

The Coming of Jesus



SABBATH—MARCH 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 1:2, 3; 2 Timothy 3:16; Luke 1:5–22; Deuteronomy 18:15; Luke 2:9–12, 25–32.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Nothing is impossible with God’ ” (Luke 1:37, NlrV).

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE WAS WRITTEN FOR THE GENTILES.¹ Luke himself was a Gentile (as is suggested in Colossians 4:10–14). So was Theophilus, to whom the Gospel is addressed.

In addition to being a physician, Luke was a careful historian. In introducing the Gospel, Luke puts Jesus in real history. Really, he puts the story in the historical situations of its times: Herod was the king of Judea (Luke 1:5). Augustus ruled over the Roman Empire (Luke 2:1). And a priest by the name of Zacharias² was doing his turn of duty in the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 1:5, 9). In chapter 3, Luke speaks of six dates having to do with the ministry (work done for God) of John the Baptist, who opened the way for Jesus.

So, Luke places the story of Jesus in history (real people, real times), careful to prevent his readers from thinking that his story is a myth (imaginary tale). Luke's readers must respect the fact that Jesus is real and that through Jesus, God has invaded history with the “ ‘Savior, who is Christ the Lord’ ” (Luke 2:11, NKJV).

DEFINITIONS

1. Gentiles—non-Jews.
2. Zacharias—the father of John the Baptist.

**“AN ORDERLY [CAREFUL] ACCOUNT [REPORT]”
(Luke 1:1–3; Acts 1:1–3)**

Acts 1:1 tells us that before Acts was written, Luke wrote a “former [earlier] account.” This, and the fact that both reports were addressed to Theophilus, helps lead us to think that the same author wrote both books. The two accounts can be viewed as parts 1 and 2 of “The Origin [Beginning] and History of the Christian Church.” Part 1 is a story of the life and work of Jesus (the Gospel of Luke). And part 2 (Acts of the Apostles [teachers and leaders]) is an account of the spread of the message of Jesus and of the early church.

How was the Gospel written? Read Luke 1:2, 3 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

Luke realized that there were many who had written of the events about Jesus, which had shaken the city of Jerusalem. He spoke of many “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:2, NKJV). This clearly means the disciples and other fellow workers of Jesus. Luke himself had had experiences with these witnesses and ministers (such as Paul and other apostles). Luke had probably heard of or read the Gospels written by Mark and Matthew. Clearly, Luke was not an eyewitness to the Jesus story, but he was a true believer in Christ.

Matthew wrote to the Jewish readers, presenting Jesus as the Great Teacher, the fulfillment (completion) of prophecy,³ and the King of the Jews. Matthew often pointed to Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled (satisfied) in Christ. Mark wrote to the Roman readers about Jesus as the Person of action. Luke, himself a doctor and a Gentile, wrote to the Greeks and the Gentiles about Jesus as the Savior of the world. Luke says that he has written his Gospel for two main reasons: (1) to present an “orderly account” (Luke 1:3, NKJV) and (2) to support facts about the great teachings of the new period of Christianity. The certainty about truth in Jesus is one goal of Luke’s Gospel.

Luke, a Spirit-led author of the Bible, used other material in his writings. How very interesting! Clearly, the use of other sources does not mean that Luke’s writings are not inspired (given to him) by the Holy Spirit. What does this tell us about how the Spirit of God works on the hearts and minds of writers?



Luke, a doctor and a non-Jew, wrote to other Gentiles and Greeks about Jesus, the Savior of the world.

DEFINITIONS

- prophecy—a special message from God about what will happen in the future.

“CALL HIS NAME JOHN” (Luke 1:5–22)



The birth of John to a woman too old to have a child teaches us that what we cannot do on our own God can do through us.

DEFINITIONS

4. prophetic—having to do with special messages from God about the future.

For nearly four hundred years after Malachi, God became silent in the history of Israel. With the birth announcements of John the Baptist and Jesus, God’s silence was about to be broken.

The birth stories of John and Jesus are very much alike. Both are miracles. In the example of John, Elizabeth was supposed to be too old to have a child. In the example of Jesus, a virgin was to give birth to the child. The angel Gabriel announced both birth promises. Both announcements were received in a spirit of wonder, joy, and surrender to God’s will. Both babies were to grow and become strong in the Spirit (Luke 1:80; Luke 2:40).

But the mission and the ministry of the two miracle babies were very different. John was to open the way for Jesus (Luke 1:13–17). Jesus is “the Son of God” (verse 35) and the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah (Chosen One) (verses 31–33).

Read Luke 1:5–22. Zacharias is described as “blameless [without fault].” But his lack of faith at the angel’s announcement brought a rebuke (scolding). How does this help us to understand what “blameless” means for a believer in Jesus?

“The birth of a son to Zacharias, the same as the birth of the child of Abraham, and that of Mary, was to teach a great spiritual truth. This is the truth that we are slow to learn and ready to forget. In ourselves we cannot do any good thing. But what we cannot do will be done by the power of God in every believer who surrenders self to God. It was through faith that the child of promise [John the Baptist] was given. In the same way, it is through faith that spiritual life is born. And God enables us to do the works of righteousness [goodness and love and truth].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 98.

The miracle of John had a real purpose in God’s dealing with His people. After 400 years of prophetic⁴ silence in the history of Israel, John broke forth into that history with a special message and with great power. John’s mission and message was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17, NKJV). He was to lead the way to the Messiah. He also was the one to prepare the way for the mission of Jesus.

“CALL HIS NAME JESUS” (Matthew 1:21–23)

The birth of Jesus Christ was no normal event. It was marked in God’s eternal calendar. “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4, NKJV). This fulfilled the first promise God made after sin came to Eden (Genesis 3:15).

Read the following pairs of verses. In each one, how was the birth of Jesus a wonderful fulfillment of prophecy? What does this tell us about why we must learn to trust all of God’s promises? Read Deuteronomy 18:15 and Acts 3:22–24; Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:21–23; Micah 5:2 and Luke 2:4–7.

Six months after Gabriel announced to Zacharias the coming birth of John, he announced to Mary of Nazareth an even greater miracle: that a virgin will “ ‘conceive[to become pregnant] . . . and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS’ ” (Luke 1:31, NKJV).

The virgin birth of Jesus goes against all nature, and it cannot be explained by nature. Even Mary had her question: “ ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ ” (verse 34, NKJV). The angel answered her that this would be the work of the Holy Spirit (verse 35). The angel also said, “ ‘With God nothing will be impossible’ ” (verse 37, NKJV). Mary’s quick and faithful surrender was also wonderful: “ ‘Let it be to me according to your word’ ” (verse 38, NKJV). Every human question, no matter how natural or logical, must give way to God’s answer. Be it Creation or the Cross, the Incarnation (God in human form) or the Resurrection (Jesus’ return to life from the dead), the downpour of manna or the outpouring of Pentecost—God’s action requires human surrender and acceptance.

Mary answered her own question by surrender to God’s rulership. But Gabriel encouraged her with another great answer: “ ‘The Holy Spirit will come to you. The power of the Most High God will cover you. So the holy one that is born will be called the Son of God’ ” (verse 35, NIV).

Some worldly cultures have been brainwashed into believing that everything must be done by nature or science. Why is this such a narrow thought of God’s true miracles?



The virgin birth of Jesus cannot be explained by nature.

THE MANGER OF BETHLEHEM (Luke 2:7)



Heaven's most valuable Gift came in such a simple package.

DEFINITIONS

5. manger—a station (crib) for feeding farm animals but used as a baby cradle for the newly born Child Jesus.
6. Incarnation—the process in which the Son of God was put in human form.

Luke begins the story of the Bethlehem manger⁵ with a note of history. Joseph and Mary left their home in Nazareth to travel to their hometown of Bethlehem, where they needed to pay their tax to Caesar Augustus, the emperor of Rome. Quirinius was governor of Syria at that time. Such historical details must lead Bible students to appreciate the Holy Spirit's leading in Luke's report. In this way Luke would record the details of the Incarnation⁶ within the framework of history.

Think about Jesus as a very poor child, according to Luke 2:7. Compare the word-pictures of “swaddling clothes,” the “manger,” and “no room . . . in the inn” (NKJV) with Paul's description in Philippians 2:5–8 of how humble Jesus was. What kind of a road did Jesus walk for our sake?

Luke tells the story of the poor conditions in which the Lord of heaven became Man. This story continues with the first visitors the manger had: the shepherds. Not to the rich or the powerful, not to the scribes or the priests, not to rulers and the powers that controlled the land did the “ ‘good news of great joy’ ” (Luke 2:10, NIV) come, but to humble and lowly shepherds. Think about how glorious (wonderful; noble) but simple the message is: *A Savior is born to you. In the city of David. He is Christ the Lord, the Anointed (Chosen) One. You will find Him wrapped in swaddling clothes* (author's translation). Heaven's most valuable gift came in such a simple package. But the gift brings “ ‘glory to God,’ ” “ ‘on earth peace,’ ” and “ ‘goodwill toward men’ ” (verse 14, NKJV).

Luke's record of the angel (Luke 2:9–12) brings out three important thoughts in our study of Christian thinking. First, the good news of the gospel is for “ ‘all people.’ ” In Jesus, both the Jew and the Gentile become one people of God. Second, Jesus is the Savior. There is no one else. Third, Jesus is Christ the Lord. These three themes were clearly established early in Luke. Later they became the foundation (basis) of the apostles' preaching, especially Paul's.

Think about what we believe as Christians. The Creator of all that was made (John 1:1–3) entered into this fallen world as a human being. He also lived the hard life and ended up on a cross. If we *really* believe that, then every part of our life should be lived in surrender to this wonderful truth. What parts of your life reflect (show) your belief in the story of Jesus, and what parts do not?

THE WITNESSES TO THE SAVIOR (Luke 2:25–32)

Luke writes his Gospel mainly for Gentiles. But he also knows that the Jewish history of the Old Testament is important. So, he is very careful to connect the New Testament story with the Old. He also mentions the circumcision⁷ of the Baby Jesus on the eighth day and the moving scene of Mary and Joseph taking Him to the temple in Jerusalem, all according to Jewish law (Luke 2:22–24).

Read Luke 2:25–32. Note three points about salvation that Simeon brings up: (1) salvation is through Jesus; (2) salvation is prepared by God; and (3) salvation is for all peoples—for the Gentiles and the Jews. How do these truths tie in with the first angel’s message of Revelation 14:6, 7?

Simeon’s prophecy also foretold two important parts of Jesus’ ministry. First, Christ is “ ‘going to cause many people in Israel to fall and to rise’ ” (Luke 2:34, NIV). Yes, Christ has brought light and salvation to all, but not without cost to the receiver. With Christ there is no neutral ground. We must accept Him or refuse Him. Upon the right answer one’s salvation depends. Christ demands all of us. We accept Him, or we do not. Those who stay with Him will rise up and be part of His kingdom. Those who refuse Him or remain uncaring to Him will fall to the ground and die without hope. Faith in Christ is not something that we can bargain for.

Second, Simeon prophesies to Mary, “ ‘A sword will wound your own soul too’ ” (Luke 2:35, NIV). No doubt this means the Cross which Mary will witness. Mary and all the generations that follow her should remember that without the Cross there is no salvation. The Cross is the center of the entire plan of salvation.

Salvation is a gift in that we can do nothing to earn it. But it can still be very expensive to those who claim it for themselves. What has following Christ cost you? And why is that cost cheap enough?

DEFINITIONS

7. circumcision—cutting off the skin (called the foreskin) at the end of the penis of a man or a boy.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Luke, the writer of the Gospel that carries his name, was a medical missionary. In the Bible he is called ‘the beloved physician.’ Colossians 4:14. The apostle Paul heard of his skill as a physician, and looked for him as one to whom the Lord had entrusted a special work. Paul received Luke’s cooperation, and for some time Luke went with Paul in his travels from place to place. After a time, Paul left Luke at Philippi, in Macedonia. Here Luke continued to work for several years, both as a physician and as a teacher of the gospel. In his work as a physician he ministered to [worked for; helped] the sick, and then prayed for the healing power of God to rest upon the suffering ones. So the way was opened for the gospel message. Luke’s success as a physician gained for him many opportunities for preaching Christ among the nonbelievers. It is God’s plan that we shall work as the disciples worked.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pages 140, 141.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Luke quoted (“borrowed”) some materials already written by others for writing his Gospel. If true, how are we to understand the leading of the Holy Spirit in Luke’s Gospel (2 Timothy 3:16)? How does inspiration (God’s leading) work? Read Ellen G. White, “The Inspiration of the Prophetic Writers,” *Selected Messages*, book 1, pages 15–23.
- ② The virgin birth is of God’s making, marked by His mystery, power, and rulership. It is really beyond human understanding too. But the question is, So what? How many worldly things are beyond human understanding too? Why should something like the virgin birth be beyond His power? Only those with worldly thoughts are limited to natural laws alone. Only they could scoff at the idea of a virgin birth. But those who can understand spiritual matters should have no reason to deny the miracle. For example, think about what the angel said to Mary after giving her the incredible news: “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).
- ③ An American TV interviewer once said that if he had had an opportunity, the person he would most like to interview would be Jesus. If so, he would ask Him just one question: “Are You really born of a virgin?” Why is that question, and the answer to it, so important?