

January 31: Luke 1-2

Chapter 1

Vs 1-4, The Prologue is one long sentence to offer a formal introduction to the massive work that Luke has undertaken to write. Luke is the first volume (of 2) written by the same author, chronicling the history of Jesus Christ and the early church that followed him after his ascension. Luke wrote in the literary style of a historian, and set out to provide as thorough and orderly an account as possible –however, that does not mean that every word is historically accurate per se (as we’ll see in the dating of the birth narrative). Luke notes that he is writing what had been handed down to him by those who were eyewitnesses of the life and times of Jesus. Luke himself would have been too young to have travelled with Jesus personally, but it is likely that he knew and travelled with St. Paul. Luke describes the apostles, the eye witnesses, as “servants of the Word.” This is still how we describe our ministers –both deacons and pastors are considered “servants of the Word.” Luke addresses the prologue to “Theophilus.” No one knows who this person was, exactly. He was likely the patron who provided the funding for Luke to do his investigative work and to write down his account of the events, he was also likely a catechumen (an adult who was in the lengthy process of converting to Christianity), this often involved years of instruction in the faith. Luke notes that his purpose was for Theophilus to know the TRUTH about the things he’d already been instructed about, the gospel was not just good news, but a tool for growing in faith and knowledge about our Lord. In a figurative sense, any one of us reading the gospel takes on the role of Theophilus, as his name simply means “Lover of God” or “Beloved by God.” Each and every one of us reading are lovers of God, and beloved by God. Luke’s gospel is a gift to us, for the nurturing of our faith!

Vs. 5-25, We’re given an initial description of Zechariah and Elizabeth that paints both of them as prestigious beyond measure according to Jewish society. Zechariah was a priest in the line of Abijah, and Elizabeth’s family lineage can be traced all the way back to Aaron! They both were righteous before God and lived blamelessly. BUT... the scripture tells us that they were barren, for no apparent reason. This would have puzzled original audiences, for it was long held in Jewish belief that those who were barren were cursed by God for something they had done. Luke’s introduction to the couple leaves no room for believing that they could have done anything to bring this barrenness upon themselves. This would have been a great source of shame for Elizabeth especially, as at this time a couple would not have been considered officially married until there were children to prove that the marriage had been consummated.

Zechariah is finally visited by an angel and told that his wife will finally conceive and bear a son –their greatest wish and prayer had been answered- and that his son, even before birth, would be filled with the Holy Spirit (a prophet). The baby is to be named “John” which means “God is gracious.” John’s mission would be one of repentance, to turn God’s people back to loving God and living according to the commandments. John would open hearts and minds, following in the footsteps of one of Israel’s greatest prophets, Elijah. This baby is an answered prayer.

BUT...

Zechariah doesn't believe the angel! He asks "How will I know that this is so? What's my proof?" For which the angel struck him silent until all of what the angel said had come to pass.

Elizabeth's response to what God has done for her, models a faithful response to the good news. The reason for Elizabeth's 5 months of seclusion remain a mystery. It may be that she chose to remain in her house so as she could no longer bear to be treated publically as a barren woman when she knew such very good news. Perhaps she chose to remain secluded until her joy would be visible for all to see and celebrate.

Vs. 26-56, Six months later, the angel Gabriel is sent to visit Mary. The message is similar, but the setting and response to the message are extremely different! Gabriel starts off his visit by announcing that Mary is favored and that God is with her, even before she carries God in her womb. God's love and favor towards Mary is not because of anything that she has done. It's not noted (as it was for Zechariah and Elizabeth) that she is especially righteous or faithful. Mary is an ordinary teenage girl from a small town, as far as the text indicates. This visit is pure grace. She didn't earn God's favor, but God favors her anyway! Gabriel announces that she will conceive the Son of God, and Mary asks a similar question to that of Zechariah, but in this case tone is everything! Zechariah's question was one of disbelief, whereas, Mary wanted to understand the mechanics of what Gabriel was talking about. Her question was not one of disbelief, but rather of genuinely seeking to understand what God was about to do. From this very earliest introduction to Mary, she is a theologian (theology= faith seeking understanding). Gabriel answers her question (kind of?) and then offers her a sign to confirm that this was happening, even though she didn't ask for one (remember, Zechariah got in trouble for asking for proof). Elizabeth's pregnancy is proof for Mary that what Gabriel said would come to pass for her as well. Mary responds to this message with bold, daring faith, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word!"

When has God asked you to do something challenging? Who have been the messengers in your life?

Immediately, Mary went to visit Elizabeth, this would have been as much for her safety as for her curiosity. Before John the Baptist was a prophet, his mother, Elizabeth was a prophetess, announcing for Mary that she was the Mother of the Lord before she would have known this herself! Elizabeth announces that Mary is blessed because she believed that what God said would happen. Mary's response to Elizabeth's greeting is the Magnificat, a soaring song of praise and resistance to the world as it is. The Magnificat envisions the world as it will be when God's will is done on earth, and recalls that God is the one who saves and delivers the people from one generation to another. Her song is very similar to Hannah's song from 1 Samuel 2.

Vs 57-80, Baby John is born and Zechariah is still silent until he announces to the religious leaders that the baby's name is John, just like the angel said. With this act of faith, all that Gabriel said would happen for their family did happen, and Zechariah's tongue was unbound. He immediately broke out into song, just as Mary had in the Magnificat. Singing is an expression of joy AND of faith. Zechariah's song chronicles God's ancient fulfillment of God's promises, while pointing to the reality that the birth of his son is the dawn of a new era of God's salvation of God's people. John's sacred mission is to be a prophet of God by preparing

the way for God, giving knowledge of salvation to the people. Through John's ministry, God would guide the people's feet in the way of peace.

Who should we expect to believe Gabriel? Vs. Who does believe?

Zechariah

- Old
- Male
- Served as a priest
- Prestigious
- Lived near Jerusalem (the hill country)
- Lived faithfully, righteously
- Married
- Barren

Mary

- Young (likely around 14)
- Female
- No job description
- Nothing remarkable
- Lived in rural, small town Nazareth
- Nothing mentioned about her faith
- Unmarried, engaged
- Virgin

Chapter 2

Luke sets the backdrop of Jesus' birth against the world stage. All of these super important people are out there doing important things in important places, but the most important event the world has ever seen takes place in a barn in Bethlehem with people who would not have been considered important. Luke drops these names as a means of contrasting their lives with Jesus' birth, but the people he names didn't necessarily all rule at during the same historical time frame. Augustus, for instance, ruled Rome from 31-14BC. The registration that is named has never been historically established, but it was a common Roman practice for oppressing conquered peoples for the purposes of taxation. Nazareth to Bethlehem is an 80 mile journey, it likely took them 4 days to walk this journey. There is no donkey mentioned in the Bible, however, if they did use a donkey to travel with the journey would have taken longer than if they had walked the whole way (perhaps more like 7 days). The scripture doesn't say that Mary gave birth as soon as they arrived, it just says that sometime while they were in Bethlehem the time came. However, there was nowhere available for her to give birth. The word for inn could also mean guest room... so, this could have been talking about an actual inn, or could have simply meant that all of Joseph's relatives' homes were full up. Either way, the inhospitable nature of the story is true. Mary is forced to give birth in the barn. No animals are specifically mentioned, but a manger is an animal's feeding trough, that's how we know that they were in the barn. Shepherds were considered dirty and lived on the margins of society, yet these are the first ones to hear the good news from God. The angel chorus erupts and announces the good news of great joy, that Jesus, the Messiah, has come to bring peace to the earth.

Just as John was named and circumcised on the 8th day, so too was Jesus, as the son of a faithful Jewish family. The purification would have been 40 days after Jesus' birth (think of this as a religious post-partum check up). The family consecrated Jesus to the Lord as the first born son, offering the appropriate animal sacrifice as an offering of thanksgiving to God. While there, Simeon was guided by the Spirit to find the Lord's Messiah in the Temple. He took the baby Jesus in his arms and broke out into the soaring song of praise we know

liturgically as the Nunc Dimittis “Now Lord You Let Your Servant Go In Peace.” Simeon expresses what it feels like to look into the eyes of salvation himself. Mary and Joseph were amazed at what was being said about Jesus. Had they forgotten what had happened on Christmas night? Simeon offered Jesus a prophet’s blessing, but it comes across as a curse – this little baby was himself salvation, but he would be opposed and break his mother’s heart.

We’re told that Jesus grows in wisdom, and then fast forward 12 years to the only story we have about Jesus’ childhood. Jesus is right on the cusp of adulthood in Jewish tradition. He doesn’t intend to hurt or alarm his parents, but he stays behind engrossed in learning from the temple sages. Jesus will grow up to be a rabbi and will have conflicts with perhaps some of these same teachers when he becomes the Teacher. Luke makes clear through this story that while Joseph was his earthly father and concerned for him the way any father would be, that Jesus knew who his true father was, and wanted to learn as much as he could about God. I always think that perhaps this was the one thing Jesus ever did to cause his parents anxiety, which is how this became the one story we have about Jesus from his childhood, it stands out from the rest of his childhood. Luke writes that Jesus returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

February 7: Luke 3 & Introduction to Luke

February 14: Luke 4-5

February 21: Luke 6-7

February 28: Luke 8-9

March 7: Luke 10-11

March 14: Luke 12-13

March 21: Luke 14-15

March 28: Luke 16-17

April 4: Luke 18-19

April 11: Luke 20-21

April 18: Luke 22-23 (Maundy Thursday)

April 25: Luke 24