

## Preparing the Way of the Lord (Luke 1:1-56)

Luke was a Gentile-trained as a Roman physician, redeemed by Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and set apart for ministry. That is all we know because Luke did not write about himself. Instead, he focused on the Glory of God as revealed in history through the words and works of Jesus Christ. This is the "Gospel According to Luke."

Luke meticulously authored a two-part history of the church. The first part, *The Gospel According to Luke*, describes the life of Jesus Christ. The second part, (Most believe) *The Acts of the Apostles*, records the early years of Christianity. Luke did careful research-interviewing disciples, meeting family members, and collecting firsthand testimonies of events. He also personally witnessed many of the things he recorded in Acts. He *followed all things closely* (Lk 1:3b). Why does Luke write so carefully (1:4)?

Luke's carefully researched; historical books declare the kingdom of God has entered into human history. The phrase "kingdom of God" occurs more than thirty times in Luke, more than the other three gospels combined. Luke wants people to know God's kingdom is for Jews and Gentiles alike. From where do the citizens of the kingdom of God come, according to Jesus (Luke 13:29)?

Jesus calls people from every direction. Everyone who responds to His call receives three wonderful blessings: forgiveness of every sin, eternal life in heaven, and a purpose for daily living. In this lesson, we see how to pre- pare the way of the Lord in our lives. First. ...

### **Be faithful in the daily ministry God gives us to do** (1:5-25).

Herod the Great was the Roman-appointed ruler of Judea. When the Romans conquered a foreign country, they allowed their subjects to continue practicing their religious traditions. As long as the Jewish people submitted to the laws and taxes of the Romans, they were permitted to continue most religious traditions of the Old Testament. These traditions were administered by thousands of Levitical priests living throughout Israel. Luke's record begins with events in the lives of one of these priestly families.

A certain priest named Zechariah and his wife Elisabeth are well-advanced in years and have no children. This reminds us of Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament. Although their hope of having children has passed, Zechariah and Elisabeth have continued to obey all the commandments and Jewish regulations. Luke describes them as *walking blamelessly* because they are **faithful in the daily ministry** God has given them (1:5-7).

As it happens, Zechariah is chosen by lot to burn incense in the temple as a representative of his priestly division. Out of the thousands of priests all over the country, only a few received this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. This would be the greatest honor of Zechariah's priestly career (1:8-9).

As Zechariah executes his priestly tasks, an angel of the Lord appears to him on the right side of the altar of incense. Fear overcomes Zechariah. But the angel tells him, "*Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard*" (1:13a). Like Abraham and Sarah from generations before, Zechariah and Elisabeth will have a son in their old age (1:13b).

The angel then announces a special name for their son: *John*. He will live a holy lifestyle - abstaining from alcohol and being filled with the Holy Spirit "*even from his mother's womb*" (1:13c-15). Then, in verses 16-17, the angel explains John's mission. John is the fulfillment of what prophecy in Malachi 3:1a?

Zechariah hesitates and then says to the angel: "*How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.*" (1: 18). This reminds us of Moses' experience at the burning bush. Moses questions God's command and calling by saying: "*they will not believe me*" (Ex 4:1); "*I am slow of speech*" (Ex 4:10), and "*please send someone else*" (Ex 4:13). Zechariah and Moses hesitate because they think in terms of their limited human capabilities. However, God's plans are based on His divine, limitless capabilities.

When God calls us to follow Him, we should remember what truth expressed in Psalm 20:7?

God knows about Moses' and Zechariah' immature faith when He chooses them. So, He immediately begins working to develop their faith. God uses "different strokes for different folks." He brings Moses a helper to speak for him (Ex 4:14-15). However, God strikes Zechariah mute, so he cannot speak (1:20). Sometimes the Lord gives, and sometimes the Lord takes away. In each case, He knows the best means to bring about His good and perfect will, while strengthening the faith of His children.

While Zechariah encounters the angel, the people outside are wondering why he is taking so long to come out. When he finally exits the temple, he can't verbalize what has happened. So, Zechariah invents some sort of sign language to explain the angelic encounter in the temple (1:21-22).

After his time of serving in the temple, Zechariah returns home, still unable to speak (1:23). Probably in a written note, he evidently communicates the angelic announcement to Elisabeth. If you were to tell a barren woman in her sixties, she is going to have a baby, what would be her reaction?

I imagine Elisabeth's response is a mixture of disbelief, fear, and joy. Like Abraham, Sarah, and Zechariah, Elisabeth has her reservations about God's miraculous promise. But she hears the Word, responds with imperfect faith, and God proves faithful (1:24-25).

Why is it so important, even though our faith is imperfect, to seek God through faithful obedience, according to Hebrews 11:6?

To prepare for the way of the Lord in our lives, **be faithful in the daily ministry God gives us to do**, and ...

### **Be obedient when God calls us to something new** (1:26-45).

In the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, God sends Gabriel to Nazareth to visit a young woman named Mary (1:26-29). If Gabriel's appearance scared a seasoned priest like Zechariah, trained in reading the holy scriptures and experienced in the temple rituals, it must have absolutely terrified a simple, uneducated village girl!

Gabriel comforts Mary (1:30) and tells her: ... "*you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High ... and of his kingdom there will be no end*" (1:31-33). Mary must have become as confused as she was terrified. Just like Moses and Zechariah, Mary questions God's pronouncement: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (1:34b).

This does not make any human sense. Mary's mind, body, and emotions all tell her one thing - this is impossible. Gabriel gives her some details and then makes a final statement. What does Gabriel tell her in 1:37?

Mary replies by saying she is the Lord's *servant* (1:38a). The word translated servant is (doo'-lay), which literally means "slave." Though she is afraid and confused, Mary is **obedient when God calls her to something new**.

After the angel departs, Mary thinks of the one person who can empathize with her amazing and confusing experience - her older cousin Elisabeth. So, Mary goes *with haste* to the home of Elisabeth and Zechariah (1:39-40). What three things happen when Elisabeth hears the sound of Mary's voice (1:41-42)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

To prepare the way for the Lord in our lives, **be faithful in the daily ministry God gives us to do, be obedient when God calls us to something new,** and ...

**Be thankful God is working in our lives** (1:46-56).

Mary responds to Elisabeth by praising God's favor on her and her people. Later church tradition would name this prayer "The Magnificat" after the first words of the prayer when translated into Latin. Write down the English translation of what Mary says in verse 46a on the line below:

These passages demonstrate that God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect work. As we prepare for the way of the Lord in our lives, we don't have to be perfect, but we must:

**Be faithful in the daily ministry God gives us to do;  
Be obedient when God calls us to something new; and  
Be thankful God is working in our lives.**