

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT LUKE

Dedication to Theophilus

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us,² just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word,³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely^a for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theoph'ilus,⁴ that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechari'ah,^b of the division of Abi'jah; and he had a wife 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 blamelessly.⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,⁹ according to the

1:2: 1 Jn 1:1; Acts 1:21; Heb 2:3. **1:3:** Acts 1:1. **1:4:** Jn 20:31. **1:5:** Mt 2:1; 1 Chron 24:10; 2 Chron 31:2.

1:1–4 Luke opens with a prologue and personal dedication. Stylistically, he follows a conventional format that was used to preface historical works in the Hellenistic world. Luke likewise sets out to record history, not as a stale collection of facts and figures, but as an evangelistic presentation of Jesus' life and mission.

1:2 delivered to us: Luke is probably a second-generation Christian. His work is heavily indebted to the testimony of **eyewitnesses** and **ministers** of the gospel in the early Church. Three points follow from this: (1) Luke is a careful historian who has sifted relevant sources to obtain accurate information; (2) he transmits, not private opinions, but apostolic traditions; and (3) he writes to strengthen the faith of fellow Christians.

1:3 most excellent Theophilus: Otherwise unknown in early sources. He may be a distinguished figure or high-ranking official of the Roman government. The formal designation, *most excellent*, appears elsewhere as an honorific title (Acts 23:26; 24:2; 26:25). A similar dedication serves to preface Luke's second volume, the Book of Acts (Acts 1:1).

1:5–2:52 Luke's Infancy Narrative recounts the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Stylistically, he makes a transition from the classical format of his prologue (1:1–4) to a biblical style of writing used in the Greek OT. For Luke, the OT is an unfinished book whose concluding notes resonate with expectation and unfulfilled promise. He thus weaves numerous allusions to the OT into his narrative, implying that the story he now tells is a continuation of biblical revelation and, indeed, its awaited climax.

1:5 In the days of: Luke situates his narrative within the broader framework of world history (2:1–2; 3:1–2). **Herod:** Herod the Great, who was appointed king over Palestine by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. and reigned in Jerusalem from 37 B.C. until his death in 4/1 B.C. See note on Mt 2:1. **Zechariah:** A Hebrew name meaning "Yahweh has remembered." **division of Abijah:** Israel's Levitical priesthood was comprised of 24 divisions of priests (1 Chron 24:7–19). Each division served at the Jerusalem Temple two different weeks each year, and those represented by Abijah were the eighth group in the priestly rotation. **Elizabeth:** A Greek form of the Hebrew name meaning "My God's oath". Being a daughter of **Aaron**, she was a Levite (1 Chron 6:1–3).



1:6 righteous before God: Zechariah and Elizabeth live in faithful observance of the Old Covenant (Deut 6:25; Is 48:18). See word study: *Righteousness* at Mt 3. ● Luke places the couple in an OT stream of righteous figures: Noah (Gen 6:9), Abraham (Gen 15:6), Phineas (Ps 106:30–31), David (2 Sam 22:21–25), and others had exemplified similar devotion to the Lord. ● *Mystically* (St. Bede, *In Lucam*): Zechariah and Elizabeth represent the priesthood and Law of the Old Covenant. Both were righteous, as the priesthood was holy and the Law was good; but together they were unable to bear children for God or bring forth the grace of Christ. The couple thus signifies the aging Old Covenant awaiting the blessings of the New.



1:7 barren: This was sometimes considered a sign of God's disfavor (Gen 30:2), while a fruitful womb was viewed as a divine blessing (Deut 7:14; Ps 128:3–4). ● Elizabeth, along with Sarah (Gen 11:30), Rebekah (Gen 25:21),

Word Study

Informed (Lk 1:4)

Katēcheō (Gk.): means to "instruct" or "teach orally" and is the basis of our English word "catechism". The verb is used eight times in the NT. It is often linked with the early transmission of the gospel, when the apostles and their associates instructed believers by word of mouth. Luke writes his Gospel to a certain Theophilus, who has already been catechized in this way, in order to confirm and deepen his understanding of Jesus' life and teachings (Lk 1:4). Apollos had likewise learned the rudiments of Christian doctrine by oral instruction (Acts 18:25). Paul employs this term years earlier when he encourages young Christians to assist their local catechists with financial support (Gal 6:6), and when he stresses that intelligible instruction in the faith is more profitable for God's people than the unintelligible speech of charismatic tongues (1 Cor 14:19).

^a Or accurately. ^b Greek Zecharias.