

# The Old Becomes New

## Lesson Fifteen

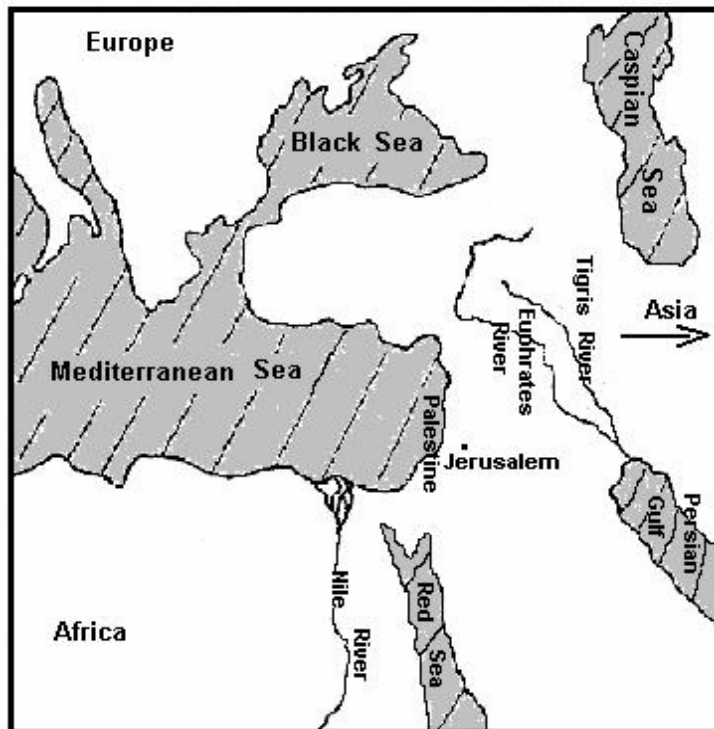
Luke 1, 2; Matthew 1

This lesson will begin the study of the events occurring in the New Testament of the Bible. About four hundred years have passed since the last book of the Old Testament was written. About four hundred years have passed since the last historical event recorded in the Old Testament occurred.

These four hundred years have been referred to as the "silent years." They are silent in that no prophet wrote or spoke. But they are a time of intense preparation for the birth of the Savior. The land of the Israelites is now referred to as Palestine, and it is a crossroads of the civilized world. The great European empires must control this area as they expand

eastward to Asia and as they expand southward into Africa. Consequently, the Israelites have many different rulers in this time. (See map.)

These historical events are paving the way for the arrival of the Savior. Before this time it would have been difficult for the gospel of the Lord to spread throughout the world. Several things distinguish this period of time from any period of time before this. First of all, when the Greeks were in control of this vast region, the Greek language became the language of all the peoples under their control. Prior to this there was no common language for the



civilized world. The Romans developed a good network of roads. This made possible fairly good travel conditions over great distances. The Romans also brought a political system that allowed for some diversity of beliefs. The Greeks had become intolerant of all religious systems other than theirs. In fact, they had tried to destroy all copies of the Torah (the first five books of our Old Testament – the Scriptures of the Jewish faith). The Romans started off their rule by massacring the priests and entering the Most Holy Place in the temple. Just because the Romans were a little more tolerant than the Greeks does not mean that life was easy for the faithful Jewish people.

However, the common language and the good network of roads were necessary for the spread of the gospel. The harshness of life under foreign domination made the Jews hope for the promised Messiah who, they thought, would deliver them from foreign rule.

Into this setting, Jesus is born. This lesson will cover the angel's visit to Zacharias, John the Baptist's father; the angel's visit to Mary; Mary's visit to Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother; the birth of John the Baptist; and the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

## ZECHARIAH

Luke 1

The prophet Isaiah lived and prophesied from shortly before the fall of the northern kingdom (722 B.C.) through most of the reign of King Hezekiah. This was over six hundred years before the birth of Christ. Isaiah foretold of the coming of a person who would make ready the path of the Lord and prepare the people for His arrival. John the Baptist was the fulfillment of this prophecy. He preached repentance for sins and forgiveness of sins. He made the people aware of their need for a Savior. John the Baptist was born to a priest and his wife.

**Read Luke 1:5-10** for some background information about the parents of John the Baptist.

From whom are both Zechariah and Elizabeth descended? Aaron

Do they serve the Lord? yes

What two bits of information does verse seven contain about this couple?

1) they have no children      2) they are old

For what was Zechariah chosen? To burn incense



*And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, **1** standing on the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was troubled. But the angel said to him, "Fear not, Zechariah; for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth shall bear a son. You shall call his name John. He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit. Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord, their God. He shall go before Him in the spirit and the power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

What prayer of Zechariah is answered? To have a child

Will this be an ordinary child? no

**Read Luke 1:18-20** to see Zechariah's reaction to what the angel has said. (Slide 2)

What does Zechariah ask the angel? "How can I be sure of this?"

What sign is given to Zechariah? Cannot speak until these things happen

*The people waited for Zechariah and marveled that he stayed so long in the Temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They perceived that he had seen a vision in the Temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. As soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.*

## THE ANNUNCIATION THE VISIT OF MARY

Luke 1:25-56; Matthew 1:20-24

The angel Gabriel has another person with whom to speak. He must announce to Mary what is about to happen and tell her of her roll in this event. Note that Mary is related to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

**Read Luke 1:26-29** for details of Mary's encounter with Gabriel.

In what town does Mary live? Nazareth

To whom is Mary pledged (engaged)? Joseph

*The angel said to her, **3** "Fear not, Mary; for you have found favor with God. Behold, you shall conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call His name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of His father David. He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary to the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you. Therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God. Behold, your cousin Elizabeth, she has also conceived a son in her old age. This is the sixth month with her who was barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible." Mary said, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word." The angel departed from her.*



What Mary has just consented to is no small matter. Betrothal in this time was a much greater commitment than an engagement is today. In fact, for a betrothal to be broken required a divorce. However, as serious a commitment as a betrothal represented, it did not allow for sexual relations between the couple. Sexual relations outside of marriage is adultery. The punishment for adultery at this time was death by stoning. To become pregnant outside of marriage could certainly lead to death for the woman. Mary is aware of all of this. Her trust in the Lord is complete.

**Read Luke 1:39-56. (Slide 4)**

Whom does Mary go to see? Elizabeth

What happens when Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting? The baby leaps in her womb

In Mary's song, who is blessed? She is (Mary)

To whom does God show mercy? Those who fear Him

What has God done for the humble? Lifted them up

For how long does Mary stay with Elizabeth? Three months

*The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph **5** in a dream saying, "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take Mary for your wife. For she shall bring forth a son and you shall call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins." Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Then Joseph did as the Lord had bidden him and took Mary as his wife.*

Will Joseph marry Mary? yes

## **THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST**

Luke 1:57-80

When the angel visited Zechariah, he told him that the child is to be named John. Once the child is born, Zechariah still cannot speak.

**Read Luke 1:57-66** to see when Zechariah regains his speech. **(Slide 6)**

After whom do the relatives want to name the child? Zechariah (his father)

What does Elizabeth say the child's name is to be? John

Do the relatives take Elizabeth's word in this matter? no

How does Zechariah let them know what he wants the child's name to be? He writes it on a tablet

What happens immediately after this? He can speak

What is the child named? John

What is the first thing Zechariah speaks? Praises to God

Do the neighbors and relatives recognize that this child will be special? yes

*And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He has visited and redeemed His people. And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest. For you shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins."*

*And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit. John was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.*

Who will be called the "prophet of the Highest"? John

Who will prepare the way for the Lord? John

Where did John spend most of his time? In the deserts

## THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST

Luke 2:1-20

The time has come for the event that all of creation has been waiting for. The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah is about to occur. The Savior of the world is coming unheralded by men, but heralded by the angels of heaven. The spectacular wonder of God coming to earth to save mankind from their sins takes place in the ordinary event of the birth of a child – a child born to poor parents in an occupied country.

### Read Luke 2:1-7. (Slide 7, 8, 9)

Why is Bethlehem the destination of Joseph and Mary? They must register in the town of their relatives and they are descended from David

What happens while they are there? The baby is born

Where does this event occur? In a stable (manger)



*There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, **10** and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. They were very afraid. The angel said to them, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. This shall be a sign to*

you: *You shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*" Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude **11** of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace,  
Good will toward men."*

What is the reaction of the shepherds? *fear*

Where was the child born? (which city?) *Bethlehem (City of David)*

Where will they find the Savior? *In a manger (in a stable)*

**Read Luke 2:15-20** to see what the shepherds do about what they have heard.  
(Slide 12)

What do the shepherds decide to do? *Go to Bethlehem to see the baby*

Do the shepherds keep this news to themselves? *no*



## REVIEW

1. How much time is there between the last events of the Old Testament and the birth of Christ? About four hundred years
2. What are these years called? Silent years
3. Which group of people rules Judea at this time? Romans
4. Who prophesied about John the Baptist? Isaiah
5. Does Zechariah totally accept what the angel tells him? no
6. What sign is given to Zechariah? Cannot speak until these things come to pass
7. What two people does Gabriel visit? Zechariah and Mary
8. Does Mary accept what the angel tells her? yes
9. With whom does Mary visit? Elizabeth
10. Why doesn't Joseph divorce Mary? An angel explains everything to him
11. When does Zechariah regain his speech? When the baby is named
12. Who is the famous ancestor of Joseph and Mary? David
13. Who announces the arrival of the Christ child? angels

