

Lesson 5

JESUS AND HIS EARTHLY FAMILY

In lesson 4 we learned of Joseph and Mary, his betrothed, being enrolled in the census at Bethlehem because they were both of the tribe of Judah and descendants of King David. You might expect this lesson to be about the birth of Jesus, and it is, but it is more than that. We will be looking at the Scriptures about Jesus and his family, from his birth to his death.

“While they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Luke 2:6-7. There were shepherds in the area, watching their sheep by night. An angel appeared to them amid the glory of the Lord and told them, “For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11. And they told them how to recognize Jesus when they found Him. And the heavenly host said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!” Luke 2:14.

The shepherds talked it over and hastened over and found Jesus and his parents. When they found everything was just as they had been told, they started telling everyone both in Bethlehem and back where they had come from.

“At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” Luke 2:21. Circumcision was required after seven days. Leviticus 12:3. Naming was normally done at that time.

On the fortieth day, the day of purification, (Leviticus 12:4) his parents brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. Exodus 13:2. The sacrifice they brought indicated that they were very poor. Leviticus 12:8.

A man named Simeon had been promised that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ. When the parents gave him Jesus to perform the service, he took Jesus in his arms and said, “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰for mine eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” ³³And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; ³⁴and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.” Luke 2:29-35. And the prophetess, Anna, gave thanks and spoke of him. (When Jesus was on the cross and Mary saw the soldier pierce Jesus’ side, Mary must have felt it too, as Simeon said.)

Something mentioned earlier is very important. Joseph did not have sexual relations with his wife, Mary, until Jesus was born, to fulfill prophecy that Jesus would be born of a virgin. Also, they could not start those relations until after the days of her purification. Now normal relations could begin. Joseph and Mary had four sons, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas and some daughters. More will be said about that later.

Matthew adds a beautiful story. “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying,
² ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.’” Matthew 2:1-2. That evil King Herod didn’t know what was going on but those words “King of the Jews” troubled him greatly. He asked the chief priests and the scribes where to find him and they told him Bethlehem of Judea. Herod wanted to be clever so he told the wise men, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” Matthew 2:8.

With the help of the Star they found Jesus and Mary in the house they now lived in and they worshiped Jesus. Then they gave him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Many think the three gifts indicate there were only three wise men but that is conjecture. Having been warned in a dream, the wise men went home another way. (Matthew 2:12).

¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.” Matthew 2:13-15.

We don’t know how long after Jesus’ birth the wise men arrived or how long it took Herod to realize that they didn’t come back and tell him where to find Jesus, but it was long enough for Herod to cast a large net to try to be sure he killed Jesus. He ordered all the male children in Bethlehem and the region who were two years old or younger to be killed. With a King like Herod, no wonder God thought it was time for a new covenant.

When Joseph knew that Herod was dead he took Jesus and his mother back to Israel. Because Herod’s son, Archelaus, was ruling in his father’s place Joseph took the family to Nazareth in Galilee. He would be called a Nazarene. Don’t confuse Nazarene with Nazarite. Jesus was not a Nazarite as defined in Numbers 6:1-8.

Luke says, “³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” Luke 2:39-40.

Jesus received a good education. Joseph must have followed Moses’ advice. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; ⁵ and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; ⁷ and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:4-9. And it was Jesus’ custom to attend the synagogue. Luke 4:16. He may have learned a lot there also.

When Jesus was twelve years old he went with his parents to Jerusalem for the Passover. When it was over, Jesus stayed behind. His parents thought he was in the large group of kinsfolk and friends. When they could not find him they went back to Jerusalem and searched for him for three days. They found him in the temple sitting among the teachers and asking them questions. They all were amazed at his understanding. “His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.’”⁴⁹ And he said to them, “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Luke 2:48-49. They did not understand his answer. Jesus went home with them and continued to increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with both God and man.

The Scriptures now skip about eighteen years of Jesus’ life. He is in a big family now with four brothers and some sisters. Joseph may have died. If so, Jesus would have had the responsibility of supporting the family. When he is about thirty, John the Baptist, his relative, is preaching and Jesus goes to him and asked to be baptized. After some discussion, John consented. “And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him;¹⁷ and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” Matthew 3:16-17.

Several things happened before the next family event. Jesus has fasted, been tempted, and gained his first disciples. The next family event is a wedding at Cana.

On the third day, there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;² Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples.³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”⁴ And Jesus said to her, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”⁶ Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.⁷ Jesus said to them “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.⁸ He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.” So they took it.⁹ When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom¹⁰ and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.”

¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.¹² After this he went down to Caper’na-um, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples; and there they stayed for a few days. John 2:1-12.

Jesus was not ready to perform his first “sign” and go public with his ministry, but his mother asked him to take care of a problem. When Mary asked him he didn’t refuse or go out and slam the door. He loved and respected his mother enough to do what she asked. A lot of us could learn a lot from his example.

Next is the first of two recordings of Jesus teaching in his hometown of Nazareth. “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; ¹⁷ and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ ²⁰ And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ ²² And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’” Luke 4:16-22. Their problem was; he can’t be the Messiah! He is one of us.

Matthew records the next family encounter. Jesus has just healed a blind man. The Pharisees say he is doing this by Satan. Jesus is strongly reproofing the Pharisees. “While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.’” Matthew 12:46-50. Jesus wasn’t rebuking his family; he didn’t want them involved. But the statement he made is beautiful and most reassuring. We can be part of his family if we do his will.

Matthew also records, “And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, ⁵⁴ and coming to his own country he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?’ ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.’” Matthew 13:53-57. The importance of this passage is the naming of his brothers and mentioning of his sisters.

Once when Jesus’ brothers were getting ready to go to the Feast of Tabernacles his brothers taunted him by saying, in effect, “If you want to be well known you have to go.” They said this because they did not believe in him. Jesus did go later and taught in the temple. After Jesus’ resurrection, though, at least two of his brothers were Christians, James was a leader and both he and Jude wrote books in the New Testament.

The last written family interaction is with Jesus on the cross. “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Mag’dalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” John 19:25b-27. Even in his dying moments, Jesus showed his love for his mother.