

The Gospel of Luke – Dawn of a New Era (1:1-38)

Prologue (1:1-4)

1. Author: Luke (Some oldest MSS has title 'According to Luke.') "*Luke the beloved physician...*" (Col 4:14). Luke uses ~50 medical terms such as 'high fever', 'leprosy', etc.
 - a. Luke is a marvellous storyteller with many materials unique to Luke. E.g. Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, Zacchaeus, Lazarus, etc.
 - b. It is the only gospel to have a sequel of history: [Luke-Acts] – constitutes to largest portion of NT writing by any single writer (being the only gentile writer of NT).
2. It is addressed to 'Theophilus' – 'lover of God' (possibly a Roman official = 'Gentile'). *Whoever loves God will love this gospel of Luke.*
 - a. Somebody said of Luke's gospel as the '*loveliest book in the world.*' (1) The word 'salvation' mentioned more than any other gospels (not so in Matthew or Mark). Also mentions 'peace' (x 13) [Matthew x 4, Mark x 1, John x 6]. (2) There is more teaching on 'prayer' & 'praise' in Luke's gospel than the rest of NT – i.e. Gospel reaching up to heaven. (3) Also it reaches down to earth to all mankind. Jesus' genealogy goes back to Adam, not Abraham. (4) Gospel for the weak & poor: Women disciples are prominent – Elizabeth, Mary, Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, etc. Widow's mite, poor Lazarus, Zacchaeus, etc. These are not much in this world, but they can praise the Lord and touch heaven and are honoured by God.
 - b. Luke assumes not much knowledge of Jewish religion & tradition in his readers (not a lot of quotation of OT Scripture). Starting from scratch! A perfect for new gentile believers.
 - c. 4 gospels as 4 portraits of Jesus: Matthew (Lion) – King of the Jews. Mark (Ox) – The Suffering Servant. John (Eagle) – The Son of God. Luke (Man) – Saviour of the world (humanity of Jesus). The only gospel writer that says, "I" – personal gospel!
3. Why did Luke write this gospel?
 - a. For the 'lovers of God' to know with certainty in orderly way the true accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus. All kinds of legends & funny stories float around after some time and muddy the story of Jesus. (e.g. gospel of Thomas, etc.) Therefore, Luke as a doctor who is very careful with the accurate recording practices, has put together only the historical facts about the life and teaching of Jesus so we can know Jesus with certainly!

Dawn of a New Era

With Malachi as the last prophetic voice to Israel, God had been silent for more than 400 years. It was a very dark period of Jewish history, marred with persecution and bloodshed. Herod (Edomite, ie. Esau's descendant) was installed by Romans as their puppet king over Israel, which deeply angered the Jewish people.

Suddenly the light dawned as God starts to speak to His people again after 400 years of silence through Angel Gabriel to two Jewish women who couldn't naturally have children. One was too old (Elizabeth). The other was too young and did not know a man, ~15-16 y.o. (Mary).

John's Birth Announced

1. Zacharias (from the division of Abijah) & Elizabeth both from 'priestly line'. Although they were 'righteous before God' and 'blameless' (v.6) they were barren. Cause for much grief & prayer. Now they are well past childbearing age – *'well advanced in years.'*
2. Zacharias' big day to go behind the veil and offer incense at the altar of God. Background: Priesthood had 24 division – 24 shifts (1 Chr 24:1-6, 10) each shift took about 1 week. Each division gets 2 chances per year. ~1000 priests who lived around Jerusalem. So they cast lots to choose the one to offer incense (prayer) while people prayed outside. Many priests never get to offer incense in their lifetime. [A priest could not offer incense more than once in their lifetime (Mishnah, Tamid 5:2)]. For the first time Zacharias was chosen to offer incense – privilege of a lifetime!
3. Suddenly an angel of the Lord (Gabriel) appears and announces:
(1) About Zacharias: (a) 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias...' (x 366 in the Bible!). (b) 'Your prayer is heard....' After so many years & after they had given up?! (Zacharias = 'The Lord has remembered.' Elizabeth = 'God's faithfulness/promise'). (c) 'and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. (d) 'You shall call his name John...' (John = 'God is gracious'). (e) 'You will have joy and gladness...'.
(2) John's Life & Mission Prophesied – (a) 'He will be great in the sight of the Lord...' (what a great prayer for our children); (b) life of focus & dedication (Nazarite lifestyle); (c) filled with Holy Spirit from birth (to be taught by the Spirit in wilderness); (d) 'spirit and the power of Elijah' (c.f. Mal 4:5-6): (e) Elijah's task = 'to turn the hearts' & 'to make ready a people prepared for the Lord'. (c.f. Matthew 17:11)
4. Zacharias (godly but unbelieving) asks 'how?' Zacharias was struck with muteness for unbelief for 9 months. Why? 'to deeply ponder and understand what it all means.' Finally, when Zacharias came out of the temple, he couldn't bless the people (Mishnah, Tamid 7:2) because he was struck with muteness – dent to his pride. So the people understood that he had seen a vision.

Jesus' Birth Announced

1. 6 months later Gabriel visits Mary in a country town of Nazareth. Mary was a young girl ~15-16 betrothed to marry Joseph (both from 'royal line' of David). Zacharias/Elizabeth from rich priestly line from Jerusalem – central metropolis. Mary/Joseph from poor northern town of Nazareth of Galilee – gentiles & crossroads of trade route.
2. Background: (Although marriage was not consummated by physical union betrothal couldn't be dissolved except by divorce). Suddenly Angel Gabriel walked into her home (at the kitchen sink?) with unusual greeting: "*Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!*" (v.29; c.f. Eph 1:6 – 'accepted in the Beloved – i.e. 'made us the objects of His grace')
3. Gabriel's announcement
(1) About Mary: (a) 'Do not be afraid, Mary...' (b) 'you have found favour with God...' (c) you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son.' (d) 'shall call His name JESUS.'
(2) About Jesus: (a) 'He will be great, and will be called the *Son of the Highest.*' (b) 'throne of His father David.' (c) 'He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of *His kingdom there will be no end.*'
4. Mary asks "How?"
 - a. *Mary understood by revelation that it would be without Joseph's involvement.* ('Son of the Highest' & eternal kingdom = divine seed of God!)
 - b. Gabriel unveils further, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you...that the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

- c. Sign of old Elizabeth's supernatural conception through Zacharias into 6 months. If God can do it with Elizabeth, God can do it with Mary also even without a man's involvement.
- d. Mary's question of 'how' is answered by Gabriel: *"For with God nothing will be impossible."* (1:37)
 Literal rendering: *"For every word of God (rhema) is not without power."* – i.e. the very power to fulfil every word is within the spoken word of God itself. When we receive that spoken word of God in faith that seed gets implanted into our spirit, and all the necessary power to fulfil that word is within that seed.
'Mary must have conceived God's word in her spirit (heart) by believing, before she bore Jesus in her womb.'
- e. *"Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to Your word."* – The attitude of 'humble faith' which God already knew Mary possessed – highly favoured one!
- Consider that for Elizabeth, the news of her conception would bring great joy and removal of her reproach. However, for Mary this conception would bring reproach and possible death! How can you explain to anyone including Joseph? Her hour of destiny came to her in the worst possible timing of betrothal! Mary had to risk being misunderstood, mistreated, maligned, possibly lose his husband, future. But she said, "Yes" to God.
 - If God asks you to use your "womb" for His purpose, what would be your answer? If God asks to use your body, reputation, life for His glorious purpose, what is your answer?

Challenge:

- Why is Mary called 'highly favoured one'? The only woman in human history to bear the Son of God for 9 months! However, the same favour is also given to us (c.f. Eph 1:6).
 Why? We are called to carry Jesus in our heart (spirit)! That is more important than anything else in our life!
- The highest & holiest calling: *"According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death."* (Phil 1:20)
- *"...it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me..."* (Gal 1:15-16)
- Are we ashamed to carry Christ in our life for the fear of being ridiculed or rejected?

Discussion Questions

1. What do we learn about prayer and God's answer from how God answered Zacharias' prayer? (1:13-17)
2. What is the significance of John's life and destiny in the light of Malachi 4:5-6 prophecy? How does this prophecy relate to us Christians today?
3. What do we learn from Gabriel's answer to Mary on how God works miracles? (1:35-37)
4. What did it mean for Mary to say "Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to Your word." What would you say if you are in Mary's place today?
5. Read Paul's confession in Philipians 1:20, and Galatians 1:15-16. In what ways are we in the same situation as Mary? Can you make Philipians 1:20 & Galatians 1:15-16 your personal confession?