

Sunday School Lesson

**The Birth & Childhood of Jesus** (October 9, 2022)

Lloyd Candell's death Wed, Oct 5; last taught in 2016  
Kirkin' next Sunday => no SS

**Introduction:**

As we study the life of Jesus, as described by Luke, it is helpful to remember that Luke's perspective was that Jesus is the hope of the whole world. But, Luke is not a Universalist: he says everyone can be saved, but not that everyone will be saved. Luke is most effective because he is addressing his message to Theophilus, an individual who could easily be any one of us. His name is Greek and means "Friend of God," or "Lover of God." Is that not us, too?

Each of the four Gospels was written to a different audience; Luke was written to the Greeks. He is the only Gospel author who did not personally ever meet Jesus, so his book is based on his conversations with eyewitnesses and his observations of the "early saints" who were living out their faith in their daily lives. It is not one man's fantasy, but a collection of accounts from a variety of first-person participants and witnesses. If these accounts were not accurate, there were plenty of other people around to challenge the facts. Watch for instances where Luke emphasized the role of women, also children, the poor, and the disreputable.<sup>1</sup>

Luke was "the beloved physician" (Col 4:14), and the friend and travel companion of Paul. He joined Paul in Troas, during Paul's second missionary journey. Apparently, he stayed in Philippi until Paul came back on this third journey. From there he accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and Rome. He was with Paul when Paul wrote to Colossae, to Philemon, and to Timothy.

Luke also wrote what we know of as The Acts of the Apostles. Since neither document includes any mention of the destruction of the Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, or the death of his friend Paul, some scholars date this text before that, while others date it 80-90 AD.

**Preface:**

Luke lays out what and why he is creating this document. Read **Luke 1:1-4**.

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<sup>1</sup> Tynsdale, Luke, p. 44.

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.*

“An orderly account” – how Presbyterian of him! ☺

### **John the Baptist**

Remembering back to Exodus, Moses brother, Aaron, had four sons. Two of them, Nadab and Abihu, died in a fire they started to burn incense when they weren't supposed to be doing so (God was credited with striking them down). The two remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, produced many families, all serving as priests to the Israelites. In 1 Chronicles 24, King David divided the descendants of those two men, by casting lots, to determine the sequence of each family's service in the tabernacle.

Fast forward: In the time of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah (“Zacharias” KJV), of the division of Abijah (ah-by-yah). His name meant “The Lord Remembers.” He had a wife named Elizabeth, also a descendant of Aaron. It was a special blessing to Zechariah that he should be able to marry the daughter of priest. They were both fairly old – Zechariah was senior enough to qualify to serve in the tabernacle - but they had no children. At that time married women were shamed for not having children – common folk thought you were being punished for doing something wrong, or that God did not like you.

Zechariah meets an angle while he is serving in the tabernacle. You remember about the bells at the bottom of the priest's robe and the rope around his ankle to pull him out? Well, it's Zechariah's turn to go in to the Holy of Holies by himself to burn incense. As a priest he got to make this incense offering only once in his lifetime (per Mishnah, *Tamid* 5:2), and many priests never got this opportunity, so this was the biggest day of Zechariah's life. Read **Luke 1:8-12**.

<sup>8</sup> Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. <sup>11</sup> And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> And Zechari'ah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

What did the angel say to Zechariah? The angel gives him instructions for raising the child. Read **Luke 1:13-17**

<sup>13</sup> *But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechari'ah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.*

<sup>14</sup> *And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth;*

<sup>15</sup> *for he will be great before the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.*

<sup>16</sup> *And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God,*

<sup>17</sup> *and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Eli'jah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."*

Previously the Holy Spirit came to certain people at certain times, to help them accomplish certain tasks. John will be the first person filled with the Holy Spirit from the very start! In Acts 2:17 Peter said, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" After that it will be possible for all believers to live in the Spirit, but John was the first.<sup>2</sup>

Zechariah was immediately fearful – who wouldn't be?? He challenged the angel, and suffered for it. Read **Luke 1:18-23**.

<sup>18</sup> *And Zechari'ah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."* <sup>19</sup> *And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news."* <sup>20</sup> *And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."* <sup>21</sup> *And the people were waiting for Zechari'ah, and they wondered at his delay in the temple.* <sup>22</sup> *And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb.* <sup>23</sup> *And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.*

Can you imagine what it would be like to go home to your family after a day like this and NOT be able to tell what happened??

Well, Elizabeth got pregnant and felt vindicated among her tongue-wagging neighbors.

<sup>24</sup> *After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying,* <sup>25</sup> *"Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."* Luke 1: 24-25

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<sup>2</sup> Larson, Mastering the Old Testament, p. 30.

## **Jesus' Birth Prophesized**

When Elizabeth reached her sixth month, God sent the angle Gabriel to Nazareth to see a virgin, named Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph, of the house of David.

<sup>28</sup> *And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"* <sup>29</sup> *But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be.* <sup>30</sup> *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* <sup>31</sup> *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.*

<sup>32</sup> *He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,* <sup>33</sup> *and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

<sup>34</sup> *And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?"* <sup>35</sup> *And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.*

<sup>36</sup> *And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.* <sup>37</sup> *For with God nothing will be impossible."* <sup>38</sup> *And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* *And the angel departed from her.*

Using the Apostles' Creed, we Presbyterians affirm that we believe in the Virgin Birth. Some other Christian sects do not require this belief. But if you doubt it, then J.B. Phillips would challenge you with his book, *Your God Is Too Small* (1986). In any event, ALL Christians are required to believe that God was in Jesus as in no other human.

Some sources claim Mary & Elizabeth were cousins, but the Greek word for "cousin" also means "kinswoman." Mary went to visit Elizabeth, and even Elizabeth's unborn baby got excited! Read **Luke 1:39-45**.

<sup>39</sup> *In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah,* <sup>40</sup> *and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.* <sup>41</sup> *And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit* <sup>42</sup> *and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"* <sup>43</sup> *And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* <sup>44</sup> *For behold, when the voice of your greeting*

*came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy.<sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”*

### **Hymns in Luke**

Much of the great beauty of Luke’s writing is in the hymns that he transcribed in his text.

#### **Magnificat of Mary (1:46-55) – her response to the angle’s message**

This begins with praise and continues with thankfulness for all that God has done (included previous events), and dwells on His power, His holiness and His mercy.<sup>3</sup>

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;  
<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
<sup>50</sup> And his mercy is on those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,  
<sup>52</sup> he has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
and exalted those of low degree;  
<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent empty away.  
<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
<sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”

#### **Benedictus of Zechariah (1:67-79)**

When the baby was eight days old the priests came with a crowd to circumcise the baby and give it a name. At first they wanted to name the baby after Zechariah, after his father, but Zechariah protested. When they asked what the name should be, he wrote “John.” And, suddenly, he was able to speak again!

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<sup>3</sup> Morris, Luke, p. 84.

Zechariah begins with thanks to God. Then, instead of expounding on his new son, he prophesizes about the salvation that the coming Messiah will bring. Zechariah reminds the people that God keeps His promises/covenants, especially the one to Abraham that the people will serve Him without fear and live in holiness and righteousness.

<sup>67</sup> And his father Zechari'ah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,

<sup>68</sup> "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has visited and redeemed his people,

<sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us

in the house of his servant David,

<sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

<sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies,

and from the hand of all who hate us;

<sup>72</sup> to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,

and to remember his holy covenant,

<sup>73</sup> the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, <sup>74</sup> to grant us

that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,

might serve him without fear,

<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

<sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

<sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people

in the forgiveness of their sins,

<sup>78</sup> through the tender mercy of our God,

when the day shall dawn upon us from on high

<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace."

### **The Christmas Story - Gloria in Excelsis of the Angles (2:13-14)**

Luke includes the angles and shepherds, but not the wise men (those are in Matthew's version).

Caesar Augustus, nephew of Julius Caesar, wanted a census made of his entire realm, so everyone was supposed to go to the home town of the family patriarch to be counted. Since Joseph was descended from David, he had to take his wife with him to Bethlehem, about 70 miles. She is WAY pregnant and had to walk or ride on a donkey.

**Read the Christmas Story – Luke 2:8-20**

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

It could easily have been that all guest rooms in town were filled with out-of-towners coming for the census, and Mary and Joseph arrived late in the evening. It is also possible that in such a small town, the people knew Mary as pregnant and unmarried, so they didn't want her in their house.

Later, Jesus will explain that He has come for the sinners, the outcasts, and the lost. That message starts here, with the angles delivering their joyous message straight to shepherds, some of the lowest class at that time.

### **Nunc Dimittis of Simeon (2:28-32)**

When the time came for their purification, Mary and Joseph brought the baby to the temple. The proper sacrifice would be a lamb and a dove, but they were too poor to afford one, so the Law allowed them to give a pair of turtle doves or pigeons. The Holy Spirit brought Simeon, a Pharisee, and Anna, a priestess, to the temple at the same time that Mary and Joseph were there. Moved by the Holy Spirit, Simeon recognized the significance in the baby Jesus. He pronounced that Jesus was the Messiah and not just for Jews, but for ALL people.

<sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

<sup>29</sup> “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.”

### **Jesus in The Temple**

When Jesus was 12 his parents took him for the annual trip to Jerusalem for Passover. That's about 64 miles – by foot. People usually made this kind of trip in groups, with the women leading the caravan and the men following. On their way home Mary and Joseph each assumed that Jesus was walking with the other. It was not till night that they discovered he was not among the crowd. Mary

chastised the boy and said it took them three days to find him (probably one day out of Jerusalem, one day back, and one day looking in Jerusalem). Read **Luke 2:49-51**.

<sup>49</sup> *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?"* <sup>50</sup> *And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them.* <sup>51</sup> *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.*

I believe that Jesus is not denying Joseph's fathership, rather He is introducing the concept of "Abba," the Father God.

### **Summary:**

Thinking back to Zechariah's celebration, Martin Luther had a solution for his dark and discouraging days that we all have; he would say to himself over and over, "I am baptized. I am baptized." He affirmed that whatever was happening to him at the moment, he was a child of the covenant God had made with His people. Try that on one of your bad day. You might get surprising results.<sup>4</sup>

*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.*

- Luke 2:52

### **References:**

1. Asbury Bible Commentary (on line), <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/asbury-bible-commentary/LUKE>
2. Harper Study Bible, Revised Standard Version, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985.
3. Henry, Matthew, Commentary on the Whole Bible, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1961, pp. 1408-1241.
4. Larson, Bruce, Mastering The New Testament: Luke, Lloyd Ogilvie, General Editor, Word Publishing, Dallas, TX, 1983.
5. Morris, Leon, Tynsdale New Testament Commentaries: Luke, Inter-Varsity Press, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989,
6. NRSV Bible on-line: <http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>
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8. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%201&version=RSV>

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<sup>4</sup> Larson, Luke, p. 45.

Reading Assignments:

<b>1. Luke 1:1-4</b>	<b>2. Luke 1:8-12</b>
<b>3. Luke 1:13-17</b>	<b>4. Luke 1:18-23</b>
<b>5. Luke 1:39-45</b>	<b>6.</b>