

The Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem

Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* (2012)

1. The historical and theological framework

Read and discuss > Luke 2.1-7. What was the importance of the census? How is Caesar Augustus the anti-type of Jesus?

‘By referring to thye Emperor Augsutus and to “the whole ecumene”, Luke was intentionally creating both a historical and a theological framework for the events he was about to recount.’ (p. 63)

Read and discuss > Micah 5.1-5.

2. The birth of Jesus

Jesus was ‘wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger’. (Luke 2.7) **Discuss** > Can you imagine that the Early Church saw in the clothes and the manger symbols of Jesus’ death and sacrifice? How?

Jesus was called Mary’s firstborn son. (Luke 2.7) **Discuss** > What does this word ‘firstborn’ mean?

(See Exodus 13.1, 13. The reference to the firstborn anticipates the account of the presentation in the temple.). ‘Clearly, this word [firstborn] highlights the particular way in which Jesus belongs to God.’ (p. 70)

Romans 8.29 - Jesus is the ‘firtborn among many brethren.’

Colossians 1.15 - Jesus is the ‘firstborn of all creation.’

Colossians 1.18 - Jesus the ‘firstborn from the dead.’

Colossians 1.16,18 - ‘In him all things were created ... that in everything he might be preeminent.’

Read and discuss > Luke 2.8-21

Why did God reveal him first to the shepherds?

Regarding the words of the angels (Luke 2.14), who are ‘those with whom God is pleased.’ **Compare with** > Luke 3.22.

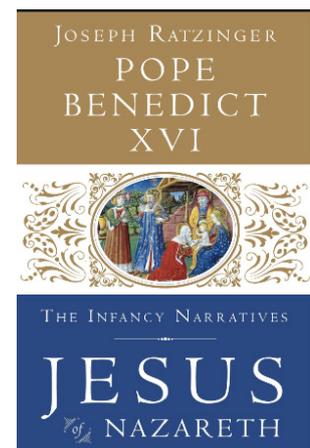
Discuss > What sort of peace does God offer us on earth? How does this relate to the ‘peace’ that Emperor Augustus brought ‘to the whole world’? (Luke 2.14)

3. The presentation of Jesus in the Temple

Read > Luke 2.21-40

On the eighth day, Jesus was circumcized and he received his name ‘God will save’. (Luke 2.21). **Compare this with** > Galatian 4.4-5.

On the fortieth day, Jesus was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem.



- a) Fully in accordance with Jewish law, Mary sacrificed some turtledoves or pigeons - the sacrifice of the poor. This was for her own purification after childbirth. (See Leviticus 12.1-4)
- b) Firstborn sons had to be 'redeemed' as they belonged fully to God. The price of redemption was 5 shekels. **Question** > Does that happen in this story? What actually happens?
- c) Jesus is a sacrifice to God. **Read** > book p. 82-83

Note > the prophetic words of Simeon. (Luke 2.30-32) He quotes Isaiah 42.6 and 49.6 with promises for the nations and for Israel that will be fulfilled in Jesus. These quotes show how the earliest church applied the 'suffering servant' passages to Jesus.

Note > With Luke 2.34-35, 'The theology of glory is inseparably linked with the theology of the Cross.' (p. 85) Again, Simeon seems to use a concept from Isaiah, now 8.14.

Page 86: 'Redemption is not "wellness," it is not about basking in self-indulgence; on the contrary it is a liberation from imprisonment in self-absorption. The liberation comes at a price: the anguish of the Cross.'

Page 87: 'The Christian faith holds up the God who suffers with men, and thereby draws us into his "com-compassion". The Mater Dolorosa, the mother whose heart is pierced by a sword, is an iconic image of this fundamental attitude of the Christian faith.'

