “sorrowing”. The term means to “cause intense pain, to be in anguish, to distress one’s self” (Thayer).

Verse 49 – The NKJV says: “I must be about My Father’s business?”

The phrase in Greek literally means: “in” or “at My Fathers,”” Business is not in the Greek. Because of this it’s been translated a number of ways:

ISV - **Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?"**

LSV - Did you not know that it is necessary for Me to be in the things of My Father?"

CEV - Didn't you know that I would be in my Father's house?"

It could mean either “about His Father’s affairs/concerns” or “where His Father dwells”.

It’s also clear from this, that by at least age 12, Jesus knows who His real Father is.

Scott Ashley made the following statement during his gospels class: “There are several interesting things here that are easy to overlook. First of all, Mary is understandably worried. But this isn’t a situation where Jesus has been rebellious or irresponsible toward His parents. As He says here, He was “in My Father's house?” And notice how He subtly corrects Mary's statement. What does she say? She says, “Look, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.” And notice how He gently corrects the statement. He says, Didn't you know that I must be in My real Father's house --- referring to God the Father as His real Father. He gently and subtly corrects her as to who His real Father is. And so even at that young age of 12, He was already convicted of who

His Father was --- and what He must be doing and of His direction in life. He knows He is the literal Son of God --- and that God the Father is His Father" [End Quote]

Verse 50 – They didn't understand what He was talking about. Maybe they thought He was talking about Joseph and was confused.

Verse 51 – Christ choose to be “subject” to his biological mother, and his legal father. This Greek word is used throughout the New Testament and means “to submit”, “to subdue”, “to be submissive”. It's often translated to “put under”, to “be subject to”, to “submit oneself”. The idea here is that Jesus willingly chose to submit Himself under His parents. This concept is important because it's similar to the willing choice we all make to place ourselves under the authority of those over us (compare Romans 13). We aren't made/forced to be, we choose to place ourselves into that position.

Verse 52 – Christ wasn't a twelve-year-old boy with all wisdom and knowing everything. He increased in wisdom, he learned (Hebrews 5:8). He didn't have all knowledge.