

# The Gospel of Luke

## Lesson 2

In the attempt to discover the time of Jesus' birth, two dates have risen that limit the span of days on which Jesus could have been born and both focus on Quirinius, also called Cyrenius, the Governor of Syria.



**Picture: 8**  
Coin Rubbing of Quirinius  
(6 BC – 4 BC)

### Quirinius (Cyrenius) Governor of Syria

The census of the world occurred during the reign of Quirinius as governor of Syria. He ruled two times as governor. From 6 BC - 4 BC (748 - 750 AUC), we have coins confirming his governorship. From 6 AD – 9 AD (758 – 761 AUC), we have public documents confirming his governorship. Records indicate that Quirinius was an old man when he served his last time as governor of Syria, brought out of retirement because he was a trusted man.

Q · AEMILIVS · Q · F  
PAL · SECVNDVS · IN  
CASTRIS · DIVI · AVG · Sub  
P · SVLPICIO · QUIRINIO · LEGATO  
CAESARIS · SYRIAE · HONORI  
BVS · DECORATVS · PRAEFECT  
COHORT · AVG · I · PRAEFECT  
COHORT · II · CLASSICAE · IDEM  
IVSSV · QUIRINI · CENSVM · EGI  
A · P · A · M · E · N · A · E · CIVITATIS · MIL  
ITVM · HOMIN · CIVIVM · XXVII  
IDEM · MISSV · QUIRINI · ADVERSVS  
ITVRAEOS · IN · LIBANO · MONTE  
CASTELLVM · EORVM · CEPI · ET · ANTE  
MILITIAM · PRAEFECT · FABRVM ·  
DELATVS · A · DVOBVS · COS · AD · AE  
RARIVM · ET · IN · COLONIA ·  
QVAESTOR · AEDIL · II · DVVMVIR · II  
PONTIFEX  
IBI · POSITI · SVNT · Q · AEMILIVS · Q · F · PAL  
SECVNDVS · F · ET · AEMILIA · CHIA · LIB  
H · M · A · M · P · L · I · V · S · H · N · S ·

**Picture: 9**  
Document with Date  
of Quirinius' Service  
in Syria  
(6 AD – 9 AD)

### Service of Quirinius as Governor of Syria

6 BC - 4 BC 748 - 750 AUC	3 BC to 5 AD 751 – 757 AUC	6 AD – 9 AD 758 – 761 AUC
Quirinius Governor of Syria	Quirinius In retirement	Quirinius Governor of Syria

First, Quirinius was governor of Syria twice. Legal documents show he was governor from 6 AD to 9 AD. This term of office was at least eleven years after the death of Herod the Great and simply too late for the birth of Jesus. Coins indicate that Quirinius was Governor from 6 BC to 4 BC. Another Governor was in office in early 6 BC. Most likely, Quirinius became governor late in 6 BC and coins were struck with his image on them in the year 4 BC to commemorate his time in office. The coins and documents serve as bookends of the earliest and latest possible dates for Jesus' birth. Second, for the latest date of Jesus' birth we need only to go to the well documented fact that Herod the Great died in April of 4 BC. With this information, we can determine the span of time in which Jesus was born.

## Gabriel Appears to Zacharias

Luke 1:11

**Luke 1:11** And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

The altar of incense, also called "the golden altar" stood in the holy place before the veil that was by the Ark of the Covenant. On this altar, sweet spices were continuously burned with fire taken from the brazen altar. The morning and the evening services began when the high priest offered incense on this altar. The burning of the incense was considered a type of prayer. This altar was a small movable table, made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was one cubic in length and breadth and two cubits in height. In Solomon's temple, the altar was similar in size but made of cedar overlaid with gold. In Ezekiel 41:22 it is called "the altar of wood." In 164 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes took it away, but it was thereafter restored by Judas Maccabaeus. Among the trophies carried away by Titus at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the altar of incense is not listed. It was at this altar that Zacharias ministered when Gabriel appeared to him.

## Zacharias Troubled

**Luke 1:12** Zacharias was troubled when he saw *the angel*, and fear gripped him.

Some Christians tend to de-emphasize the fear of God found in the New Testament by emphasizing the love of God. Although there is indeed a greater emphasis on the love of God in the New Testament than in the Old Testament, the element of fear is part of the proclamation of the early church. In the New Testament, Paul admonished believers to work out their salvation "with fear and trembling". The early church grew in number as it lived "in the fear of the Lord". The fear of God is related to the love of God. The revelation of God to people in the New Testament contains the element of God's mysterious calling for reverent obedience. The New Testament church must stand in awe and fear in the presence of a holy God, for fear is "the whole duty of man".

## John's Name

**Luke 1:13** But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

The name "John" means the grace of the Lord or the mercy of the Lord.

## John's Life

**Luke 1:14** "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. <sup>15</sup> "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup> "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

John is not called a NAZIRITE but his life indicates that he lived as one. The name Nazirite is used for an Israelite who takes the vow prescribed in Numbers 6:2-21. Although there is no mention of a Nazirite before Samson, it is evident that they existed from the time of Moses. The vow of a Nazirite involved abstinence from wine and other strong drink, refraining from cutting the hair off the head during the whole period of the vow and the avoidance of contact with the dead. When the period of the vow came to an end, the Nazirite had to present himself at the door of the sanctuary with a male lamb less than a year old for a burnt offering, a female lamb less than a year old for a sin offering, and a ram less than a year old for a peace offering. After these sacrifices were offered by the priest, the Nazirite would go to the door of the temple, cut off his hair, and throw it into the fire under the peace offering.

The duration of a Nazirite's vow was left up to the individual except in cases where the Lord prescribed the vow as in the case of John the Baptist. The Scripture mentions only three men who lived as Nazirites for life Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist. In its ordinary form, the Nazirite's vow lasted thirty to one hundred days. This term "Nazirite" was a symbol of a life devoted to God and separated from all sin, thus living a holy life.

### John's Purpose

**Luke 1:17** "It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

In Malachi, written 400 years before the conception of John, the prophet foretells John's purpose and ministry. Upon Malachi's death, the voice of God's prophets would be silent for 400 years.

**Malachi 4:5** "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Elijah was one of the greatest prophets who ever lived and his story is recorded in First Kings 17 – Second Kings 2. Malachi indicated that Elijah would come to herald Christ's coming. In the book of Matthew, Jesus identifies John the Baptist as Elijah when He says,

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept *it*, John himself is Elijah who was to come.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 11:11-14

John the Baptist will prepare the people's hearts for Jesus by urging people to repent of their sins. Jesus' coming will not only bring unity and peace to those who repent but also judgment on those who refuse to turn from their sins. Malachi's prophecy will become important in this discussion when we find Jesus being asked, "when will Elijah come."

## **Zacharias' Doubt and Gabriel's Response**

Luke 1:18-19

**Luke 1:18** Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this *for certain*? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." <sup>19</sup> The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news."

Gabriel means God is my strength. He is the heavenly messenger who interpreted to Daniel the meaning of the vision of the ram and the goat. He appears four times in the Bible, each time bringing to man a message from the Lord. Twice he appeared to Daniel (Daniel 8:15-27; Daniel 9:20-27). In the New Testament he appeared to announce the births of John the Baptist (Luke 1:8-20) and Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). The term "angel" is derived from the Greek word *angelos* which means messenger. *Angelos* and the Hebrew equivalent, *malak* (which also means messenger), are the two most common terms used to describe this class of beings in the Bible. In general, when an angel appears, his task is to convey the message or do the will of God who sent him.

## **Zacharias Mute**

**Luke 1:20** "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time." <sup>21</sup> The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. <sup>22</sup> But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. <sup>23</sup> When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.

In the days of the Old Testament, a vision was an experience in the life of a person whereby a special revelation from God was received. It can be thought of as a daydream in which an entire event was played out before the prophet. The prophet then recorded what he saw in the vision. A vision from God had two purposes. First, a vision was given for immediate direction, as with Abram in Genesis 12:1-3, Lot in Genesis 19:15, Balaam in Numbers 22:22-40 and Peter, Acts 12:7. Second, a vision was given to develop the kingdom of God by revealing the moral and spiritual deficiencies of the people of God in light of God's requirements for maintaining a proper relationship with Him. The visions of prophets such as Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Ezekiel, Daniel and John are representative of this aspect of revelation. Among the prophets, the visions were the primary means of communication between God and the prophet. By this avenue, the prophets interpreted the meaning of immediate events in the history of Israel. "Vision" and "Word of Yahweh" became synonymous in these prophetic writings (see Obadiah 1:1). However, these were the days

of Zacharias and no one had had a vision in 400 years. Yet the people knew the signs as described in the Old Testament and Zacharias had most definitely had a visitor from God.

### **Elizabeth's Blessing**

Luke 1:24-25

**Luke 1:24** After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, <sup>25</sup> "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked *with favor* upon *me*, to take away my disgrace among men."

Elizabeth looked upon her pregnancy with great joy, seeing it as a blessing of favor from the Lord. In the eastern world, seclusion was the proper place for a pregnant woman in that day. Once Elizabeth began to show in her pregnancy, she would have become homebound until the child was born.

### **Gabriel's Announcement to Mary**

Luke 1:26-27

**Luke 1:26** Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

The city of Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament. Besides being the home of Joseph and Mary and the place of Gabriel's announcement of the birth of the Messiah, it is where Jesus grew from infancy to manhood. At the beginning of His ministry, the people of Nazareth were so offended that they sought to kill Him. Twice they tried to throw Him out of the city. Finally, He made Capernaum His place residence.

Nazareth is situated on the southern edge of Lebanon on the steep slope of a hill, about 14 miles from the Sea of Galilee and about 6 miles west from Mount Tabor. It can be inferred from the words of Nathanael in John 1:46 that the city of Nazareth, along with the rest of Galilee, was held in great disrepute. As a rude and less cultivated class, largely influenced by the Gentiles who mingled with them, the Galileans were thought to be of a low moral and religious character.

The Jews believed that according to Micah 5:2, the birth of the Messiah would take place only in Bethlehem.

### **Gabriel Words**

Luke 1:28-29

**Luke 1:28** And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.

The Catholic Church uses the old King James Version of this verse in their rosary.

### ***Hail Mary***

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou amongst women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The words "blessed art thou among women" are not found in the oldest and most reliable texts. Gabriel uses the greeting of the day with the term "Hail." It would be the same as our hello today. Gabriel continues by saying, "Favored one! The Lord is with you." Later Mary would ponder these words. Several times the Scripture indicates that Mary pondered these things in her heart.

### **Jesus' Name**

Luke 1:30-31

Luke 1:30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

When Gabriel instructed Mary to name her Son Jesus, the angel was giving Him a Greek name. Although the Romans were the dominant power in the world and in control of the state of Israel, the Greek language was spoken throughout the world. The name Jesus comes from the original Hebrew word Hoshea. The name changed over time and these changes are present in the Bible and should not confuse the reader because they all mean savior or deliverer.

### **The Origin of the Name of Jesus**

Before the Exodus	Hoshea (Hebrew)
Moses Changes the Pronunciation	Jehoshua or Joshua (Hebrew)
After the Return from Exile	Jeshua (Hebrew)
The Greeks Change the Pronunciation	Jesus (Greek)

### **Jesus' Purpose**

Luke 1:32-33

Luke 1:32 "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; <sup>33</sup> and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Notice the five promises made about Jesus. Any one of them would have thrilled a parent, but all five reveal the incredible nature of Mary's Son. He would not be just any ordinary man.

1. He will be great and
2. (He) will be called the Son of the Most High; and
3. the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and
4. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and
5. His kingdom will have no end.

## **Holy Spirit's Work**

Luke 1:34-35

**Luke 1:34** Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" **35** The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

Only through the divine intervention of God the Holy Spirit could such a thing happen! All the laws of nature set by God are about to be altered at the arrival of the Savior!

## **Mary's Cousin Elizabeth**

Luke 1:36-38

**Luke 1:36** "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. **37** "For nothing will be impossible with God." **38** And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Luke gives another clue to determine the time of the birth of Jesus when Gabriel announces the sixth month of gestation of John in the womb of Elizabeth, a miracle in itself, given to Zacharias and Elizabeth by God. Mary, in her gentle manner, accepts her position in God's great plan.