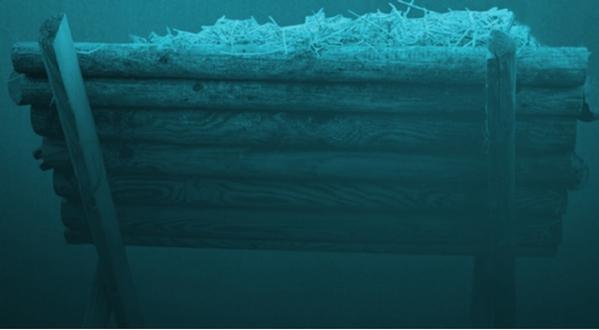


LUKE



LUKE: WEEK 1

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LUKE – SMALL GROUP SERIES

WEEK 1: JESUS IS BORN

Bottom Line: Jesus' birth fulfilled God's promises and brought hope to humanity.

Key Bible Verse: *Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."* **Luke 2:9-11 (NLT)**

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Luke is known as one of "The Gospels," which are comprised of the first four books of the New Testament.

Luke is also one of the *synoptic* gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), meaning they are similar in structure, content, and wording.

This gospel was written with much attention to marginalized underprivileged/disadvantaged members of society.

Luke is also the longest gospel, covering more of Jesus's life than the others.

It tells the origins, birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

The date and place the letter was written are uncertain, but many date the Gospel to 63–70 AD. While others give a later date.

The Gospel of Luke is a companion to the book of Acts.

The language and structure of these two books indicate that both were written by the same person.

Like many books of the New Testament, Luke is a letter written to a specific person. Within the first three verses of chapter 1, we learn why the letter was written and who it was written to.

*"1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 3 With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, **most excellent Theophilus,**" (Luke 1:1-3)*

There are different schools of thought about who Theophilus was. Some believe he was an actual person, while others believe that it is a generic term that references the church and all Christians.

What we do know is this:

- The name Theophilus translated means *loved by God*.
- Luke calls him “most excellent” - a title often given to someone of honor or rank, such as a Roman official.
- Paul used the same term when addressing Felix (**Acts 23:26; Acts 24:2**) and Festus (**Acts 26:25**).

For this study, we will conclude Theophilus is an actual person, one of high rank or influence.

Luke wanted Theophilus to be certain of the things he had been taught. He wanted him to know that the accounts of Christ were true and trustworthy.

In contrast with many of the other New Testament writers, Luke was not one of the twelve disciples of Christ.

Although we do not have a deep knowledge of Luke, Paul gives us an idea of who he was.

Paul makes mention of him in Colossians: “Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.” (**Colossians 4:14**).

Luke was a physician, ministry partner, and friend of Paul.

A few verses earlier, we also learn that Luke is a Gentile.

Paul shares in his letter to the Colossians greetings from his fellow prisoners.

He points out that Aristarchus, Mark (the cousin of Barnabas), and Jesus who is called Justus, “are the only Jewish believers among my co-workers” (**Colossians 4:11**).

Therefore, Luke is the only Gentile to write part of the New Testament.

The name Luke is mentioned only two other times in the New Testament by Paul (**Philemon 1:24 and 2 Timothy 4:11**).

Even though Luke was not one of the twelve disciples, he assures us that his report was carefully investigated (**Luke 1:3**).

While all the gospels give similar accounts, if you want to take an in-depth look at the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the book of Luke is a great study for you.

LESSON

In literature, the *theme* refers to the main idea or moral of the story. Sometimes this main idea or moral is stated directly, and sometimes the reader has to think about the main idea.

This concept of theme is not reserved just for books in Language Arts classrooms; it can also be found in the book of books—the Bible.

The Bible itself has a key theme and is composed of many books with various themes to guide us on our Christian journey.

The Book of Luke has a theme of universal salvation for all mankind. From the opening of this book to the close, the concept of Christ coming to bring salvation can be found.

In **chapter 19**, Luke sums it up this way, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

The verse does not specify a specific group of people, simply “the lost.” Luke’s target audience is the Gentiles (people who are not Jews).

This was counter-cultural during this time. Gentiles were thought of as “unclean” and excluded from the things of God unless they converted to Judaism.

The concept of salvation from the Jewish Messiah as not only being for the Jews is what made Christ’s ministry so controversial.

Luke is letting the Gentile believers know through the theme of universal salvation, that they are also rightful heirs to the promises of the Old Testament if they are in Christ Jesus.

Like most books we read, the major theme is not the only theme that can exist, and Luke is no exception. Other themes found in Luke include...

Fulfillment - Jesus is The Messiah

- Luke will show repeatedly that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, King of the Jews. Luke emphasizes Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled.

He is intentional to point out that the events chronicled are not things that just “happened.” The Old and New Testaments work together to highlight promises made (OT) and promises kept (NT).

Luke writes his gospel highlighting the fulfillment of prophecies made about the Messiah. Jesus's birth was the fulfillment of God's promise. He makes it clear that Jesus is the Son of God and the rightful heir to the throne of King David.

The Kingdom of God

- The phrase "the Kingdom of God" is used over and over in Luke's gospel. He points out that the new Kingdom of God, which is at hand, is not like the kingdoms of the world.

The Kingdom of God is not restrictive like the world. This Kingdom is for the poor, the humble, the outcast, the sinner, the outsider. In Luke's gospel, we will see how arrogant people respond to Jesus compared to the poor, the sick, and the sinners. Luke shows how Jesus is different from the political and religious leaders of His day.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has anyone ever broken a promise to you?

Have you ever broken a promise to anyone? Explain how you or the other person felt.

2. Jesus is God's promise to us fulfilled. He came as the Savior of the world, for all mankind.
 - a. What does it mean to you that God is a promise keeper?
 - b. How does knowing that Jesus came for everyone impact your view/interactions with others?
3. When you hear the word "kingdom" what comes to mind? How is the Kingdom of God different from the world?

Read Luke Chapter 1.

Luke opens his letter with person and purpose. He gets right to the point in the first four verses.

For this reason, readers should not be surprised that verse 5 jumps right into the backstory which leads up to the birth of Christ.

Unlike most stories we hear about the time leading up to the birth of a child, Luke's account does not include the parents. In **verses 5-25** we meet Elizabeth and Zachariah.

They are not the parents of Christ, but they are the parents of the one who will lead the way for Christ.

Verses 5 -10 point out who Elizabeth and Zachariah were. We learn about their lineage and their character.

“Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly” (**Luke 1:6**).

Their current condition in life is also given. They are older in age and childless. Despite Zachariah being a priest and both being righteous, they were still faced with living in shame.

There are two life lessons Luke provides in the text:

- The righteous are not exempt from suffering and disappointment.
- Continue to serve God through your disappointment.

When the angel appeared to Zachariah in **verse 11**, he was not home moping in his situation; he was in the temple fulfilling his priestly duties.

In **verses 11-25**, Luke shares the encounter between Gabriel and Zachariah. The angel gives the prophecy of the birth of their child, along with instructions on how he is to be raised, his ministry purpose, and his name, John. We will later come to know him as John the Baptist.

In **verses 26-38**, Luke shares a second encounter with the angel Gabriel six months after the prophecy of the birth of John. This second encounter is with Mary as she learns the prophecy of the coming Messiah.

As he did with Zachariah, Gabriel tells Mary of the promise that she would conceive a son, what she should name him, and his purpose for coming to the world. (**Verses 30-33**)

The response of Mary is like Zachariah in words but not in heart. In **verse 34** she states, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” Her question was not one of “can it be done?” She is asking “how will it be done?”

Mary’s inquiry was one of faith—not doubt.

Gabriel goes on to reveal in the following verses one of the greatest mysteries of the universe, the immaculate conception (**verses 35-37**).

As the first chapter of Luke concludes, Mary demonstrates an Isaiah-like faith (**Isaiah 6:8**) and says, “Let it be according to your word” (**Luke 1:38**).

Then, in the final verses, Luke tells of the journey Mary takes to visit Elizabeth.

In seven **verses (39-45)**, Luke paints a wonderful picture of the supernatural encounter that occurs between the two.

As soon as Mary enters the house, she greets Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's voice, the baby inside Elizabeth leaps, and she is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth then declares that Mary is blessed and wonders, "the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Without any prior conversation, Elizabeth states Mary's condition. Before He ever came to the earth, Elizabeth confessed Jesus to be Lord. How did she know if He had not yet come?

The power of the Holy Spirit filled her, and it was because of the Spirit that she could know Jesus is Lord (**1 Corinthians 12:3**).

The same ability is granted to everyone who believes in Christ Jesus.

Read Luke Chapter 2:1-20.

Following the same pattern as **chapter 1**, Luke does not waste time at the start of **chapter 2**. Within the first seven verses, he explains where Joseph and Mary are going and why.

It was the time of the census and Joseph, being from the line of David, set out for Nazareth to be registered.

Verse 7 tells us, "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn."

Jesus, the Savior of the world, was born in a place for animals. The awaited King, the Messiah, was not born in a palace, but a manger.

In today's world, a birth such as this would cause an uproar. There would be accusations of abuse and neglect. Some might even question the parents' mental state.

Even in the 21st century, there is debate about women who have home deliveries with the support of professionals. Birth in a barn would be unthinkable.

However, like all things God does, He does well and with purpose. The birth of His Son is no exception. Jesus Christ humbly came to the world as a model for all.

One of the sub-themes of Luke is the Kingdom of God. Through His manger birth, Christ teaches us that in the Kingdom of God, humility comes before glory.

Luke continues the account with an angelic birth announcement of the newborn Savior. The angel of the Lord did not come to King Herod or other nobles.

Unlike the other gospels, Luke's emphasizes the shepherds (**Verses 8-20**). This is significant because shepherds were outcasts of their society and often a despised class of people.

They were considered unclean.

To this group of men, the angel of the Lord announced the Good News: "Then the angel said to them, *"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"* (**Luke 2:10-11**).

The message found in these verses was a message of hope to the shepherds then and is a message of hope to us now.

The overall theme of Luke emerges in this declaration: salvation for all. The gospel is not just for Israel, but for all nations that believe in the Son of Man.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In today's society, shame is a very real thing. How can the story of Zachariah and Elizabeth encourage us to serve through our disappointment and overcome shame?
2. Jesus the savior of the whole world wasn't born in a beautiful palace like other kings. Why do you think that was?

In what ways does the nature of His birth create humility in us?

3. What was the significance of the angel of the Lord appearing to the shepherds?

What message (comfort) does that give us today?

Read Luke 3:1-20.

Luke describes in **chapter 3** the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus' baptism, and genealogy. He goes on to share the story of Jesus' temptation by Satan at the start of **chapter 4**.

In **Verses 1-20**, Luke shows the ministry of John the Baptist. Following the pattern of previous chapters, he does not delay in sharing the mission of John's ministry.

Also known as the forerunner for Jesus, he was true to his name. **Luke 3:3** tells us, *"Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that*

people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.”

His mission was clear: preach repentance and salvation and prepare the way for Christ. **Luke 3:4** declares, *“Isaiah had spoken of John when he said, He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming! Clear the road for him!’”*

John gives an example to every person who preaches the gospel, pointing away from self and toward Jesus.

In our culture, too often we praise and elevate the man of God over the Son of God.

John always kept the main thing, the main thing: Jesus. He constantly pointed people to Jesus. His concern was not if the crowd loved his sermons; his desire was for them to love the Savior.

We can learn much from John’s ministry.

Read Luke 3:21-28.

As Luke moves through the chapter, we come to a familiar passage of scripture: the baptism of Jesus.

We have become so familiar with the account that we do not always appreciate what is actually happening during this time of Christ’s ministry.

In **verse 21**, Luke simply states that Jesus was baptized like the others in the crowd.

While his gospel does not give as much detail as some of the others, the message is no less powerful.

Jesus, who knew no sin and had no need to repent, submitted to be baptized.

Although he does not come out and directly state it, Luke’s theme of fulfillment is present in this passage of scripture.

Jesus came to the world to fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law.

Luke continues the narrative in the next verse. In one statement, we see not only the affirmation of Jesus as God’s Son but also an appearance of the Trinity: *“and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy” (Luke 3:22).*

The imagery in this scene was undoubtedly powerful to those who witnessed and later read Luke’s account.

Let us never get so comfortable with the passage that we miss the power which still exists.

As we come to the end of the chapter, we come to Jesus' family tree. Luke's record of Jesus' ancestors is unlike any of the other gospels. This is not a section to skim over like we so often do with lineage accounts in the Bible.

The family history Luke provides traces back to Adam and shows that Jesus fulfills the criteria for being the Messiah.

The genealogy also supports Luke's purpose for writing the gospel. He started from the beginning to give an accurate account so we could be certain of the things we have been taught.

Read Luke 4:1-15.

Now that Jesus has been baptized, we learn that He is immediately faced with a trial. Luke, along with the other synoptic gospels, tells of Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness.

After being baptized, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to the wilderness where He fasted for 40 days and nights.

During this time, Satan appeared to Jesus and tried to tempt him towards sin. The root of this temptation was the identity of Jesus.

Luke previously addressed this issue in **chapter 3** when He highlighted the baptism. Here we find again that Luke emphasizes Jesus as the Son of God.

Each temptation, the Devil begins with "If you are the Son of Man."

Jesus rebukes each temptation, not by boasting about who He was, but by using the Word of God to validate that He was the Son of God.

Luke concludes this section of chapter 4 stating Satan left "until the next opportunity came" (**Luke 4:15**).

Where Adam and Eve failed in the garden (Israel failed in Exodus), Christ passes the test in the wilderness. In doing so, He is our example for resisting.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. For today's believers, baptism is an outward expression of the inward change which takes place when we accept Christ.

What lesson does Jesus' submission to baptism teach us?

What affirmation does God give to Jesus at His baptism? How did this affirmation provide certainty to humanity then and now?

2. At the end of Chapter 3, Luke gives the genealogy of Jesus. How does knowing His lineage give us confidence that He truly is the Messiah?
3. How did Jesus overcome temptation? What comfort model does it give us today for tackling temptation?