

LESSON VI

A Survey of the Life of Christ (Part I)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is what makes Christianity distinct from other religions. And when we consider the coming of this, the Son of God, into earthly form, and how He lived and died to save man from sin, we see further the unique nature of the Christian faith. And climaxing this unique nature is the Resurrection of Christ from the state of death. All this not only makes Christianity distinct, but was accomplished for a far greater purpose – the salvation of mankind from sin. Therefore it is necessary to look at the life of Christ at least briefly, before we consider the doctrine of salvation.

The most important sources for information regarding the life of Christ on earth, are the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament. They were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, respectively. Matthew and John were eyewitnesses of the major events of Christ's life, being two of His chosen twelve disciples. Mark may have been an eyewitness, and Luke by his introduction to his book, indicates that he had access to eyewitness statements, or to eyewitnesses themselves. Of course, we have already shown the inspiration of the Scriptures and its subsequent proven trustworthiness.

The first three Gospels, namely, Matthew, Mark and Luke are often called the Synoptic Gospels. This means that they are somewhat parallel in nature in terms of content and phraseology. John's approach to the life of Christ is different. Incidentally, the word "Gospel" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word, "**god-spell**", meaning good tidings. This in itself is a literal translation of the Greek word **evangelion**, with the same basic meaning. The word Gospel itself is used in the New Testament in reference to God's revealed plan to save man from sin through the blood of Christ. A good definition of Gospel is "the story of God's gift of salvation through the person and work of Christ which the Church has been commissioned to proclaim (Mark 16:15; Acts 20:24; Eph. 1:13). (**Merril C. Tanney: Pictorial Bible Dictionary**).

Some Roman historians of the first and second century also refer to Christ from various stand points. Such are Tacitus and Suetonius, who wrote about seventy-five years after the death of Christ, and also Lucian. They give evidence of Christ's life in Palestine, in Emperor Tiberia's reign; of the great movement that spread through His followers; of His being worshipped as God and of the faith and zeal of His followers.

Together with the Roman historians, Josephus, the famous Jewish historian of the first century, makes at least two references to Christ in his history of the Jews : Jewish Antiquities. The Jewish Talmud also refers to Christ, though often slanderously. And many Christians of the

first two centuries refer to Christ in various ways. Also, in the catacombs of Rome, and other places are inscriptions referring to the person and teachings of Christ.

But for the authentic life of Christ we need the Gospels, and the other references in other New Testament books. Even though this by far is very limited it does give us a comprehensive picture that is enough for man to know, understand and believe. As the Gospel writer John himself declares : And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book : But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name, (John 20:30 & 31). So we have sufficient records to lead us to belief in Christ as God's Son. And further John says, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." (John 21:25).

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH AND YOUTH OF CHRIST

Christ came in the flesh, into this earth of ours, as a baby. That is, He, the Son of Christ, entered the human stream of life by being born. The world He came into was of a greatly unified nature. The organizing genius of the Roman Empire had provided for relative peace through Roman Law and Order. The Roman system of roads and the freedom of travel under the Roman Empire was ideal for the spread of the Gospel. And of tremendous importance was the world wide usage of the Greek language. Various religions had broken down and lost their credibility and people were searching for spiritual deliverance. We could see then why the Bible declares that Christ came in the "fullness of time". The proper background had been provided by God.

The Announcements: The coming of Christ, as the Messiah, had been foretold by the prophets of Israel hundreds of years before Christ's birth. But just before His actual birth, His mother-to-be, Mary was visited by the angel of God and told of the coming birth. She was to conceive, not in human fashion, but of the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus she would conceive while a virgin. And the child, she was told, was to be the Son of God.

Mary was troubled, being yet only engaged, and not married to Joseph. She visited her cousin Elizabeth with the news. Elizabeth's husband Zacharias, had been visited by an angel himself while he did his duties as a priest in the temple. Here the angel Gabriel promised him a son who was to be called John, and he would prepare the way for Christ, the Messiah. As a sign of this message's veracity, Zachariah was made dumb till the boy's birth. And John was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth even though both were well advanced in age. Read the first chapter of Luke for details of this account.

Genealogies: Chapter 1 of Matthew, and chapter 3 of Luke both trace the ancestors of Jesus. This is important since the prophecies had predicted the Messiah through the line of

David. So in investigating the genealogies we find that both trace Christ back to David, and also all the way to Abraham.

Matthew's account is arranged in three divisions with 14 names each. From Abraham to David there are 14 names; from David to the time of Israel's captivity in Babylon are 14 names; and from then to Joseph, the husband of Mary there are 14 names. But the importance is in seeing how Christ did descend from the line of David.

The genealogy in Luke is done backwards tracing from Joseph to Abraham, and eventually Adam. It is similar between Abraham and David. And then the names change with two exceptions. But if we see that in Matthew, Joseph is given as the son of Jacob, and in Luke as the Son of Heli (or Eli). But many scholars, and early church fathers agree that Eli was Joseph's father-in-law, rather than father. This could make Luke's genealogy that of Mary's ancestors and not Joseph's. And we have then, both Mary and Joseph from the line of David. In Romans we read of Jesus being of David's line through the flesh. (Romans 1:3 & 4). This proves that Mary too was of Davidic descent and would sustain the theory of Joseph being Heli's son-in-law, as indicated by Luke. The early Church historians had no problem in accepting Luke's genealogy as being Mary's ancestors.

But what is important is the evidence of Christ's Davidic ancestry. And the fact that Old Testament history becomes so very evident as we see the names of Old Testament characters in the genealogy of Christ.

The Virgin Birth: One very important fact should be remembered about the birth of Christ. When God sent His Son to earth, He came as a little baby. But yet, the baby came into being in a miraculous way. The Bible clearly states that Christ was born of a virgin (Read Luke 1:31-34) and Matthew 1:18). That is, Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb while she was a virgin. Thus, Jesus had no physical father. This is the miracle of Christ's birth.

The virgin birth is foretold beautifully in the Old Testament in Isaiah 7:14. Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Immanuel means 'God with us'). There is controversy over the usage of the word translated as "virgin". Some say it should simply read as "young woman". But the Gospel writer Matthew himself testifies to the meaning of Isaiah 7:14 when he wrote of the prophecy and used the word in Greek meaning 'virgin'. (Matthew 1:23). So we can accept the testimony of the Gospel writers that the fact of the Virgin birth of Christ is very evident.

The significance of the virgin birth is great. Christ entered human race in a manner both Divine and natural. His birth was natural. His conception was Divine and a miracle. Thus we see God's power as a Creator at work. Certainly He could have brought this Universe into being, would also make a virgin conceive. And we see also that Christ became flesh in a Divine conception showing God's ability, but yet being born in a human manner to connect with mankind. This makes the salvation of Christ all the more significant. Being God and man on earth He fulfilled the full requirement for a substitute for sinful man. He was free from the guilt of sin, but yet took upon Himself that guilt.

The fact of the virgin birth, and all of how God came in the flesh (called the Incarnation) is a mystery. A mystery in that, we may not fully comprehend it. But we can take the testimony of those who wrote the Gospels and on faith accept it. The fact is indisputable. Our comprehension has to be geared by faith. But we can see the significance and then thank God that He did indeed send His Son, born of a virgin, to live and die on earth, that each of us might be saved from our sin.

The Nativity: By the nativity we mean the actual events that took place at the birth of Christ. Before He was born, the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus ordered a census of the whole nation. This was to be accomplished by ordering all the people to go to their native or ancestral home for the census. So Joseph and his wife-to-be had to go back to Bethlehem. Bethlehem, the ancient home of David, was also Joseph's and Mary's since they came from the Davidic line. Mary was heavily pregnant at the time and they could find no room for her at any inn. So they were forced to stop in a stable and there she gave birth to Jesus.

Thus was Jesus born in a humble manner, but yet of the royal, Davidic line. His birth, though, did not go without glory. For, the night of Christ's birth, shepherds were grazing their sheep outside Bethlehem. Suddenly all around them there was a bright shining light. And an angel appeared to them, announcing the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. And then the angel was joined by countless others and sang of peace on earth for all men. Then the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem, found the baby Jesus just as they angel had said.

Also, around the time of Jesus' birth, wise men (or called kings) were led through their study to see the significance of a special star in the sky. The star, when they followed it, led them to Jerusalem. But when they searched for the baby, Herod the King was troubled. But the wise men eventually were led by the star to where Christ was, and gave Him gifts and worshipped Him. Consequently Herod ordered the massacre of all baby boys, below two years of age, in Bethlehem. But Joseph, warned by an angel in a dream, fled to Egypt and stayed there till Herod the King died. Joseph was then again visited by the angel in a dream, and told to go back to Israel. You can read this account in Matthew chapter 2.

It may appear that very few knew of the birth of Christ, the Messiah. This is true. But look at the varied background of those who did know. Shepherds, humble and lowly. Wise men, learned, and probably wealthy. While the world looked away for the promised Messiah into the palaces and temples, God's Son came in a lowly, humble manner as a babe born in a stable. But He did not come for pomp or earthly glory, for earthly power and might! But He came that man, you and I, might be saved from our sin. And we thank God that, though in humble fashion, He did come to redeem us.

The Youth of Jesus: The Bible does not mention too much about the youth of Jesus. There are other writings that appear to give more details but their authenticity is suspect. Furthermore, some of the accounts are rather fanciful, and not in keeping with the true character of the Messiah, and His real purpose on earth.

In Luke chapter 2 we read of the circumcision of Jesus. This was eight days after his birth in accordance with Jewish custom. He was named Jesus. This name was given to Mary by

the angel who visited her before the conception of Jesus. Literally, Jesus means Saviour. (Matthew 1:21).

Forty days after His birth Joseph and Mary took Him to the temple. She went to keep the rules for her own ceremonial cleansing as prescribed in the Mosaic (Jewish) laws. At this time they presented Jesus to God. This too was in accordance with the laws of Moses. In the temple they met two aged people, Anna a prophetess, and Simeon a devout, God-fearing man. Simeon had been promised that he would not die till he saw the Christ. So when he saw Jesus, he knew He was the Messiah, and he rejoiced and praised God. Anna also thanked God for the Christ and spoke about Him to others. These events probably happened prior to the visit of the wise men, and the subsequent flight into Egypt.

When Mary and Joseph and the child returned to Nazareth after Herod's death, the child grew and developed mentally, physically and spiritually (Luke 2:52). Luke also says that Jesus grew strong, and was filled with wisdom and the grace of God. We learn that Joseph was a carpenter, and Jesus too was called a carpenter in Mark 6:2 & 3. This makes it evident that Jesus did partake of strong, manual labor as a boy and young man.

Let us remember that Jesus as a boy was still the Son of God. Later, Jesus claimed no sin (John 8:46) and the epistles also testify to that fact. (I Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15, et al). Thus the sinless nature of Christ was for all of His life on earth, including His boyhood and youth.

One definite incident during the youth of Jesus is mentioned in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:41-52). Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem with his parents for the Jewish feast of the Passover. Here, in the Temple, Jesus got into a discussion with the most learned scholars of Israel, and amazed them with His wisdom. Meanwhile, Mary and Joseph had begun their homeward journey. After a day's travel they found Him not with them, and came back, and found Him with the scholars. Mary and Joseph themselves were amazed, and rebuked Him for creating anxiety for them. But Jesus answered that He was doing His Father's business, and they should have known about it. But Mary and Joseph did not fully comprehend this at the time.

Thus we see Jesus conscious of His Divine mission even as a lad. It shows that Jesus was in direct contact with God. And that His wisdom was from the Father, and not from any earthly source.

Behind the scenes of Jesus' youth, that we read of in the Bible, we can be sure that He did have a life free of sin, and in close communion to His heavenly Father. Though at times Mary and Joseph misunderstood Him, yet there is no evidence of friction or boyish mishaps, that may show a deviation from His deity. Surely, Jesus, as a youth, was still the Son of God.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

John the Baptist: Before we consider the ministry of Jesus it is necessary to consider, briefly at least, the life of John, the Baptist, (or John the Baptizer). We have already seen how John's mother, Elisabeth, was a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. John was born as a descendant of Aaron and his birth itself was accompanied by the prediction of the angel to his father Zacharias.

John's youth is not mentioned but we find him as a man preaching repentance, and administering baptism (immersion) in water unto repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). He advocated that repentance needed to be followed by works that showed itself as proofs of repentance (Luke 3:1-14). The baptism of John was unto repentance. As they were baptized and repented they could expect forgiveness of sin by following God's Law. The Law at this time was the Law of Moses. The baptism of John should not be confused with Christian baptism which is advocated by the Bible, for today.

John was a colorful character. He wandered in the wilds, and clothed himself in camel's hair and leather. His food included locusts and wild honey. He appears fearless and was courageous in his preaching. He did most of his baptizing in the river Jordan.

John was the "forerunner" of Jesus, the Christ. He emphasized that he was not the Christ (John 1:20), but preached repentance as a way of preparing people for the ministry of Christ. John's ministry was definitely ordained of God (John 1:6-23) and thus his preaching and baptism was also ordained of God.

John had the privilege of baptizing Christ. Later he was put into prison for his fiery preaching against the adultery of Herod, Tetrarch of Galilee, and Herodias, wife of Herod's brother, Philip. Herod has "stolen" Herodias and was thus living in adultery with her. Herodias was in full agreement to this and it was she who eventually had John the Baptist beheaded. (Read Matthew 14:1-12).

Thus John was executed, but not before he had fulfilled his ministry. He prepared the way for Christ and led people to a life of true repentance.

The Baptism of Jesus: Jesus was about 30 years of age when He came to be baptized by John. Thus began His real ministry. As said earlier, His childhood and youth are barely mentioned.

John was a little hesitant concerning Jesus' need for baptism. And surely Jesus had no need for being baptized for "repentance unto the remission of sins." He was sinless (I Peter 2:22). But he asked to be baptized to "fulfill all righteousness." This was in accordance with the will of God. Thus Jesus' baptism is an example to us. Jesus submitted to being baptized by John, thus showing his humility.

But at the time of Jesus' baptism a strange Divine event took place, John had been foretold by God that the Christ would be pointed out to him (John 1:32). This took place at Jesus' baptism. After John had baptized Christ, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. And a voice from Heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." John saw the dove and knew it was the Spirit of God, for later he pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." John probably heard and understood the voice from Heaven as well. And we find that in the simple act of baptism God revealed Christ to John; and Christ was glorified. And God, both visibly and audibly, identified with Jesus.

We cannot conclude that Christ became the Son of God from this time on! No! He was always God's Son. He was guided by the Spirit even before His baptism. But in the humiliating act of baptism, Christ publicly began His ministry, and the Spirit then joined Him in that ministry in fullness. (Read Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; and Luke 3:21-23).

The Temptation of Jesus: Immediately after Jesus' baptism, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness. Here He fasted for forty days and forty nights. And here Satan tempted Him. Three definite forms of temptations are mentioned. And this does not mean that Christ was not tempted at times other than the forty days, in the wilderness. But here there is direct, concentrated temptings by Satan.

Satan used the physical hunger of Jesus to try to deter Him from the real purpose of His miraculous power, to put into Christ the element of doubt. Satan said, "If thou be the Son of God, command this stone to be made bread." But Christ overcame both the physical and spiritual aspects of the temptation and told Satan that man, rather than only satisfying this physical hunger, should also put his trust and confidence in God and His Word.

Then Satan tempts Christ again, he takes Him to a pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and tempts Him to try God's promise of protection by throwing Himself down. "See if the angels would protect you" is the taunt. Or, try out your trust in God. Here again Satan seems to want to plant doubt in Christ and to perhaps make Him become "sensational". But again Christ thwarts Satan saying it is not right to test God.

Satan tries again. From a high mountain the nations of the world are somehow shown in a "moment of time." Full power over these, dominion and kingship in an earthly sense is promised. The temptation was to forego the way of the Cross and to set up an earthly kingdom. But Christ turns Satan away sharply when Satan offers these with the condition to worship him. "Get three behind me Satan," is the rebuke. Christ tells him that only the Living God should be worshipped and served. And Satan leaves Christ for a time.

In all the tempting, Christ rebukes Satan by quoting Scripture counter to the aims of Satan. "It is written," Christ said again and again. The three passages He quotes are from Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 91:11; Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20. And the Word of God is always an antidote to Satan and his tempting. For when we trust God, and follow His Word we can overcome temptation. Thus did Christ, the Son of God, suffer temptations like we do, but yet overcame them. And thereby could He become our Great mediator, that though He was tempted

– yet He committed no sin. (Hebrews 4:15). (Read Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12 & 13; Luke 4:1-13).

The Disciples of Jesus: The word disciple simply means “a learner”. And Jesus probably had many disciples. John the Baptist also had disciples. But when we refer to the “disciples of Jesus” we refer to a chosen twelve, who were later to be known as the apostles.

Christ spent much time with his disciples. They became like a family to Him. In the short time He was with them He taught them many things and trained them for the task of evangelism. They were to continue His Work after His Death and Resurrection.

The first disciples were, Andrew and Simon Peter; James and John; and Philip and Nathanael. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:40) who followed Jesus when John pointed Christ out as the Lamb of God, he brought his brother Simon Peter. Thus when they were called by Christ they left all and followed Him. Similarly with James and John. (Matthew 4:18-22).

Christ invited Philip to follow Him also and He brought Nathanael to meet Christ. Nathanael was a little doubtful but when Christ showed him His power, he too followed Jesus, (John 1:43-51).

Later He calls Matthew, a tax collector to follow Him. (Matthew 9:9). And eventually He chose, altogether, twelve men to be His close disciples, and to become the means of proclaiming His message to all men. The twelve are: Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John the son of Zebedee; Philip, Nathanael (also called Bartholomew), Thomas, Matthew, James (called James the Lesser or James the younger), Jude (Thaddaeus), Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot, (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3: 16-19; Luke 6:14-16).

The disciples came from various walks of life. Many were fishermen. One, Matthew, was a tax collector. Most were humble men, probably without a grand education. During the life of Christ some even showed lack of faith and consistently (e.g. Peter denied Him). But when they had seen Christ after His Resurrection, and believed on Him as truly being God’s Son, then with God’s Spirit they became transformed men carrying His message far and wide with power and authority.

The exception was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ. And soon after took his own life. (This will be in more detail in the next lesson).

The First Miracle: Soon after Jesus had called his first disciples, he and they, together with his mother Mary were invited to a wedding. They all went for the marriage, where an embarrassing social situation occurred. The host of the wedding feast found that he had run out of wine. So Mary mentioned it to Jesus. She seems to have expected Him to perform a miracle. But Jesus was not ready to publicly declare or demonstrate His Messiahship. This is probably what she expected. But Jesus did go ahead and perform a miracle. The servants were asked to fill six water pots full with water. Each contained about 2 or 3 firkins (a firkin is about 9 gallons). When they were filled, Jesus asked the servants to take it and distribute it, particularly

to the governor or Chief Guest at the feast. And behold, the water had become wine, and the wine was good. A miracle had been performed. Plain water had become wine.

We see Jesus here, not performing a miracle for glamour or sensation. Rather, it was to help his friends. He was providing a means when all else was impossible. But God makes the impossible possible. And his mother saw the miracle. And so also did the servants. And his early disciples could see that their Master had the power over nature itself.

The wine was evidently not intoxicating. There is no record of it making anyone drunk. And Jesus would not contradict Himself, for He did teach against drunkenness (Luke 21:34). Wine was a common drink at the time in Palestine.

Jesus' ministry had really begun. He had disciples with Him now. He had demonstrated to them, through this first miracle, His power. For surely Jesus had power – for He was the Son of God!

Name:.....

Student No.....

Grade.....

QUESTIONS ON LESSON VI

A SURVEY OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST (Part I)

Note: Answers to the questions below are found in the lesson material. Read the lesson carefully before answering. Try to answer in your own words, as much as possible. Wherever necessary, just fill in the blanks, or choose the correct word. Print out this page if you like. If you wish to send in the answers or to write further comments, or ask any questions yourself, do so on a separate sheet of paper and put your name and student number in a prominent place.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. What makes Christianity so distinct and different from other religions?

2. Which books in the Bible give us most information about Christ? Have you read them?

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH AND YOUTH OF CHRIST

1. Why was the Birth of Christ a Miracle?

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

1. How were John and Jesus related?

2. Why did John baptize people?

3. Why was Jesus baptized?

4. Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Three temptations are mentioned. Did He give in to Satan?

5. Give the names of Jesus' twelve disciples.

6. What was the first miracle? Where did it happen?

Send answer sheets to:

THE WAY OF GOD CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

Post Box: 1023, Kilpauk P.O.,

Chennai – 600010

India