

Gospel of Luke

Jesus, Savior of the World



Introductory Material

- Overview of Syllabus
- Where are we headed?
- Maps



Biography of Luke

- It is generally held that St. Luke was a native of Antioch
- St. Luke was not a Jew, but a Greek
- Physician with liberal education
- Appears in ACTS in the city of Troas
- in the three places where he is mentioned in the Epistles (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11)
- St. Luke is always represented by the calf or ox



Purpose and Content

- The Gospel was written, as is gathered from the prologue (i, 1-4), for the purpose of giving Theophilus (and others like him) increased confidence in the unshakable firmness of the Christian truths in which he had been instructed, or "catechized"
- four divisions:
 - ✓ Gospel of the infancy, roughly covered by the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary (ch. i, ii);
 - ✓ ministry in Galilee, from the preaching of John the Baptist (iii, 1, to ix, 50);
 - ✓ journeyings towards Jerusalem (ix, 51-xix, 27);
 - ✓ Holy Week: preaching in and near Jerusalem, Passion, and Resurrection (xix, 28, to end of xxiv).



Purpose and Content

- Out of twenty miracles which he records six are not found in the other Gospels
- In Luke's edition of the Gospel we find preserved some of the most famous and moving parables spoken by Jesus
- The account of the journeys towards Jerusalem (ix, 51-xix, 27) is found only in St. Luke; and he gives special prominence to the duty of prayer
- Luke has also taken a particular interest in noting down words and deeds of Jesus concerning women
- What was Jesus' attitude towards women? Did they have a place in his affection and did they have a part to play in Jesus' plan of salvation?



The Synoptic Issue

- "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word"
- written documents
- From a study of the Gospel we know that Luke collected the material for his book from three sources
 - ✓ catechetical teaching, which we also find in Mark and Matthew
 - ✓ "Q"
 - ✓ traditions specially known to Luke



Purpose and Content

- We have to consider two elements in detail:
- ✓ Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem - Why did Luke stress the journey?
- ✓ Luke's Preface -By his preface Luke indicated that his book was similar in purpose: to help students assimilate a course of instruction.
- Who was the 'Theophilos'
- From this prologue we may draw some conclusions:
- ✓ LUKE'S GOSPEL PRESUPPOSES THE EXISTENCE OF THE CATECHETICAL TEACHING OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE. IT AIMS AT PROVIDING FURTHER READING ON THE SUBJECT.
- ✓ LUKE'S GOSPEL INTENDS TO EXPLAIN AND CONFIRM THE ANCIENT APOSTOLIC TEACHING TO GREEK CONVERTS.



Infancy Narratives

- How does one extract theology from a narrative?
- The infancy material in Luke 1:5--2:52 is an example of a narrative text that is full of theology.
- ✓ It reviews and previews events,
- ✓ uses scriptural quotations and allusions to reveal God's purpose,
- ✓ reveals that purpose through dialogue from God's commissioned agents, and
- ✓ gives testimony through reliable characters within the account



Infancy Narratives

- In fact, these first two chapters serve as an overture to the Gospel, revealing the major themes that Luke will develop throughout his portrayal of Jesus
- John is the major focus of Luke 1:5-25, 46-80, while Jesus is the subject in Luke 1:26-38 and 2:1-40
- three points stand out:
 - ✓ Jesus is superior to John,
 - ✓ God is bringing to pass what he promised long ago, and
 - ✓ what God promises now through his Word will come to pass



Infancy Narratives

- Luke introduces the parents of John as pious, law-abiding saints
- Yet despite their righteousness, they have suffered the disappointment of barrenness, a condition Elizabeth will later refer to as a *disgrace*
- Elizabeth's feelings are perfectly understandable, but to be barren is not an indication of the presence of sin or of condemnation; it may be an opportunity for blessing
- The announcement of John's birth comes at a high moment in Zechariah's career
- **Angelic visitation** The angelic announcement proceeds in stages
 - ✓ the child's name (v. 13),
 - ✓ the response to the child (v. 14),
 - ✓ the position and character of the child (v. 15)
 - ✓ and the mission of the child (vv. 16-17)



Infancy Narratives

- Zechariah's response, though coming from a pious man, is very human.
- In response, the angel announces his name, Gabriel, and indicates that God will bring his promise to pass
- To drive the point home, Zechariah becomes temporarily deaf and dumb
- God's word will be realized. So Elizabeth becomes the next one to encounter his work



Announcement of the Birth of Jesus

- The announcement to Mary sets up a parallel to John's birth and mirrors a number of birth announcements in the Old Testament
- God again takes the initiative
- Mary's chaste character is highlighted
- The announcement of Jesus' birth, which is formulated like Old Testament announcements
- So Jesus is not only *great*, as John was, but *Son of the Most High, Son of God*
- To Jewish ears this would be the same as calling him king



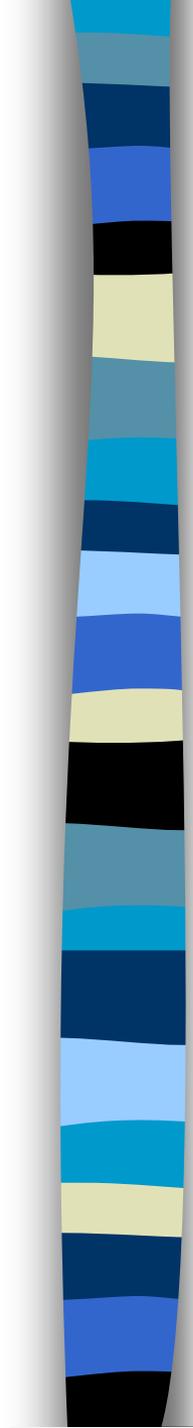
Announcement of the Birth of Jesus

- Luke chooses to present Jesus from the "earth up"-- that is, showing how, one step at a time
- Only slowly do people grasp all of what is promised.
- Luke's approach is different from that of the Gospel of John, which presents Jesus as sent from heaven to earth
- Mary's faith is put on the line at the start.
- The angel notes the life that is stirring within the womb of an elderly woman, Elizabeth, Mary's relative. Thus John serves as a pointer to Jesus not only in his preaching but also in his birth.



Mary's Meeting with Elizabeth

- In terms of Luke's plot, this meeting expands Luke's characterization and serves as a crucial pivot in the infancy narrative.
- John's ministry starts very early; he is a forerunner even as he responds in Elizabeth's womb
- Elizabeth is exemplary in her response
- Elizabeth recognizes the unique blessedness of Mary because of the child she bears



Mary's Meeting with Elizabeth

- Elizabeth also reveals a second exemplary attribute, one that also is found in Mary. While reporting the leaping of John in her womb, she expresses a beatitude for Mary's faith: "*Blessed is she who has believed.*"
- To be blessed is to be happy because God has touched one's life.
- The first sign of such faith in Mary was her willingness to let God use her (v. 38). The second was her immediate (*hurried*) visit to Elizabeth, who herself served as a sign that God keeps his word and can give life (vv. 36, 39).



Mary's Hymn of Praise: Magnificat

- Mary's hymn is one of three major hymnic pieces in the infancy material (the others are known as the **Benedictus**, Lk 1:67-79, and **Nunc Dimittis**, Lk 2:28-32)
- Mary's hymn expresses praise to God for his treatment of her, but then extends her praise to how God has treated the righteous throughout the ages and how he will vindicate them fully in the future
- Mary is exemplary of the humble, faithful disciple
- She *glorifies the Lord*, which means her words acknowledge his goodness and bring attention to him like a huge neon light shining out from a building



Mary's Hymn of Praise: Magnificat

- The exemplary character of Mary grows out of her understanding of God's character. God owes her nothing; she owes God everything. All the good things that come from his hand are acts of grace.
- Mary generalizes her praise: God's *mercy extends to those who fear him*. This description is important in setting the context of the hymn's statements
- Loyal love is the hymn's basic theme, and God's treatment of Mary is but one example. His divine loyalty requires his action on behalf of the beloved. Those who stand in opposition will face God's power and authority to bring down.



Mary's Hymn of Praise: Magnificat

- Here is God working on behalf of the pious downtrodden, a group the Old Testament called the *'anauim* (Ps 9:11-12, 17-20; 10:1-4; 12:1-5; 18:25-29).
- These verses express the traditional Jewish hope of vindication in the face of oppression at the hands of foreign, pagan rulers
- Mary's remarks are often misinterpreted in two directions
- Luke raises a theme here that he will return to again and again: God's desire to minister to the poor



Mary's Hymn of Praise: Magnificat

- One of the lessons of the infancy section is that God keeps his word, including the promises made to the nation of Israel.
- Though Luke will develop the concept of God's constant care for Israel according to covenant promise, his portrayal of Mary here shows a woman confident that God will care for a remnant in his nation
- In fact, the two points of assurance are linked. Since God remembers the loyal love promised in covenant to Israel, Theophilus can rest assured that God will remember his promises to this Gentile believer



The Birth and Naming of John

- As in Luke 1:39-56, where there was a meeting (1:39-45) and then a hymn (1:46-56), John's birth is followed by a hymn
- The difference is that Mary's hymn focused on how God deals with his people, while Zechariah's hymn will highlight the main players who bring such blessing on humanity, John's Birth (1:57-58)
- Those who had shared her pain now rejoice with her. God's mercy expresses itself in concrete, loving action. The Surprise in the Naming of John (1:59-66)
- Many features of the naming of John are surprising



The Birth and Naming of John

- The crowd fully expects custom to be followed
- Elizabeth rejects the crowd's desire and goes her own way.
- The protest of the crowd shows that they are unaware of what God is doing.
- The event has three unusual features: (1) the old have given birth, (2) the child has a strange name, and (3) Zechariah's handicap is taken away, whereupon he launches into praise about what God is doing.
- With John, God has prepared the way for his promise. God's ways were not traditional or what had been culturally expected, but they were his ways nonetheless. Sometimes going God's way means going against the grain of our ways.



Zechariah's Hymn: Benedictus

- This hymn surveys God's plan through the forerunner and the anointed Davidic heir
- Luke describes the hymn as Spirit-inspired
- John's birth means that God is once again working actively to redeem his promise
- This Messiah is a picture of strength, which is why Zechariah mentions the *horn*
- The promise involves rescue: God will save his people from their *enemies* and *from all who hate* them
- But what is the goal of this salvation? Here is perhaps the most insightful part of the hymn.



Zechariah's Hymn: Benedictus

- The meaning of life comes in faithful service to a holy God
- Who are the enemies referred to in the hymn?
- To ask what the hymn means for Luke, we need only to see how he develops the theme of enemies within his Gospel
- To know Jesus is to have access to authority that can overcome the presence of evil
- Two agents are responsible for this work. John the Baptist, as prophet, *will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him*



Zechariah's Hymn: Benedictus

- For Luke, God is the producer-planner and Jesus is the plan's directing agent. John's preparation involves giving *knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins*. Forgiveness is a major Lukan theme
- Forgiveness is also a principal component of the expression of God's *tender mercy*.
- So John and Jesus come by God's mercy to prepare and lead God's people. John will proclaim salvation, but Jesus will take them to it.



The Witness of a Man and Woman at the Temple

- The testimony to Jesus continues as both a prophet and a prophetess reveal God's plan.
- Anna's and Simeon's prophecies share a note of hope and expectation, along with declarations that in this child God's promise is moving into realization.
- Here two old and wise prophets of Jewish piety speak not only for the nation but for all humankind, as Simeon's prophecy mentions Jesus' relationship to the Gentiles
- Jesus' parents are law-abiding Jews
- They show up at the temple to perform sacrifices associated with the wife's purification after birth



The Witness of a Man and Woman at the Temple

- At the same time the firstborn child is to be set aside to the Lord
- They offer *a pair of doves or two young pigeons* - offering is the one usually made by the poor, Jesus is identified with the very people he reached out to save
- The Spirit leads an old man to the temple to greet Jesus
- Simeon's remarks are set within a hymn known as the **Nunc Dimittis** Simeon can die in peace because *my eyes have seen your salvation*



The Witness of a Man and Woman at the Temple

- To see Jesus is to see God's salvation. They are inseparable. There is joy, even in the face of death, when one has seen the source of life. Simeon's job as a sentinel for Messiah is done. The Lord can take him home. Simeon pictures a faithful servant who is at home in God's purpose and plan, even when his time is up
- But Simeon is not done.
- There is a note of foreboding he must leave with Mary. Jesus will be the cause of division
- The road to promise-fulfillment is not smooth. To identify with Jesus will bring pain, because many will reject him



The Witness of a Man and Woman at the Temple

- Jesus is God's litmus test for where a person is. Do I sense a need to depend on God and come to him to walk in light, or do I not?
- My response to Jesus is the test, and the answer comes from my heart. Each person's response to him reveals where he or she is before God, just as one day Jesus will reveal where everyone's heart is (Acts 10:42-43).
- Anna's Prophecy (2:36-38) Her hope, like Simeon's, looks to the completion of what God is starting, Jesus' Growth



The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus Goes to the Temple

- As Luke's infancy overture comes to a close, he makes a transition to John and Jesus' ministry through a single incident from Jesus' adolescence
- Jesus now speaks for himself for the first time. This is the literary climax of Luke's initial section and shows the sense of mission and self-awareness Jesus possesses
- The events leading to Jesus' exchange with his parents begin with their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem
- Jesus is twelve years old



The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus Goes to the Temple

- After the seven days of celebration, Jesus' family returns home. The text does not say why his parents fail to make sure that he was present in the caravan
- Apparently after one day's journey back to Jerusalem and a day looking for Jesus, it is on the third day that Joseph and Mary discover him at the temple, listening to and asking questions of the teachers
- At the tender age of twelve, Jesus already shows signs of possessing great wisdom. Clearly Luke wants the reader to develop a sense of respect for this amazing, blessed child.



The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus Goes to the Temple

- When the parents finally find him, Mary steps forward to address the young Jesus in a way that both parents and children can appreciate. She expresses concern about the anxiety Jesus has caused by remaining at the temple.
- The mild parental complaint leads to Jesus' self-declaration of mission
- Jesus must be engaged in teaching God's ways, since for Luke the temple is a place where Jesus instructs (20:1--21:4).
- But there is a second key detail. Jesus refers to God as his *Father*



The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus Goes to the Temple

- Such closeness to God not only is something Jesus' parents need to appreciate but also is a point the disciples will struggle to grasp
- The infancy material stresses Jesus as Messiah, but this text is one of two hints early in Luke's Gospel that he is also much more
- Jesus is breaking new ground with his parents here, and they need to understand who he is, just as Luke's readers do
- Mary does what Luke wants his readers to do as well. It is good to pause and contemplate who Jesus is and the mission he performs. Even two thousand years of history does not do away with the need for such reflection.



Reflection

1. Luke paints a series of word pictures- dual annunciations, dual births, dual temple scenes. What is the usefulness of these parallels?
2. Even though Zechariah was a man of faith, he could not grasp the truth about the annunciation about a son. How would your faith react in his situation?
3. Why do many feel frustration when reading the first chapter of Luke? How might they express their feelings?
4. How have you experienced life more as a mystery to be revered than a problem to be solved?