Lesson 3
Luke 2; Matthew 2; Matthew 3:24–26 (JST); 1 Nephi 11:1–23; Helaman 14:1–8; 3 Nephi 1:4–21; 27:13–16; Doctrine and Covenants 93:11–20

Luke 2
As in chapter 1, Luke goes out of his way to tell the story of Jesus’s birth as a parallel to the story of John the Baptist’s birth: the joy at the birth of the child, the circumcision and naming, prophecies of expectation by someone closely associated with the temple, and a concluding remark about the growth and development of the child. Why do you think he tells the stories with these parallels?

Verse 6: The Greek word translated accomplished could also have been translated fulfilled. Luke uses that Greek word for fulfilled, eight times in chapters 1 and 2. Why?

Verse 7: Some historical and linguistic notes: Newborn babies appear to have been washed and then rubbed down with salt in the belief that the salt would harden their skin. Swaddling clothes are strips of cloth four or five inches wide and about six yards long. They were used to bind children when they were born. The belief was that if the baby’s arms were bound tightly to its sides, they would grow straight and firm. The word translated inn means “guest room” or “dining room.”
Verses 8–20: Though Matthew shows us Christ’s birth (or at least his infancy—the wise men may have come some time after he was born) as it relates to the rich and powerful, Luke shows us the birth in relation to the poor. Why do you think Luke tells the story this way?

Why is it significant that, from among the many poor people living around Bethlehem, the angel appears to the shepherds? What symbolic significance could that have? What was David the king’s occupation? How is Jesus sometimes described?

Verse 11: The angels announce the good news, the gospel: the Savior, the Messiah (which means “the Anointed One”), the Lord has been born. How does each of these titles differ in meaning? Luke is the only one of the four Gospel writers who uses the title Savior, and he uses the verb save more than Matthew and Mark put together. Why might that be? What does it tell us about his Gospel?

Verses 21–28: Notice that Luke shows us here that Jesus was raised according to the Mosaic law. He is circumcised and named, and his parents follow the law regarding the sacrifices to be made. Why would that have been important to Luke’s audience? Oddly, however, Luke seems to be confused about the rituals required by the law. According to Leviticus 12:2–8, forty days after the birth of a male child, a woman was to be purified by offering a lamb at the temple, or a pair of doves if she was poor. Exodus 13:2, 12–13 says that the firstborn male belongs to God and could be redeemed by an offering by the father. Luke has conflated the two offerings. Do you think that is a confusion on Luke’s
part or a conflation of the ceremonies that has occurred for the post-Babylonian Jews?

**Verses 22–24, 25–27:** In the first set of verses, Luke refers to the law three times. In the second set, he refers to the Spirit three times. Do you think that is intentional? If so, what do you make of that parallel?

**Verse 25:** Some have speculated that Simeon is a member of the priestly class who, having seen the corruption of the temple priesthood, is waiting for its restoration. This speculation is based on the fact that he calls himself a servant in verse 29 and that word is generally reserved for those with the priesthood.

Simeon has been “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” What does that mean? A rabbinic tradition has it that the phrase refers to the last words spoken between Elijah and Elisha, words that will be revealed when Elijah returns. Could that rabbinic tradition have significance for Latter-day Saints?

The word translated *consolation* is *paraklēsis*. It is closely related to the word translated *comforter* in places like John 14:16, 26 and 15:26. Literally the Greek word means “one who calls out” or “one who calls to,” so it means “an exhorter” or “one who beseeches.” Luke uses the word in Luke 3:18 to describe John the Baptist’s preaching. How does this word describe Jesus? How is it possible that a word that means “exhorter” can also mean “comforter”?

**Verse 28:** In Judaism of the second century and later, it was customary for a rabbi to take a child in his arms to give him a blessing. We assume that many of the customs of later Judaism were also customs during the time of Christ.
Verse 32: Simeon recognizes that Jesus is the Savior of all people, Gentile and Jew. Why is that theme important to Luke? How did Matthew include that theme in his story?

Verses 34–35: When Simeon speaks of the fall and rise of many in Israel, he may have Isaiah 8:14 in mind. Note also that the only other times that Luke uses the Greek word that is here translated rise, he is referring to resurrection, so that is probably also what he means here. How is the word resurrection appropriate here?

With what does Simeon bless Mary? When Simeon says that Jesus will minister so “that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed,” what does he mean?

Verses 36–38: Anna confirms Simeon’s testimony. Four women in the Old Testament are called prophetesses: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3). The rabbis also recognized Sarah, Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1), Abigail (1 Samuel 25:32), and Esther as prophetesses. By calling Anna a prophetess, Luke explicitly compares her to these women. In what ways is she comparable to them? If we think of Simeon and Anna as types, whom might they represent?

Phanuel means “face of God,” and Asar (Asher) means “good luck.” Is Luke mentioning these names because he believes they add an additional layer of symbolism to his story?

Verses 41–51: Notice how important the temple is to Luke’s story. It begins in the temple, with Gabriel’s appearance to Zacharias. The infant Jesus’s divinity and calling are confirmed by witnesses in the temple. And the only incident we know from his childhood is one in the temple. Later, in
verse 49, the phrase translated “about my Father’s business” is probably better translated “in my Father’s house,” and is, therefore, another instance where Luke is emphasizing the importance of the temple. When we get to the end of Luke’s Gospel (Luke 24:53), we will see that his story ends with the disciples in the temple. Why do you think the temple was so important to Luke’s understanding of the gospel? He is, after all, not himself a Jew.

Luke shows us a young boy who knows the scriptures, who is at home in the temple, who understands that God is his father, and who obeys his parents. The person we see here is anything but a rebel. Why might Luke have thought it important to show his audience that?

**Verse 49:** This verse could summarize Jesus’s life. Did Luke write it with that in mind?

**Matthew 2**

**Verse 1:** Who were the wise men? The phrase “wise men” is a translation of the Greek word *magoi*. It is because of this word that sometimes we refer to the wise men as “magi.” We get the word *magician* from *magoi*. “The east” may refer to Mesopotamia, the center of astronomical studies at the time. Compare Numbers 24:17, Psalm 72:10–11, and Isaiah 60:1–7. What do such verses suggest to us about the wise men?

Why does Matthew tell us about the homage paid to Jesus by the wise men, but Luke tells us about the homage paid to him by shepherds? Why does each story emphasize what it does?

Why might Matthew have thought it was important to tell the Jewish community about the visit of the Gentile wise
men? We see that the Gentile visitors have come to adore the Messiah. What is the reaction of the Jews to the news of his birth? What might that foreshadow? Given that foreshadowing, how might this chapter be an excellent introduction to Matthew as a whole?

Early Christians celebrated Epiphany, the holiday commemorating the coming of the wise men, before it began to celebrate Christmas. Why do you think that might have been?

**Verse 2:** What do the wise men mean when they say that they have seen his star? Notice that, in spite of our traditions, they do not say that they have followed his star. Note also that they literally say, “We have seen his star at its rising” rather than “we have seen his star in the east.” So what?

**Verses 3–4:** Why is Herod troubled? What would Herod’s wise men know that the magi wouldn’t know? In other words, why did the wise men consult with Herod and his court? (Note that Herod died in 4 BC.)

**Verse 6:** Matthew quotes Micah 5:1–3. Since his quotation doesn’t correspond to either the Greek version of the Old Testament that was commonly used in Jesus’s day (the Septuagint) or the established Hebrew version, he is either quoting somewhat loosely or he may be quoting a version of Micah that we no longer have. Does this discrepancy between Matthew’s quotation and the texts for Micah that we have suggest anything interesting?

**Verse 11:** Why does Matthew mention the gifts the wise men gave? What is frankincense? What is myrrh? (Look in your Bible Dictionary.) How might Jesus’s family have been able to use these gifts?
Verses 13–15: Why does Matthew quote scripture so often when he tells what happened to Jesus?

Verses 13–23: The parallels between the story of Moses and that of Jesus are striking, as are the parallels between the pharaoh and Herod: the pharaoh tried to kill all male children (Exodus 1:22); Moses had to flee because his life was in danger (Exodus 2:15); when the pharaoh died, Moses returned (Exodus 4:19–20). In addition, as *Word Biblical Commentary* points out,¹ the language of Matthew 2:19 is almost identical to that of Exodus 2:23 (of the Septuagint, of course, since it is a Greek version of the Old Testament). What are we to make of such parallels? What is Matthew doing by drawing our attention to them?

Verse 16: How large a city or village do you think Bethlehem was at the time? How many children would you think were living there?

Verse 17: Notice that “Jeremy the prophet” means “Jeremiah the prophet.” Matthew is quoting Jeremiah 31:15. As with Micah 5, he is not quoting exactly.

Verse 23: No scripture in the Old Testament mentions Nazareth, so what prophets can Matthew be thinking of? Some have suggested that Matthew has Isaiah 11:1 in mind: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch (nṣr) shall grow out of his roots.” How do you explain what Matthew says here?

Matthew 3:24–26 (JST)

Read JST Matthew 3:24–26, found in the appendix of the LDS edition of the Bible. What new information does
Joseph Smith’s expansion of the text following KJV Matthew 2:23 offer?

1 Nephi 11

The following study materials can also be found in The Book of Mormon Made Harder, lesson 3.

Verse 1: Compare the personage who responds to Nephi’s desire with the one who responded to Lehi (1 Nephi 1:5–6). Are they the same being?

How does Nephi’s desire to know what his father had seen (see 1 Nephi 10:17), presumably a desire expressed in prayer, differ from his prayer in 1 Nephi 2:16?

Three things seem to precipitate Nephi’s vision: he wants to know what his father has seen, he believes that God can reveal that to him, and he is pondering in his heart. The word ponder originally meant “to weigh,” and based on that meaning it came to mean “to weigh something mentally.” What meanings does the word heart have in the scriptures? What does it mean to weigh something in your heart? What might Nephi have been weighing in his heart?

Why does this vision occur on a high mountain? How is Nephi’s experience like that of others? Is there any significance to that parallel?

Verses 2–7: The Spirit already knows the answers to the questions that he asks Nephi in verses 2–4, so why does he ask?

Having asked Nephi what he wants and what he believes, the Spirit then praises God before proceeding with the revelation (verse 6). Why?
The word *hosanna* means “save, please” or “save now.” Why does the Spirit’s address to Nephi, a praise of God, begin with *hosanna*? Does the fact that the second clause begins with *for*, meaning “because,” help us understand the cry of hosanna?

According to the Spirit, what will explain why Nephi will see the vision he wants to see?

**Verse 7:** The Spirit tells Nephi that he will see the tree that his father saw. Then he will see and bear record of the Son of God descending from heaven. And he begins the verse by telling Nephi that this combination of things will be a sign. A sign of what?

The Spirit uses the word *witness* to mean “see” in this verse rather than to mean “testify” or “bear record.” Why does he use the word *witness* rather than the word *see*?

**Verses 8–10:** Before Lehi saw the tree, he went through a dark and dreary space and a large and spacious field (1 Nephi 8:7–9). Why do you think those things are omitted from Nephi’s experience?

Is it significant that Nephi says the tree he saw was *like* the tree his father saw (verse 8)? What tree does Nephi see? What justifies your answer?

Why is beauty a representation of good and godliness? Is there a connection between truth, goodness, and beauty?

How does Nephi know that the tree is precious (verse 9)?

**Verse 10:** Here the Spirit asks the same question that he asked in verse 2. Why? Is there some sense in which this is
the beginning of a second vision? If so, can you explain the connection of the two visions?

**Verse 11:** What has Nephi seen so far? When he asks for “the interpretation thereof,” what does he want to have explained for him? As you read the interpretation, compare it to what Lehi says about the tree (1 Nephi 8:11–12).

Nephi identifies the Spirit as the Spirit of the Lord. Does that phrase refer to the Holy Ghost or to the Son?

Why does Nephi tell us that he spoke with the Spirit as one person speaks with another? How is that relevant to this particular story?

How does the vision that follows correlate with Lehi’s vision, and if what follows is an interpretation of the beautiful tree, what does that tell us about Lehi’s vision?

**Verses 12–15:** Do you see any significance in the repetition of look in verses 8 and 12?

As you read these verses and those that follow, keep in mind that they are the answer to the question, “What does the tree mean?” Ask yourself how this vision answers that question. How does this interpretation fit into Lehi’s vision? Why doesn’t Lehi’s vision include this interpretation?

What do you make of the fact that verses 13 and 15 describe the virgin in the same language used in verses 8–9 to describe the tree?

In the Old Testament, the prophets frequently have to deal with people who worship the goddess Asherah, whose symbol is a pole or tree. In Canaanite religion, Asherah was the queen of heaven, the consort of El, and the mother of the...
gods. Does Nephi’s vision help us understand better why the Israelites might have found Canaanite religion so easy to adopt? One LDS author has argued that the Asherah was legitimately part of preexilic Hebrew worship and that Nephi’s vision reflects that fact (Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=9&num=2&id=223).

An angel appears before Nephi (verse 14) and continues the pattern of asking Nephi questions about his beliefs and, now, what he has seen. What is the point of that pattern?

**Verses 16–18:** As used here, the word *condescension* means “a voluntary stoop or descent from one’s rightful position.” Why does the angel ask Nephi about the condescension of God rather than about something else? It is relatively easy to see what condescension has to do with the part of the vision that is about to come, but does it have anything to do with what Nephi has already seen?

How is Nephi’s answer, “I know that he loveth his children,” an answer to the angel’s question (verse 17)?

Why does Nephi add, “I do not know the meaning of all things”? Since no human being does, that is a strange thing to say.

How is verse 18 related to the question of verse 16?

**Verses 19–23:** There is a kind of empty spot in the vision here: the virgin is carried away and then, after a while, re-appears, and as far as we know Nephi sees nothing in the interim (verse 19). Why do you think the vision might have
been given in that way? Why not proceed directly to the part of the vision that we see in verse 20?

Having shown Nephi the birth of Jesus, the angel asks (verse 21) whether Nephi now understands the meaning of the tree. How is the birth of Christ the interpretation or explanation of the tree?

Having seen the birth, Nephi says that the tree is the love of God (verse 22). How does he get that from what he has seen? What does it mean that the love of God “sheddest itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men”? (Compare Romans 5:5.)

In verse 8 Nephi saw that the tree was the most beautiful thing and the most white, in other words, the brightest thing. In verse 9 he saw that it was most precious. Now Nephi sees that it is most desirable (verse 22), and the angel says that it is the most joyous thing to the soul (verse 23). How are these things connected to each other? What does “joyous to the soul” mean? Does it mean the same as “joyous for the soul”?

Helaman 14:1–8

These questions are from The Book of Mormon Made Harder, lesson 35.

Verse 1: What might prevent these things from being written?

Verse 2: Why does the prophet give them a sign?
Verse 8: Does this mean that those who believe after having seen the sign will be saved? If so, isn’t that unfair to those who haven’t seen such signs?

3 Nephi 1:4–21

Verses 4–8: How do you understand the mixture of sorrow (“lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass”) and hope (“they did watch steadfastly for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night”)?

Verses 10–11: These verses both refer to “his people,” in other words the people of Nephi. But does that phrase mean the same thing in each verse? Why do you answer as you do?

Verses 12–13: “Be of good cheer” occurs with regularity in the New Testament and the Doctrine and Covenants. Given the way we use the word *cheer* today, it seems to mean “Be happy.” But in the King James Version of the Bible, the phrase was used to translate the Greek imperative verb *tharséo*, meaning “Take courage.” “Courage” is one of the older meanings of *cheer*. The word itself descends from a Middle English word that means “face.” It probably came to mean courage as well as to have its contemporary meaning, good feeling, because to have courage requires facing one’s foes or problems with a lifted up head and a face that no longer droops. Given that older meaning of *cheer*, what is the Lord admonishing Helaman? Why that particular admonition in these circumstances? Is that admonition a guarantee that all will be well?
Verse 14: What does the Lord mean when he says, “I come unto my own”? Why does he say that to Helaman? In other words, what is he telling him?

Can you explain what “all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world” means?

The Lord says that he came to do the will of both the Father and the Son. Then he explains that by saying “of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh.” What does the first half of that explanation mean? What does the second half mean?

3 Nephi 27:13–16

These questions can be found in The Book of Mormon Made Harder, lesson 42.

Verse 13ff.: Is the Savior giving a definition of the gospel in these verses? Though at first glance it might appear so, perhaps not. Of course, we don’t know what the Nephite word translated gospel was, so we don’t know any more about its meaning than we can deduce from the English word, but we do know about the English word and about the Greek word used by those who wrote the New Testament.

The English and Greek words both originally meant “to preach the good news.” For example, in Matthew 2:10 the phrase translated “I bring you good tidings” could also have been translated “I bring you the gospel.” (It is a verb rather than a noun in that verse, but the meaning is the same.) The word gospel wasn’t used to denote a set of doctrines in New
Testament times or in its first uses in English. Only later (perhaps about 1200) did the word come to be identified with the accounts of Christ’s ministry (the four Gospels), and only later than that did it come to refer to the doctrinal content of Christian preaching. It seems most likely, therefore, that in the Book of Mormon the word *gospel* has the older meaning: preaching glad tidings. If that’s true, we could paraphrase the first part of this verse like this:

_Behold I have preached my glad tidings to you, and these are the glad tidings I have preached to you._ . . .

Notice the first element of the good news: Christ came into the world to do the will of his Father, and he did so because his Father sent him. How is that good news?

We might expect Jesus to say something like “I came into the world to do the will of my Father in order to make salvation available to all.” What is important about the reason he gives for his mission?

**Verse 14:** The phrase “lifted up” has an obvious literal meaning in reference to the crucifixion. But what else might it say to us? For example, is any analogy intended between Christ being lifted up on the cross and the way in which the Father will lift us up? (Does this verse have anything to do with verses that tell us we must take up our cross (e.g., Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23; Galatians 6:12; Jacob 1:8; Alma 39:9; 3 Nephi 12:30; and D&C 23:6; 56:2; and 112:14)? What does the phrase “that I might draw all men unto me” imply? Why use the word _draw_?
Verse 15: What does this verse tell us about what Jesus means when he says he will “draw all men” unto him?

Verse 16: What does it mean to say that those who repent and are baptized will be filled? Does it have to do with having our hunger satisfied? Or are we missing something that is given with repentance and baptism?

Doctrine and Covenants 93:11–20

Verse 11: When did John behold the glory of the Only Begotten? Is he referring to a specific experience? What does it mean to say that glory was “as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father” (italics added)?

In the readings for lesson 3 we saw John speak of Jesus as full of grace and truth. Does the phrase mean the same thing here that it meant in John 1? If so, what is that? If not, what does it mean here?

Does “even the Spirit of truth” repeat the meaning of “full of grace and truth”? Both modify “the Only Begotten of the Father.” What does this phrase tell us about him?

Why is it important to know that God himself came and “dwelt in the flesh”?

Why is it important to John that he add “and dwelt among us”?

Does the word *dwelt* in the last two phrases carry meaning that we should consider when thinking about what John is teaching? Is there a difference between dwelling somewhere and merely being there?
**Verses 12–13:** What does “of the fulness” mean? Fullness of what? What does “grace for grace” mean? Is it the same as “from grace to grace”?

How did John see that Jesus didn’t receive “of the fulness” at first?

**Verse 14:** Does this verse suggest that the Father did receive “of the fulness at the first?” To what does “the first” refer in that phrase?

**Verse 15:** Was John present at Jesus’s baptism? If he wasn’t, how could he give this testimony? If he was, what evidence is there?

**Verses 16–17:** Does verse 16 tell us that Jesus received the fullness of the glory of the Father at his baptism, or has it moved to a new topic?

These verses tell us that Jesus received a fullness of the Father’s glory and that he received all power on heaven and earth. Does John want us to understand those to be two ways of saying the same thing, or is he talking about two different things that the Father gave his Son?

What does it mean to say that the Father dwelt in the Son since one embodied being cannot dwell in another?

**Verse 18:** To whom is this promise made?

**Verse 19:** How does what John teaches in the preceding verses teach us how to worship? Does that have implications for our Sunday worship? For our temple worship? For our private devotions?
The verse suggests that knowing how to worship and what we worship are necessary for coming to the Father in the name of the Son. How so?

**Verse 20:** What would it mean for us to have the same fullness and glory as the Son? Why is obedience required for that? What does obedience show? What does it do for us?

Does the way in which we receive grace for grace help us understand how Christ did? Or is it the other way around, understanding how he did can help us understand what it means for us too?