

Send questions to: [pastornick@htchurch.com](mailto:pastornick@htchurch.com)

On YouTube: @htchurch

### **Housekeeping Items**

- Sessions are available on YouTube (@htchurch), and through our audio podcast.
- We've also set up a group for our course on our Realm app.
- Be sure to keep up with the weekly reading!

### **Recap**

Luke wasn't an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, but he was a historian and a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul.

- Luke is probably the only Gentile writer of Scripture.
- He was highly educated, and his writing is full of observation and detail.
- People suggest that Luke traveled around Judea to do his research.
- Luke wanted to defend the faith, seek favorable treatment for Christians, and show God's heart for the Good News to go to all the nations.

Some Distinctives of the Third Gospel:

- Luke gives us a lot of unique material.
- Luke is very inclusive.
- This gospel highlights salvation and how God seeks humanity.
- Luke focuses heavily on the Holy Spirit and experiencing His life and power.

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## Prologue (1:1-4)

*1 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*

- This somewhat formal introduction tells us some important things:
  - Many people had already attempted to produce a narrative.
  - These were real events, and these events had eyewitnesses. Luke has these facts from people who were eyewitnesses from the beginning, and ministers of the Word. Luke himself heard the Word from others.
  - Paul's being imprisoned in Judea gave Luke ample time to perform investigations among Jesus' family and other eyewitnesses.
- Luke's goal was to write what he calls "an orderly account," and he wants Theophilus to know the certainty of the things in which he was instructed.
- Theophilus already knows the truth, but Luke was led by the Spirit to write his own account. The Spirit made His own choices as to what would be preserved.

### Thinking About the Canon

We use the word *canon* to describe what books make up Scripture. This is a large and fascinating topic, but in short, remember that there wasn't a vote, per se.

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The Church can only *recognize* Scripture, not create it. The Old Testament books were accepted if they were accepted by the Jewish people, to whom God gave them, and if Jesus and the Apostles referenced them. The New Testament books were written by apostles or by people connected to them. Their contents could be vouched for by the living church of the first century.

### Theophilus

*Theophilus* means someone who loves God or is a friend of God. Luke calls him “most excellent.” He could have been a Roman official, a Jew, or a patron. This name could also have been code language, because every believer is a friend of God!

### **Meeting Zacharias and Elizabeth (1:5-10)**

*5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. 8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.*

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- This is a beautiful story of God blessing two of His choice servants, and it's a beautiful beginning to the story of salvation through Christ.
- This is the vicious King Herod (c. 72 BC – c. 4 BC), known for the Massacre of the Innocents. Herod ruled the region for the Romans.
- Mentioning Herod serves an important purpose: it grounds our story in history.

### *Zacharias and Elizabeth (Zekariyah and Elisheva)*

- *Zacharias* means “Yahweh remembers.” *Elizabeth* may mean something like “my God has sworn.”
- Priests would, preferably, marry the daughter of another priest. John the Baptist therefore had priestly ancestry.
- The priests were divided into 24 divisions or courses, and served for two weeks every year, except during the major feasts, when all the priests were needed. There were perhaps as many as 18-20,000 priests at this time.
- Being “blameless” doesn’t mean they had no sin, but rather that they were devoted to following the law of the Lord.
- Zacharias had the honor of burning incense at the altar of incense, before the veil that concealed the Holy of Holies. After the daily sacrifices, the priest would offer this incense, then come out to the people and bless them. Offering this incense was a high honor – and a once in a lifetime honor!

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## **The Birth of John Prophesied (1:11-17)**

*11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*

*13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And 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 shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

- We’re not sure what prayer the angel is referring to.
- The name John is *Yechonan*, meaning “Yahweh has been gracious.”
- The angel reveals that John will not drink alcohol, like a Nazirite. Unusually, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb.
- His mission: to turn people to God, and to go before the Lord as a forerunner.
- John’s ministry was a prophesied ministry:
  - “Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3).
  - “‘Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 3:1).

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## **The Unbelief of Zacharias; Elizabeth Conceives (1:18-25)**

*18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." 19 And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. 20 But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." 21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. 22 But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. 23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. 24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."*

- Zacharias responds in unbelief, only thinking of his age. Gabriel ("mighty one of God") responds with a "holy irritation." (See his earlier appearance in Scripture in Daniel 9.) Gabriel's news was the biggest news there could possibly be!
- Instead of experiencing this joy and gladness, Zacharias demands proof!
- About half of the priests lived in the city of Jericho, but Zacharias and Elizabeth lived perhaps not far from Jerusalem, in the hill country of Judah.
- God takes away Elizabeth's reproach!

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