

Doctors are often criticized for their lack of bedside manner, but such critique cannot be leveled at St. Luke. From St. Paul's letter to the Colossians, we know that Luke was a doctor; Paul calls him "**the beloved physician**" (Col 4:14). Luke is also held by tradition to have been the first Christian artist, painting the first picture of the Lord Jesus. So it is no wonder that Luke's Gospel has been praised as "the most beautiful book ever written." As though he knew the beloved subjects of subsequent centuries of Christian art and hymnody, it is Luke who tells us of the infant Jesus lying in the manger, adored by shepherds, and pondered over by the holy Virgin.

Like each of the Gospels, Luke's gives us unique content, found in none of the other three. Besides the Nativity account, it is this Gospel which tells us of elderly Zechariah and young Mary receiving their respective announcements from the angel of wondrous births. It is Luke who shows us the Lord as the Good Samaritan, the gentle stranger who has compassion on his enemy at his own expense. Luke shares with us the Lord's encouragement to Martha, to take note that while the hustle and bustle of active service to the Lord is good, the greatest and best portion is to sit at Jesus' feet, hearing His words.

It is from Luke's pen that we are shown the Lord's tender, forgiving heart, no matter how far we may stray; that He receives us back in no-expense-spared joy and celebration as the father does the prodigal son. Luke shows us the Lord's love and compassion for outright scoundrels like Zacchaeus. While we look down on corrupt slimeballs and cheats, Jesus loves them, goes into their homes to speak His word that changes hearts. Luke shows us the Lord's love even for those who hate and reject Him, as Jesus weeps over the Jerusalem that rejected Him. Luke records for us Jesus' first words from the cross, the living out of what He taught as He offers a prayer for those who crucified Him. Luke gives us His words to the penitent thief that validate even the death-bed confession after a life of sin: "**today you will be with Me in Paradise**" (Lk 23:43). And it is Luke who gives us the risen Lord Jesus' clear testimony that all the Scriptures, the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, are about Him.

Represented since ancient times by the gentle ox of Ezekiel's prophecy, Luke shows us the source of his gentleness and tenderness, the source of his steadfast loyalty to Paul, remaining with him even as Paul sat in prison awaiting martyrdom. Luke shows us the source of the Christian life, the source of the fruit of the Spirit, of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The source of all this is the one who occupies the center of Luke's portrait: the Lord Jesus, the Divine Physician.

Unlike the many fairy tales which delight children and give adults fond nostalgia of our own childhoods, the beautiful story which Luke gives us is true. Do not mistake Luke's loveable account and gentle portrayal for mere wishing on a star, some made up, feel-good story. Luke lays it all out at the very beginning of his Gospel: "**Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account...that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught**" (Lk 1:1-4). That's a mouthful, all one sentence, in Greek its positively elegant.

Luke is saying that the purpose of his Gospel, in short, is certainty. Certainty in what you have been taught and believe, certainty in the Word of God which testifies of Jesus. It comes up throughout Luke's Gospel. Mary listens to the words of Jesus. The brothers of the rich man in hell, if they would be wise unto salvation, they are to listen to Moses and Prophets. Jesus explains the necessity of His suffering and death on the basis of the Scriptures. Though physicians are lampooned for their sloppy handwriting, the physician Luke's writing is abundantly clear about Jesus. This is no fairy tale crafted to comfort the hopelessly terminal, but the true and accurate fulfillment of the Scriptures, the very words of God given to bestow immortality to body as well as soul.

God's own Son has come as a creature "**to seek and to save the lost.**" Not only the lost sheep of the house of Israel; "**the good news of great joy [is] for all the people.**" The gentle, divine physician came to seek out all the lost, the sick, the very dead. And He continues to send His ministers out into the harvest, to announce peace. The peace and goodwill of which the angels sang to the shepherds, the peace which the Lord announced to those in misery during His earthly

ministry, the peace which the risen Jesus proclaimed to His disciples, the peace which He continued to proclaim and deliver through the acts of the apostles after His ascension, and the peace which He continues to do to this very day. The gentle Lord, the kindly, good, and divine Physician speaks to you today through His Spirit-inspired Scriptures.

The words are given us through Luke's pen, but the voice is that of Christ. That is why, St. Paul, sitting in chains in Rome, almost totally abandoned, asks for "**the books, and above all the parchments**" (2 Tim 4:13). Rightly do we treasure the Scriptures, especially the Gospels. That is why we stand for the reading of the Holy Gospel in the Divine Service. "**All Scripture is God breathed,**" inspired, without error, authoritative for faith and life. Yet in the Holy Gospel we hear the very words and life of our Lord during His saving ministry.

So we stand and listen to Jesus' very words. That is a unique ceremony. We usually don't stand to listen. We do that in two places. First during the Holy Gospel, and second, when His Words which institute the Sacrament and which give us His body and blood are said. In both of these is the announcement of the 72, peace is bid to this house, to those gathered here as we hear the words of our Lord, written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, delivered to you. Today salvation has come to this house.