



Preparation for the Birth of Jesus Luke 1

Introduction

The birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, is the most significant of all births. God's plan of salvation through Jesus was prepared from the foundation of the world (John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8). The importance of Christ's birth is reflected in the careful preparation God made. Dr. Luke gives us more details than any of the other gospels.

Chronologically, Luke begins before the other gospels. The first three chapters tell of the birth of Jesus Christ and His growth to manhood. They also tell of His forerunner, John the Baptist. Matthew begins with Jesus' genealogy through Joseph, and with the virgin birth. Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus and the beginning of His ministry. Even though John's prologue takes us back before time (John 1:1-18), he too begins with the presentation of Jesus by John the Baptist and the calling of the first disciples. Luke begins with the announcements and birth of John the Baptist.

Outline of Luke Chapter 1

- I. Preface - Luke 1:1-4
- II. Pre-birth Announcements - Luke 1:5-56
- III. Birth of John the Baptist - Luke 1:57-80

I. Preface - Luke 1:1-4

- A. Reasons for Writing - Luke 1:1-4b

- 1. Many other accounts

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order....

While the apostles lived, traveled, and preached, they preserved and perpetuated the truth about Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. In the first century, people heard about a literal resurrection, whether they believed it or not. The apostles preached that Jesus rose from the dead in the same body that went into the grave. If this were not true, the empty tomb has no meaning.

However, as eyewitnesses died and Jesus did not return as expected, many accounts about Jesus began to circulate. Some were spurious and some falsely claimed they were written by apostles, such as Thomas, or their disciples. There were also gospels of Mary and Philip.

Later, The Shepherd of Hermes, the Epistles of Barnabus, Polycarp, and Clement, The Didache (also

known as the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), and others appeared. By the fourth century the church wrestled with which were authentically inspired and should constitute the canon known as the Bible. Only four gospels were received by the church as authentic and inspired accounts of Christ's life.

- 2. *A narrative of those things...*

The life of Jesus has fascinated writers down through the ages. More books have been written about Him than anyone else. There have been many with rising and fading popularity, but Jesus' influence has continued and will for eternity.

- 3. *Which have been fulfilled among us...*

Luke believed the significance of His life, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the promise in Christ needed to be told.

- 4. *As those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us...*

Luke sensed an urgency to gather and record the facts about Jesus. As the first historian of the Church, he carefully checked, dated, and documented his sources. Josephus is the only other contemporary historian whose works, Antiquities and The Jewish Wars, have survived. "Except for Luke, the church produced no historians in the first three centuries of its existence. Its greatest chronicler was Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 260-340), whose Historia Ecclesiae is the sole account of the early church that has survived" (New Testament Times by Merrill Tenney).

- 5. *It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first...*

Luke was equipped to write as a contemporary believer, an interviewer, and a companion of Paul the apostle, the great missionary expositor of the New Covenant. What has God equipped you to do? Does it seem good to you because God is in it, others encourage it, and circumstances confirm it?

- 6. *To write to you an orderly account..*

Luke accomplished this goal. Most agree his is an orderly account.

7. *That you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed*

How much of what you have learned and been taught can you rely upon to be absolutely true? How do you know it's true? Luke wanted his readers to know that the facts they had been taught were reliable, verifiable, and credible. Faith in Christ rests on certain historic facts, not on heresy or myth. Biblical faith is transmitted by propositional statements about God and does not rely upon catchy phrases or even on principles extracted from the Bible.

B. Recipient: Theophilus - Luke 1:4a

Luke dedicated his gospel and the Book of Acts to the *most excellent Theophilus*, who may have been his benefactor or patron (Acts 1:1). Theophilus' title, "most excellent", may mean he was a government official. He also could have been one of Dr. Luke's patients who became a Christian. Luke had reason to think Theophilus wanted to know more about Jesus, indicating that he was a reasonable, thinking person. Theophilus means "God's friend". He may represent all Christians who are God's friends because they want to know Him better. Are you one of God's friends?

II. Pre-birth Announcements - Luke 1:5-56

A. To Zacharias and Elizabeth - Luke 1:5-25

1. Zacharias' background - 1:5-7

a. *In the days of Herod*

Herod the Great was king of Judea from 37 to 4 B.C., in a "dark and disastrous period in the history of the Jewish people. Herod was a cruel, murderous despot. There was a saying that it was better to be Herod's dog than Herod's son. He reigned under the rule of Caesar in Rome. Against this dark background, Luke paints the story of the dawn of a new day for mankind - the coming of Christ for which preparation is made by John the Baptist" (The Biblical Expositor, Carl Henry).

b. *A certain priest named Zacharias*

Zacharias was a Levite, the tribe set apart by God to be the priests of Israel (Numbers 8:6). He was a career priest. His name means "God remembers".

c. *Of the division of Abijah*

The priests were separated into twenty-four divisions, each serving in the tabernacle half a month, as King David initiated (1 Chronicles 23:1-6, 28-32). The priests on duty handled the daily and special sacrifices,

conducted worship, and supervised the feasts. Every priest belonged to a division, but not every priest had a turn to serve in the temple since there were hundreds of priests.

d. His wife...Elizabeth

Zacharias' wife was also from the tribe of Levi. Furthermore, she was a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest, from whom all the rest descended, a prestigious line within the Levitical tribe. Elizabeth means "the covenant". Together, the couple's names mean "God remembers the covenant".

e. *Both righteous before God*

They walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. No one could find fault with Zacharias and Elizabeth. Though not perfect, they were clean before God through the offerings and sacrifices made in faith. They carefully kept all God's commandments and ordinances.

f. *No child*

They were childless because Elizabeth had never conceived (she was barren). They had borne this grief throughout their married life and had no doubt prayed about it many times. Not only were children a *heritage from the LORD* (Psalm 127:3) and a personal delight, they represented the preservation of the tribe and the nation. Zacharias' and Elizabeth's prayers for a child were in the tradition of Isaac and Rebekah, Hannah, and the parents of Samson, all of whose children came after much prayer.

g. *They were both well advanced in years*

Priests served actively from ages twenty to fifty. Zachariah may have been called back into service for the special honor of tending the temple with his division. Whatever his age, both he and Elizabeth were beyond the normal age for child-bearing.

2. Serving in the temple - 1:8-10

Luke writes, *So it was*, Zacharias was chosen by lot to serve in the temple at the time of the burning of incense. *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD* (Proverbs 16:33). What seemed to be by chance was actually according to God's sovereign plan. The smoke of the incense ascending was a picture of the prayers of God's people rising to His throne, as Zacharias' prayers had done. The entire crowd outside was praying too. Here in the first chapter we are introduced to Luke's emphasis on prayer.

3. Appearance of an angel of the Lord - 1:11-17

a. An awesome sight

Luke describes the exact place where the angel stood, *on the right side of the altar of incense* where Zacharias could not miss him. Naturally, Zacharias was troubled and afraid.

b. An awesome message

Angel means messenger. God was about to break four hundred years of silence. Not since Malachi's prophecy had God delivered a new message to mankind. At last there was word from Him.

c. A son

The angel spoke, *"Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard."* God knows each one by name. He hears each prayer. He knows your name and hears your prayer. Zacharias' fear was replaced by perplexity. What prayer had been heard? Years ago he had prayed for a child. No prayer of faith is unrecorded. All prayers await God's answer in God's time and way. The angel revealed seven things to Zacharias:

1. He and Elizabeth would have a son.
2. They were to name him John.
3. They would have *joy and gladness*.
4. Many would *rejoice at his birth*.
5. He would *be great in the sight of the Lord* (a phrase found predominately in Luke).
6. He was to drink no wine or strong drink.
7. *He would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.*

John's identity and lifestyle were determined before his birth.

d. Destiny

His life's work was to turn many Israelites to the Lord their God, and father's hearts to their children, as Malachi had prophesied at the end of the Old Testament. His ministry would be in the spirit and power of Elijah. *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse* (Malachi 4:5-6). Harmony between parents and children is needed as much today as it was in Zacharias' or Malachi's day.

e. A purpose

To make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

4. Zacharias' response - 1:18-23

Zacharias was unprepared for a miracle in his life. He questioned whether God's power was greater than his physical inability. The angel said, *"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings."* Judgment on Zacharias' unbelief was immediate. He would be unable to speak until the prophecy was fulfilled. The people waiting for him outside the temple rightly attributed his inability to speak to whatever he had seen in the temple.

5. Elizabeth's response - 1:24-25

Elizabeth accepted her miraculous pregnancy. *"Thus the Lord has dealt with me....to take away my reproach among people."*

B. To Mary of Nazareth - Luke 1:26-56

1. Appearance of the angel Gabriel 1:26-29

When Elizabeth was six months along in her pregnancy, Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee, to a young girl named Mary. She was a virgin engaged to marry Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel's greeting was cheery. *"Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you."* Mary was troubled, wondering what this meant, but said nothing.

2. An awesome announcement - 1:30-33

Gabriel reassured her and revealed God's plan. Mary would conceive, have a Son, and call Him Jesus. Gabriel gave her five more points of prophecy:

- *"He will be great."*
- *"He will be called the Son of the Highest."*
- *"The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David."*
- *"He will reign over the house of Jacob forever."*
- *"Of His kingdom there will be no end."*

3. A reasonable question - 1:34

"How can this be, since I do not know a man?" Mary was the first to question the virgin birth, but from logic not disbelief. She knew that she was a virgin and that virgins did not have babies. God does not require us to disregard our minds. He welcomes our honest questions and invites us to dialogue with Him.

4. An extraordinary answer - 1:35

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you." With these words the angel explained and prepared Mary for what would

happen. "Therefore, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." The angel gave the same explanation to Joseph (Matthew 1:20-24).

5. Proof and a promise - 1:36-39

Mary yielded herself to God's will, "Be it unto me according to your word." For proof of His power, God graciously sent Mary to Elizabeth, who was already miraculously pregnant. "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

Have you given God permission to do anything He wants with your life? Only then can you experience the greatness of His power. When will you choose to yield to Him?

6. Power and praise - 1:40-56

At Mary's greeting, the Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth and her baby leaped inside her. We now know that the unborn can hear. The Bible said it first. Luke emphasizes the Holy Spirit (1:15, 35, 41).

Elizabeth responded by pronouncing a blessing upon Mary and her unborn child. Mary answered with praise that is similar to Hannah's in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Both Elizabeth and Mary acknowledged their need of a Lord and Savior (1:43,47). These were ordinary women who had an extraordinary God. You may feel like an ordinary person, but God is in the business of doing remarkable things with ordinary people who yield to Him.

III. Birth of John the Baptist - Luke 1:57-80

A. Rejoicing of Many at His Birth - Luke 1:57-58

Prophecies about John continued to unfold at his birth. *When her (Elizabeth's) neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.* The angel had said to Zacharias, "many will rejoice at his birth" (1:14).

B. Naming Him John - Luke 1:59-65

On the eighth day....they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his

father Zacharias. Jewish boy babies were circumcised on the eighth day and given a name at that time. Surely Zacharias and Elizabeth would want the child of their old age to be named for his father. *But the angel had said, "you shall call his name John" (1:13).* So Elizabeth spoke up, "Not so, he shall be called John." Stunned, friends and neighbors reminded her, "there is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." Then they turned to Zacharias who wrote, *his name is John.* The angel's prophecy had been fulfilled and Zacharias was able to speak again.

C. Song of the Spirit-filled Zacharias - Luke 1:66-79

Zacharias was so overcome at receiving both a baby boy and the return of his voice that he burst into praise to God. His song is a prophecy inspired by the Holy Spirit. This world needs many more spirit-filled fathers like Zacharias.

His song proclaims the salvation of God! It reviews God's faithfulness in the past, and foretells John's life ministry as a prophet and the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

D. Secluded Growth and Development - Luke 1:80

In the desert John grew strong in spirit. It is good for young people to stay away from the influence and temptations of the world. See Psalms 1, 119:1; Proverbs 4:23; and 1 John 1:15-17.

Applications

1. In what present situation do you need to believe God's promise?
2. In what way do you need to yield in order to experience God's power?
3. Will you praise Him today for His promises and power? Who will you share your praises with?

QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read lesson notes and references.

1. What was interesting or important in Section I, the Preface?

2. a. Name the three people who sang praise to God in Luke 1.

b. ♥(Heart Question) Is Psalm 40:3 true for you, and if so, for what reason?

3. Whose births were announced beforehand by an angel?

DAY TWO: Read Luke 2:1-16.

4. What two historical rulers did Luke name in Luke 2:1 and 2:2?

5. Because of the Emperor's decree, what did everyone have to do?

6. a. Where did Joseph have to go and why?

b. Using a map in your Bible, can you find how far Joseph and the pregnant Mary traveled?

7. Give facts for a news release of the birth of Jesus. Give verses.
 - a. Place of birth

 - b. Time and weather conditions

 - c. First outfit

 - d. Announcement made by

 - e. Contents of announcement

 - f. First visitors

 - g. Reasons for the visit

DAY THREE: Read Luke 2:17-26.

8. a. What did the shepherds tell? To whom?

b. How did people react?

c. What did Mary do?

d. What was the mood of the shepherds after they had seen Jesus?
9. List ways Mary and Joseph obeyed God's law in 2:21-24.
10. a. Who was in Jerusalem waiting for the Consolation of Israel?

b. What did he know he would see? How did he know it?

DAY FOUR: Read Luke 2:27-38.

11. a. What made life complete for Simeon?

b. What did Simeon say Jesus would do, and for whom?
12. What good news and bad news did Simeon prophesy for Mary?
 - a. Good

 - b. Bad
13. a. Who else was in the temple and thanked God?

b. What was unusual about her?

DAY FIVE: Read Luke 2:39-47.

14. What event in Matthew 2:13-23 probably fits into Luke 2:39?

15. Make an itinerary of Mary and Joseph's roundtrip from Nazareth.

16. From Luke 2:40-47, list what is told about Jesus as a boy.

DAY SIX: Read Luke 2:48-52.

17. a. Who did Mary mean by “your father” in 2:48?

b. Who did Jesus mean by “My Father” in 2:49?

c. Did Jesus' parents understand what He meant?

d. What does Matthew 1:23 record that may have helped them understand?

18. a. What beautiful attitude of Jesus is described in 2:51?

b. ? (Thought Question) How do you think Luke might have known about Jesus' behavior as a child?

19. Give three, or possibly four, facts about Jesus as a teenager from 2:52.