

LUKE

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Introduction

The books of Acts and Luke were both written by Luke and some would put them together as one book. The Gospel of Luke contains narratives and sayings of Jesus that can be characterized into various literary forms. Luke modified some of the terminology of Mark to suit his readers such as using the Greek term for “lawyer” rather than the Hebrew form “scribe”. Both Luke and Acts are addressed to an individual named Theophilus (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1). The author of the Gospel indicated that he was a second-generation Christian who was in a position to investigate the traditions of Jesus. Paul mentioned Luke as a companion in Col 4:14, Philemon 24, and 2 Tim 4:11 so Luke had the background needed to write this Gospel. The early church attributed this third Gospel to Luke as early as 180 A.D. and such was continually stated in the early church period. The two books have remarkable similarities. Papyrus rolls were available in stock sizes of 35-40 feet. One roll of Luke would be about 35 feet and one roll of Acts would be about 32 feet. The last portion of Luke deals with the arrest, trials, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and a similar portion of Acts deal with the arrest trials, and arrival of Paul in Rome. Both also cover about the same amount of time of thirty years. Luke covers the years from 4 BC to about A.D. 30 and Acts covers from A.D. 30 to A.D. 60-62. Luke covers the background and activities of Jesus and Acts covers the actions of His prominent disciples following His ascension. Clearly the two books should be read together.

There are some factors influencing the dating of the writing. The first factor is the date of Mark and Luke’s relationship to that Gospel. It is highly probable that Luke used Mark as one of his sources and most scholars date the writing of Mark to be about A.D. 70 or a few years before. Most scholars think Luke finished the Gospel before writing Acts. There is no mention in Acts of the persecution under Nero in A.D. 65 or the death of Paul at about the same time. There is also no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. In Acts 28:30 Luke takes leave of Paul with a reference to his two-year imprisonment in Rome around 60-62 A.D. These and other evidences lead to a writing of Acts between A.D. 61 and 65. Luke makes reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in his version of the Olivet Discourse in 21:8-36 but there is considerable discussion about the application of this section. It seems that Luke would have added more details about the destruction of Jerusalem if he wrote after the event. All things considered, most scholars place the writing of the Gospel of Luke to somewhere between A.D. 60-70.

He does not profess to have been an eye-witness of his recordings (Luke 1:2-3) so he was not one of the seventy disciples nor an apostle. He seems to have been a proselyte to the Jewish religion but born of Gentile parents. Paul refers to him in Col 4:14 as being “the beloved

physician” and his writings show considerable understanding of diseases so there is no reason to not accept that he was a physician. It is not known where this Gospel was written. Jerome writes that it was composed in Achaia. Most scholars assume it was written primarily to people with an understanding of the customs of Jews since he does not explain some of those customs as do other writers. He was with Paul in Jerusalem and then accompanied him to Rome. He stayed with him when he was in prison and was with him to the last (Acts 16:10, Col 4:14). Some say that the Gospel is according to Paul because of the close association of Luke with Paul. Eusebius writes that this Gospel as well as those of Matthew and Mark was brought to the Apostle John who approved it and bore witness of its truths.

Chapter One

Luke 1: 1-4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, (2) just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, (3) it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; (4) so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

This is the preface of the evangelist to his Gospel as he writes his purpose of writing it. It seems that there was no other Gospel present when Luke wrote this and so some think that this was the first Gospel written. However it is unlikely that Matthew and Mark had not already written their Gospels. Luke says that many had attempted to write of what God had accomplished in the world. He is referring to the birth, life, actions, doctrines, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. He states that all of those events had been handed down to us from the beginning by eyewitnesses and servants of the word and so means that those people had told many people about those events. He is referring to the twelve apostles including Paul and the seventy disciples. This certainly tells us that he was not one of those individuals but had learned from them. He states that it seemed right for him to thoroughly investigate all of the accounts and to write out the details in consecutive order. He started at the beginning meaning with the forerunner of the Messiah to the ascension of Christ.

No other Gospel takes the sequence as thoroughly as does Luke. The narrative has four songs expressing joy: Mary's (1:46-55), Zechariah's (1:68-79), the angels' (2:14), and Simeon's (2:29-32). His training as a physician would have prepared him well for this task. We do not know precisely the identity of Theophilus although the title “most excellent” implies that he was a civil magistrate in some high office. A similar title is given to a governor: "*Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.*" (Acts 23:26) Luke also writes to Theophilus in the opening of Acts although without the title: *The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,* (Acts 1:1) Luke's motive for writing this Gospel was so that Theophilus would know the exact truth about what he had already been taught. Thus it seems that Theophilus had been catechized with the first principles of Christianity and Luke wanted

him to better understand all of those truths. It may be that he was bothered by the Gnostics and others who were challenging the actual resurrection. All Christians can benefit from this exposition of Luke. He now proceeds to the narrative.

Luke 1:5-7

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. (6) They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. (7) But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

Luke specifies the time as in the reign of Herod, king of Judea from 37-4 B.C. He then places Christianity with its Jewish roots by mentioning a Jewish priest and his wife who also had been born into a priestly line. Stating that they were righteous in the sight of God states their religious rather than only ethical character. The way Luke states that they had no child does not imply that some sin caused this state but it does bring sorrow and often shame to the childless couple. The hope of every Jewish woman was to become the mother of the Messiah but her barren state meant she could not have that hope. Luke emphasizes their advanced age to mean that, humanly speaking, they could not now have a child. There were incidents in the OT of women similarly being blessed with a child (Sarah, Gen 17:16-17; Hannah, 1 Sam 1:5-11) but such was obviously not the norm. This childless status did fill Elizabeth with a feeling of disgrace as Luke mentions in verse 25.

Luke 1: 8-10

Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, (9) according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. (10) And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.

The division was one of 24 groups of priests divided by families and after the pattern of 1 Chron 24:10. Each division serves in the temple for one week, twice a year and at one major festival. The Exile interrupted this function but afterwards the divisions were regrouped and the functions renewed. Each individual priest could offer incense at the daily sacrifice only once in his lifetime because there were so many priests. This event was then the climatic event in the service of Zacharias. God then chose this momentous occasion to interfere with the routine as He was introducing a new revelation. Luke mentions the extremely pious assembly of people to raise the suspense and prepare the reader for verses 21-22.

Luke 1:11-15

And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. (12) Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. (13) But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. (14) "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. (15) "For he will be great

in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

Only a heavenly being could be in the Holy Place with the priest. Luke does not describe the angel but places him in an exact place to enhance the reality of the vision. Just having someone else with him in this holy place would have been terrifying but for that person to be an angel certainly would bring great fear to the priest. The aorist tense of “has been heard” indicates that this is not just some recent prayer but for a lifelong prayer. Leon Morris disagrees with this and thinks that the priest would not be praying a personal prayer at this time but would be praying for the nation Israel. However Zacharias had probably been praying for God to grant him a son for all of his marriage. The angel calmed him and told him that Elizabeth would bear him a son and he was told to name him John. The Hebrew meaning of the name is “God shows mercy” or “God is gracious”. Naming the child before the birth shows the sovereignty of God. The joy and gladness contrasts the fear initially gripping Zacharias.

The angel tells him that many will rejoice at his birth and that he will be great in the sight of the Lord. Nothing could be more joyful to a Jewish priest than to hear such about his son. Jesus spoke of the greatness of John: *"Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* (Matt 11:11) The angel says that John will not drink wine or liquor and that he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even while in the womb. Some interpreters think this abstinence from alcohol means that he would be a Nazirite (Num 6:1-8) but no mention is made of his hair and Nazirites never cut their hair. Perhaps the meaning is that he will not be a priest or a Nazirite but a unique person filled with the Holy Spirit. John is the only person referred to in Scripture as being filled with the Spirit before birth. Paul also wrote of the contrast between the effect of alcohol and the Spirit: *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,* (Eph 5:18). Alcohol and other drugs can control someone so John is not to be ever tempted with such external control. Instead he will be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Luke 1:16-20

"And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. (17) "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (18) Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." (19) The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. (20) "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

The angel tells Zacharias that John will cause many Jews to repent before the Lord their God. He further tells him that John will be a forerunner who comes before the Messiah. He says that John will act in the spirit and power of Elijah. He does not say that John is a reincarnated Elijah but that he will act as would Elijah. Luke uses the language of Malachi:

Mal 4:5-6 *"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. (6) "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."*

Thus the work of John will avert a curse of God upon His people. This statement emphasizes both John's greatness and his subordinate position as a forerunner for the coming of the Lord. The phrase concerning turning the hearts of the fathers to the children presents some problems to interpret. It may mean reawakening the fathers to their family responsibilities as seen with Eli, Samuel, and David not disciplining their children properly. He may mean teaching children like: *"Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'* (Deut 4:10).

Zacharias then questioned the angel as to whether this birth can possibly occur. He questioned that such a birth would have to be miraculous because of his and Elizabeth's ages. Apparently he was asking for a sign and the angel's reply showed a bit of a rebuke. Since Zacharias was described as devout before the Lord God he should have been able to accept the angel's prophecy in at least the way that Mary would later. The angel then states his identity to give his statements veracity. He is Gabriel; the angel who stands before God and that gives him special privileges that Zacharias should recognize. He further states that he has been sent by God to deliver this good news to Zacharias. This is the first use by Luke of the word "good news" that is another word for "gospel". This is the good news for the entire world and not just for the nation of Israel. Perhaps the doubting of Zacharias reveals something about his prayers in the Holy Place. He may have been praying for Israel and when Gabriel told him about the coming son of Elizabeth he was taken aback. God answers our prayers at His pace. No doubt Zacharias had prayed often for a son in the past but this answer seemed out of context to him. God may have been answering many past prayers. Because Zacharias did not immediately accept this good news without question, he will have to not be able to talk until the day that the good news is fulfilled. As with any decree of God, the good news will be fulfilled in the proper time.

Luke 1:21-25

The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. (22) But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. (23) When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. (24) After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, (25) "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."

The people had been in prayer the entire time that Zacharias had been in the Holy Place and they had started to wonder what was taking so long for they were used to the work being done in a set time period. Zacharias should have come out of the Holy Place and joined with the other priests to perform the benediction. But when Zacharias came out he was unable to speak to them and

they all understood that he had seen a vision in the temple. Apparently he tried to use sign language to communicate to them but he remained mute. After his time of service ended, he went home to Elizabeth. Luke does not mention any conversation that Zacharias had with his wife about his vision but he must have somehow managed to communicate it to her. He was then able to perform his husbandly duty to her so that she became pregnant. She remained in seclusion for five months. She may have been waiting until she was showing her pregnancy or to arrive at a safer time in her pregnancy so that a miscarriage would be less likely. She then proclaimed her gratitude toward God that He had taken away her disgrace among others. She cannot imagine the total implications of this pregnancy but praises God for His work in her and her husband.

Luke 1:26-30

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, (27) to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. (28) And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (29) But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. (30) The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

This event is dated by Luke to be in the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth. Gabriel is sent again by God to deliver some wonderful news to another woman living in Nazareth that was a small village in Galilee off the main trade routes. The town contrasts with the large city of Jerusalem and Galilee contrasts greatly with Judea. Galilee is surrounded by Gentiles and the inhabitants were rather lax in their religious practices. The young virgin also contrasts with the elderly woman so we see a lot of contrasts in this setting with the one previously discussed. This time the announcement is not to an elderly woman but to a young virgin who was now engaged to marry Joseph who is stated to be a descendant of David. The virgin's name is stated as being Mary.

Our customs are very different than in the time of Mary for the Jews and probably that difference contributes to questions today about whether the meaning is that Mary was really a virgin. It was not allowed for a woman to have sexual relations with a man until they had been legally married and she is just now engaged to be married. Only death or divorce could sever the betrothal and, if Joseph died before the marriage, she would be categorized as a widow. Betrothal usually occurred shortly after puberty so Mary had probably just entered her teen years. Some scholars note that the average age for marriage among Jewish women was 12-12.5 years. Gabriel called her "favored one" because the Lord was with her. It is important to note that she is not the source of any grace but the recipient of grace from God and not based upon any of her characteristics. Gabriel states that God has blessed her and so she is favored by Him. She was bewildered at this statement and tried to understand the meaning of the salutation.

Zacharias had been gripped with fear at the presence of Gabriel but Mary was mainly bothered by the greeting. Gabriel assured her that she had indeed found favor with God. She is not stated as being devout before God but that God has granted her favor. This favor is the same as that given to us today not based upon our works but only upon the grace of God that He grants for His glory.

Luke 1:31-33

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. (32) "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; (33) and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Gabriel then announces the greatest event in the history of mankind! Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive a son whom she will name Jesus. Jesus was a common name in OT times and through the first century. In its Hebrew form it means "saves" and a verse in Matthew explains the meaning for this child: *"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."* (Matt 1:21) This information is also in accord with: *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."* (Isa 7:14) Gabriel continues to fill in the concept to Mary that Jesus will be great without qualification except that He will also be called the Son of the Most High, meaning the Son of God. Being of the throne of David links with:

- 2Sam 7:12-14 "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. (13) "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (14) "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men,
- Psa 2:7-9 "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. (8) 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession. (9) 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware."

Luke understands the office of Messiah to be a function of God's Son rather than son-ship as an aspect of Messiah. His kingdom will be everlasting rather than just a function of some timeline on earth and He will reign over the house of Jacob.

Luke 1:34-38

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (35) The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. (36) "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. (37) "For nothing will be impossible with God." (38) And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Mary did not ask for a sign but only for an explanation about how God would accomplish this event. She acknowledges that she has not had sexual relations that surely are a requirement for her to bear a son. She was betrothed so she certainly assumed she would have sexual relations later and so it is a bit difficult to understand why she is perplexed over this announcement. She could assume that this birth would occur after she was allowed to have sexual relations with her husband. Luke gave a much abbreviated account of this interaction between Mary and Gabriel so

perhaps we are to assume that Mary understood the announcement to mean that she would give birth prior to her legal marriage. Perhaps also she just wanted clarification about when the birth would occur. He told Zacharias that his wife would bear a son to him (1:13) meaning that the birth will be normal from a reproductive sense. Gabriel's answer to Mary left no doubt that she would become pregnant by an act of God before she was married to Joseph. Her pregnancy will be initiated by the Holy Spirit bringing the power of God to overshadow her. The word translated "overshadow" gives the meaning of the power of God covering something as when the tent was filled with the glory of God: "*Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*" (Exod 40:35) Since the birth is due only to the power of God, the child will be called the Son of God.

Gabriel then gives Mary another example of how God can cause the impossible to occur as he tells Mary about her relative Elizabeth becoming pregnant at an impossible age. He tells Mary that Elizabeth had been called barren but now was in her sixth month of pregnancy. Gabriel then tells Mary that nothing is impossible for God. Mary then is quoted as replying as all of God's children should respond to any situation. We are bondservants of God and we accept whatever God has planned for us. Gabriel's mission was then complete so he could leave her. Her reply reminds us of Hannah as a dedicated maidservant totally submitted to God:

1Sam 1:11 *She made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head."*

Mary would have known that she could be subject to stoning (Deut 23:22) and, at the least, ostracizing from her small community because of her pregnancy before marriage. We know that Joseph did think of divorcing her but an angel intervened:

Matt 1:19-21 *And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. (20) But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (21) "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

Both the beginning of earthly life for Jesus and His resurrection from earthly death are impossible and so require direct intervention by God, the author of the impossible.

Luke 1:39-45

Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, (40) and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. (41) When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (42) And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! (43) "And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? (44) "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. (45) "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

Luke then brings together the two women in his narrative. Mary seems to have almost immediately gone to see Elizabeth to meet with a woman in a similar situation regarding pregnancy. We are not told the name of the city in Judah but she went directly to the house of the priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth. Luke puts Mary away from Joseph during the time that she would have become pregnant to emphasize the miraculous pregnancy. The baby John leaped in Elizabeth's womb when the voice of Mary was heard and Elizabeth was then filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke now records that Mary is pregnant with Jesus. The Spirit enlightened Elizabeth about Mary's child and she shouted to Mary that she was blessed among all women as was the baby in her womb. Verse 43 is the first instance of Jesus being called Lord in this gospel. The Holy Spirit came upon many people in OT times (Num 11:16-25; 24:2; 2Sam 23:2; 1 Chron 12:18; Neh 9:30; Isa 61:1; Mic 3:8; Ezek 2:2; 3:12; 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 5, 24; 37:1; 43:5; Zech 7:12). The Holy Spirit was present at creation (Gen 1:2), He was at the exodus (Ex 40:34-35), He raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 1:4), and He overshadowed the church (Acts 1:8). However, Gabriel stated that John would be **filled** with the Holy Spirit before his birth (1:15).

Elizabeth gave the blessing that her husband Zacharias could not give because he was still mute but he must have been almost glowing himself at this encounter and knowledge. Luke records later the blessing Zacharias gave the infant Jesus (1:68-79). Mary was the mother of Jesus in that He grew within her womb but nowhere is Scripture is she called the Mother of God for God is not limited to only the Son. It is then a huge mistake for a religion to call her the Mother of God. Jesus is called Lord two other times in Luke's birth narrative (1:76; 2:11). Luke quotes the blessing Elizabeth gave Mary to bring attention to the faith of Mary.

Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, (47) And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. (48) "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. (49) "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. (50) "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. (51) "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. (52) "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. (53) "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed. (54) "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, (55) As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever." (56) And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.

This song of Mary is given by Luke and is called the Magnificat as it describes the greatness of God to His glory. The title comes from the Latin word for "exalts" or "magnifies", *magnificat*. There are similarities to the song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10) and some people think that Mary read over that song on her four day journey and composed her own version of it. There are four nativity hymns in this gospel: Mary's Magnificat, Zacharias' Benedictus, the angels' Gloria, and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*. She begins by a reference to her salvation as she refers to God as "my savior". Only sinners need a savior so Mary is certainly not free from all sin as stated by some religions. Her humble state refers to her lowly station in life and describing herself as a

bondslave means that she was in total submission to God that characterized believers in OT times and should also do so today. She states that the Mighty One has done great things for her and that is how she views her current physical state of being pregnant but not married. All Christians today should have the same attitude toward all of their circumstances in life as God is causing all things to bring good (Rom 8:28). She states that “holy is His name” for in the OT time a person’s name reflects their entire reputation and character. Without the mercy of God there would be no chance for anyone to ever be holy before God and Mary accurately expresses the importance of His mercy. Jesus will later criticize the Pharisees for their lack of mercy: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”* (Mat 23:23) Only those who really know the holiness of God and their state before that holiness will fear Him. God is personally involved in His work in the world as Mary states by saying that He has done deeds with His arm.

Mary then begins to extoll some of the accomplishments of God toward all types of people. She states that He has scattered those with prideful hearts, brought down rulers, and exalted the humble. She continues her thoughts of how God interacts with all people by stating that He filled the hungry and sent away the rich. Mary also states that God has not forgotten Israel, meaning those who are His servants. She also states that He will never forget His promises to Abraham.

There has been endless speculation about why Mary left after being with Elizabeth for three months. The birth of John would be imminent and Mary would be about three months pregnant so her physical attributes would be demonstrating that she was pregnant even though not formally married. Luke does not discuss the attitude of Joseph toward Mary’s pregnancy but Matthew does:

Matt 1:18-25 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. (19) And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. (20) But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (21) “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” (22) Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: (23) “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” (24) And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, (25) but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Let us speculate a bit now also. Perhaps Joseph sent Mary to Elizabeth and during that time the angel spoke to him and told him to not be afraid of the world’s reaction. Joseph then took Mary back home and married her but did not have sexual interaction with her until after the birth of Jesus.

Luke 1:57-66

Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. (58) Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her. (59) And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. (60) But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John." (61) And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name." (62) And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. (63) And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished. (64) And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God. (65) Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. (66) All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

Luke now turns the narrative toward the birth of John. The way Luke reports the response of the neighbors and relatives it seems that they did not know of her pregnancy until the birth. They would have all certainly rejoiced with her even if the birth was a surprise. Circumcision on the eighth day was in accordance with Gen 17:9-14 but it was not common to wait until that time to name the child. Luke gives no reason for waiting to name him. There was a Hellenistic custom of waiting a week to name a child but we do not know why they would be observing this custom. There would have been a considerable crowd present at the circumcision of this baby of the elderly Elizabeth. It was natural to name a child after a parent or grandparent, especially if one of the relatives was highly regarded as certainly was Zacharias. Elizabeth said that his name would be John but the crowd told her such was not acceptable since none of their relatives had that name. They then did not want to take Elizabeth's choosing of a name so they indicated to the mute Zacharias what he wished the name to be. He asked for a tablet and remembered the order of Gabriel so that he wrote: "His name is John". This statement is very definite probably because he knew that the angel had already told him the name and so he stated it as a fact. Surely this is not the first use of the writing tablet! Zacharias had probably already told her about the angel and the name so that she could reply initially that he would be called John. Everyone was astonished at this reply but then his mouth and tongue were set free so that he could talk. Zacharias then began to verbally praise the Lord and all present were filled with fear at this occurrence. The news of this event spread over the entire area and people began to wonder as to the future of this child since the events of his conception and birth were miraculous. They knew that the hand of the Lord was upon him and were expecting great things of him.

Luke 1:67-75

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: (68) "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, (69) And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant-- (70) As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old-- (71) Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; (72) To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, (73) The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, (74) To grant us that we, being rescued

from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, (75) In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

This is the second song in Luke and is called the Benedictus. The song has two main parts. The first part is praise to God for the messianic deliverance (68-75). The second part (76-79) is celebration of the role that John will have in God's deliverance method. Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit so that he could prophesy. God here gives us another example of someone who initially failed spiritually but then was used later by God in His ministry. We can all be encouraged by his example. Luke uses verse 68 to again show the Jewish background of Christianity in that God visited Israel and accomplished redemption for His people, meaning Israel. It is very tragic that Jerusalem did not recognize the day of her visitation by the Lord:

Luke 19:43-44 "For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, (44) and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

The concept of redemption runs throughout Scripture with the Exodus being a great example of the rescue of God's people. Luke later gives the expectation that He would do a similar work: *"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened."* (Luke 24:21)

The "horn" of verse 69 is a common OT metaphor for power so Zacharias is referring to the power of God in salvation for the Israelites as spoken by His holy prophets. The song lifts praises to God for His salvation, mercy, and covenant toward his people. The oath to Abraham is referring to:

Gen 22:16-18 and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, (17) indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. (18) "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Luke 1:76-79

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; (77) To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, (78) Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, (79) TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

The second part of Zacharias' song is directed toward his son who would be a prophet of God. There had not been a prophet of God for centuries so all would be excited to hear this from Zacharias. He also states that he would prepare the Lord's way, which was a description that is clearly linked with Elijah:

- Isa 40:3 *A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.*

- Mal 3:1 *"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.*
- Mal 4:5 *"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.*

In other Gospels (Matt 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13) Jesus is quoted as saying that Elijah has already come meaning that the prophecy concerning Elijah had been fulfilled in John the Baptist. Luke has already stated by quoting Gabriel that John would come in the spirit of Elijah (1:17). The political implications of salvation had already been stated (1:77) and now Zacharias states the spiritual forgiveness of salvation. He states that John will give his people the knowledge of salvation because of the tender mercy of our God. He will not offer salvation because no human can do that but John would announce it. He then mentions the Sunrise from:

Isa 60:1-3 *"Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. (2) "For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. (3) "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.*

This blessing will come even to those who formally were absent from the blessing:

Eph 2:11-13 *Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands-- (12) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (13) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

The final note is to bring peace to the people, which is the peace of God that is only available through the Lord.

Luke 1:80

And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

This is a much abbreviated description of the development of John. Luke will discuss more fully the development of Jesus (2:40, 52). There has been a lot of speculation since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls near Qumran that John had contact with that community. His elderly parents may have been unable to take care of him or they may have died in his youth so that he may have even lived in the community at Qumran. The community was celibate so taking in young people was the only way they could reproduce. This would explain his living in the desert area until his public appearance. However there is no supporting evidence of this possibility.

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