

ADVENT

HOPE CAME DOWN



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Introduction



Introduction

Luke was not one of the original twelve Apostles. Luke, the Greek physician, was Paul's companion during his mission in proclaiming the gospel. Luke wrote this gospel as the first volume of a single work, consisting of The Gospel Of Luke and The Book of Acts. Both volumes are addressed to Theophilus and are written in a similar style. Acts refers to The Gospel Of Luke in its introduction (Acts 1:1-2). Luke had never met Jesus personally, but as a scholar and physician he sought to interview eye witnesses and record the events of Jesus' life (Luke 1:1-4). The Gospel of Luke is therefore the most detailed of the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke).

Placing It in the Bigger Story

The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as the fulfilment of various Old Testament promises relating to both Jews and Gentiles. Luke stresses Jesus' concern for social outcasts (such as tax collectors, prostitutes and Gentiles). He tells us Jesus' ultimate concern in a statement relating to Jesus' ministry, "*The Son of man came to seek and to save*

the lost" (Luke 19:10). Luke shows us how Jesus accomplishes this by referring to prophecies about Jesus' suffering, Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem, and God's sovereignty over Jesus' ministry and death. During the first three chapters of The Gospel of Luke, we are introduced to seven characters who confirm Jesus' identity:

- The angel **Gabriel** is the first in The Gospel of Luke to confirm Jesus is the son of God (Luke 1:31-34).
- **Mary** believes what Gabriel tells her about her son being the son of God and that he has come to save others. She believes that God's promises will come true and that the seed of Abraham will be the Saviour (Luke 1:46-56).
- **Elizabeth**, the wife of Zechariah and mother of John the Baptist, also affirms Jesus as the Son of God (Luke 1:44).
- **Angels** declare the Saviour to be born (Luke 2:11-14).
- **Simeon** affirms Jesus is the Saviour (Luke 2:30-31).
- **Anna** knows that Jesus is the Messiah (Luke 2:38).
- The **Spirit** descends upon Jesus like a dove and a voice from heaven confirms he is the dearly loved Son of God (Luke 3:22).

ZECHARIAH'S RESPONSE

Luke 1:5-25



Luke 1:5-25

Zechariah's Response

Scripture Text

Luke 1:5-25

Big Idea

It has been 400 years since the prophet Malachi promised the coming of Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6). The nation of Israel is no longer independent. The king is Herod the Great, a foreigner, and a deputy of Rome. Within this environment God chooses to visit his people. An angel appears to Mary and announces she will bear the Son of God, despite being a virgin. The angel reassures Mary, and explains that her cousin Elizabeth is also pregnant (after being barren for many years). Mary visits Elizabeth, and both women rejoice that God has blessed Mary by making her the mother of the promised Messiah.

Overview

To provide service for the temple, the priests were divided into 24 divisions, each of which served for a week, twice a year. During major festivals (such as Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles) all the divisions served. Luke focuses on one priest, Zechariah, and his wife, Elizabeth. Luke mentions they were blameless in all the commandments and had no children (vv.6-7). The problem was that the Jews regarded childlessness as a sign of God's displeasure. They viewed children as a reward from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). Therefore, the story forces us to ask the following questions:

- How can such a godly couple be without children?
- Is there some hidden sin in their life?
- Is there something lacking in their faith?
- Are they being punished by God?

Observation and Meaning

1. Luke used similar language for Zechariah and Elizabeth (v.6) to that which was used for other righteous people—such as Noah (Genesis 6:9), Abraham (Genesis 17:1), and Job (Job 1:1). Does ‘*walking blamelessly in all the commandments*’ mean Zechariah and Elizabeth never sinned? If not, what does it mean? If the ‘*righteous*’ are not without sin, how do they remain ‘*blameless*’ before God? (See Psalm 32)
2. We are told Zechariah was chosen ‘*by lot*’ to offer incense in the holy place (v.9). This was a high honour, which most priests experienced only once in a lifetime. What does Luke’s inclusion of this small detail tell us about God’s involvement in Zechariah’s life?
3. Malachi spoke of a coming prophet, someone like Elijah, who would go before the Lord (Malachi 4:5). The angel announced that Zechariah’s son would be this person. What do we know about the role Zechariah’s son would eventually play (vv.15-17)?

4. After hearing the angel’s announcement Zechariah wavers, “*How shall I know this?*” (v.18). The angel answers him (v.19), before punishing Zechariah for his subtle unbelief (v.20). What does this reveal about God’s attitude towards those who do not believe He is working things out for their good, and therefore require ‘*extra*’ evidence?

Application

- Like Peter’s three denials of Jesus (Luke 22:54-62), Zechariah’s unbelief was temporary—and not a way of life. Where is ‘*subtle unbelief*’ operating in your life? How might you be going through religious routines (such as reading the bible and going to church), without expecting to see God’s power at work?
- Choosing Zechariah by lot at just the right time, reveals God’s sovereignty—He accomplishes His will in His own timing. Talk about how God has accomplished his will in his own timing in your own life?
- If the next work of God in your life is to allow a trial to strengthen your faith, how might you prepare?

MARY'S RESPONSE

Luke 1:26-38



Luke 1:26-38

Mary's Response

Scripture Text

Luke 1:26-38

Big Idea

It has been 400 years since the prophet Malachi promised the coming of Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6). The nation of Israel is no longer independent. The king is Herod the Great, a foreigner, and a deputy of Rome. Within this environment God chooses to visit his people. An angel appears to Mary and announces she will bear the Son of God, despite being a virgin. The angel reassures Mary, and explains that her cousin Elizabeth is also pregnant (after being barren for many years). Mary visits Elizabeth, and both women rejoice that God has blessed Mary by making her the mother of the promised Messiah.

Overview

Luke moves from announcing the birth of John the Baptist to announcing the birth of Jesus. The mighty work of God through John's conception and ministry will be surpassed by the greater miracle of virginal conception and the work of Jesus Christ. Advent is all about the incarnation of the Son of God:

- God becoming human,
- the supernatural becoming natural,
- the sovereign becoming vulnerable,
- the holy becoming common,
- the divine becoming human beings and
- the impossible becoming possible.

Many struggle to accept the idea of God becoming man, and being born to a virgin. Mary also wrestled with these truths. She was confused and scared. How will she explain this to her parents? She will face an uncertain future as an unmarried mother. Society will ostracise, ridicule and shame her. Joseph will leave her. She has everything to lose, but still accepts the angels announcement as reality.

Observation and Meaning

1. The angel addresses Mary as “*favoured one*” (v.28) and says she has “*found favour with God*” (v.30). What does it mean that Mary found favour with God? Where else does the Bible use this expression?

Scripture	Who?	Context
Genesis 6:8		
Genesis 18:3		
Genesis 39:12		
Genesis 43:14		
Judges 6:17		
1 Samuel 1:18		

2. What were the titles given to Mary’s child (vv.31-33, 35)? What is their significance?
3. Why is Elizabeth’s pregnancy mentioned here?
4. Why is Mary’s response to the angel unusual (vv.26-38)?

Application

- In Greek mythology, Zeus and Hercules take on human form but remain perfect in appearance and victorious in battle. Jesus became weak, helpless and eventually died. Religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Judaism, deny the idea of God becoming human. The Bible has a unique view. Why is this idea of God becoming human so important? What difference does it make to your Christian faith?
- Religious people encounter suffering and conclude God is judging them. Secular people encounter suffering and conclude God is absent or no longer cares. Which of these are you most prone to thinking? How does the incarnation nullify these conclusions?
- Mary was socially marginalised, economically poor, and without legal rights. How do you feel when you read about a God who works with the despised, draws close to the forgotten, and cares for the outcasts? How does this change the way you move towards others?

The gospel breaks all barriers of race, status and language.

It ends arrogance and superiority.

When we understand that Jesus came as the incarnate Son of God

and took on a lowly status for our sake,

it compels us to move towards others with love and acceptance.

MARY'S SONG

Luke 1:39-56



Luke 1:39-56

Mary's Song

Scripture Text

Luke 1:39-56

Big Idea

It has been 400 years since the prophet Malachi promised the coming of Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6). The nation of Israel is no longer independent. The king is Herod the Great, a foreigner, and a deputy of Rome. Within this environment God chooses to visit his people. An angel appears to Mary and announces she will bear the Son of God, despite being a virgin. The angel reassures Mary, and explains that her cousin Elizabeth is also pregnant (after being barren for many years). Mary visits Elizabeth, and both women rejoice that God has blessed Mary by making her the mother of the promised Messiah.

Overview

The beginning of the Gospel of Luke is full of music:

- the hymn of Elizabeth (Luke 1:42-45)
- the hymn of Mary (Luke 1:46-55)
- the hymn of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79)
- the hymn of the angels (Luke 2:14)
- the hymn of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32)

This particular section builds upon the responses of Zechariah and Mary and contains an introductory narrative (vv.39-41), two hymns (vv.42-45, 46-55), and a conclusion (v.56).

After the angel departed (v.38), Mary traveled to Judea to visit Elizabeth (who was six months pregnant). When Elizabeth saw Mary, she recognised this unmarried teenage girl to be “*the mother of my Lord.*” Mary began to sing in the Spirit, exalting and worshiping God. It is this song which is known as the Magnificat. The Latin phrase “*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*” means “*My soul magnifies the Lord.*”

“The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings; this is the passionate, surrendered, proud, enthusiastic Mary who speaks out here. This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Advent Sermon, 1933)

Observation and Meaning

1. How do Elizabeth and her baby respond to Mary's visit? Why do they respond this way?
2. What are some of the Old Testament references in Mary's song (vv.46-56)? How have these Old Testament promises found their fulfillment?
3. What is the significance of the virgin birth?
4. What does Mary's song teach us about the proper response to the good news about Jesus? How does Mary show us what true faith is like (vv.29-30, 38, 45-47)?

Application

- What are some ways we can model Mary's faith while waiting on God's promises?
- Mary looked forward to Jesus' coming with faith and anticipation. How can we grow in anticipation for Jesus as we celebrate his incarnation?
- Which promises of God do you find hardest to trust? How can we help each other to trust these promises even when they seem impossible?

**God sent his Only Son all the way down to my hell
to take me all the way up into His heaven.**

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