

Introduction

Opening Scripture: [Psalm 139:13-16](#) “13 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

The gospel is **not** belief in a creed or set of doctrines. The gospel is belief in a **person**, Jesus Christ. There are four books of the NT labeled as “Gospels.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke are typically called Synoptic Gospels because they mostly present the same events; John’s Gospel is completely different. All of the Gospels are theological; they all point to the **person** and **work** of Jesus as the means of knowing God. Each Gospel has a slightly different focus; therefore, each Gospel highlights different details.

Background

[Luke 1:1-4](#) “1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

Who wrote this book? Luke and Acts have historically been attributed to Luke, a missionary companion of Paul. *What is the evidence that this was written by Luke?* (1) Luke & Acts seemed to be written as one book (part 1 and part 2) (compare [Luke 1:1-4](#) & [Acts 1:1-5](#)). (2) Paul states that Luke was with him in [Philem 24](#); [Col 4:14](#); [2 Tim 4:11](#). (3) The writer of Acts traveled with Paul ([Acts 16:10-17](#); [20:5-15](#); [21:1-18](#); [27:1-28:16](#)) (notice the writer’s use of “we” in these passages). (4) The oldest manuscript copy of Luke (P75, A.D. 175-225) includes the title, “Gospel according to Luke.”

Who was Luke? Luke was Gentile. The quality of Greek syntax in Luke and Acts suggest that Luke was a native (first language) Greek speaker. Luke also typically quotes from the Greek OT (LXX), rather than the Hebrew OT. Luke was a physician ([Col 4:14](#)).

To whom was it written? The Gospel of Luke is addressed to Theophilus. No further information is given in Scripture or church history concerning Theophilus.

Why was it written? The Gospel of Luke was written to give certainty to Theophilus ([Luke 1:4](#)). Although Luke was not an eyewitness to many of these events (maybe none of them), he wrote down the account of eyewitness ([Luke 1:2](#)).

Prophecy of John's Birth

[Luke 1:5-7](#) “5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.”

Notice that Luke gives the historical setting. These events happened in the days of Herod (Herod, the Great). Herod ruled 37-4 B.C. He was an Edomite, who was appointed by the Romans. When Jacob blessed Judah, he said “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet” ([Gen 49:10](#)). An Edomite ruling over Israel may signal the coming of the Davidic Messiah (from Judah), who would rule over God’s people (JFB; Henry).

Who were Zechariah and Elizabeth? Zechariah was a priest from the division of Abijah ([Luke 1:5](#)); thus, he was a Levite. Aaron’s descendents were divided into 24 divisions, one of which was Abijah ([1 Chr 24:1-19](#)). Each division served at the temple two non-consecutive weeks per year. Elizabeth, Zechariah’s wife, was also a descendent of Aaron ([Luke 1:5](#)). Zechariah and Elizabeth were childless and old ([Luke 1:7](#)).

There are quite a few allusions to Hannah in [Luke 1-2](#). Hannah and Elizabeth were barren ([Luke 1:7](#); [1 Sam 1:5-6](#)). Both women gave birth to lifelong Nazirites ([Luke 1:15](#); [1 Sam 1:11](#)). Just as Samuel prepared the way for David, John would prepare the way for Jesus (see Pao & Schnabel).

[Luke 1:8-12](#) “8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.”

Why was Zechariah in the temple? Zechariah had been chosen by lot to offer incense in the temple. Because of the number of priests in the first century, a man would probably only get this opportunity once in his lifetime. Incense was offered twice per day ([Exod 30:7-8](#)), in conjunction with the morning and evening sacrifices ([Exod 29:38-39](#); cf. [Dan 9:21](#)).

Who appeared in the temple? An angel of the Lord appeared in the temple beside the altar of incense. Often in the OT, “angel of the Lord” refers to God, Himself. However, this is an angel (cf. [Luke 1:19](#)).

[Luke 1:13-17](#) “13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been 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 before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will 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 and he will 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 for the Lord a people prepared.””

Notice that Zechariah’s prayer has been heard. In light of the context, this could be a prayer for a son or for Israel’s return to the Lord (see [Luke 1:68-79](#)). This verse is a good reminder that God hears and remembers the prayers of His people.

What restrictions were laid on Zechariah’s future son, John? John could not drink any form of alcohol. This likely refers to a lifelong Nazirite vow. Many of the Nazirite restrictions are missing, such as growing the hair, avoiding the dead, and abstaining from grapes. However, the context alludes to both Samson and Samuel; therefore, this command likely refers to the Nazirite vow (cf. [Num 6:1-21](#)) (Pao & Schnabel).

It is quite significant for modern culture that John was filled with the Holy Spirit. The phrase (ἔτι ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ) may mean from birth or while he was in the womb. John’s reaction to Mary’s voice in [Luke 1:44](#) suggests that he had the Holy Spirit in the womb (3 months before birth). Filling with the Holy Spirit before birth contradicts the modern suggestion that life begins at birth and that unborn babies are not human (Bock).

What was John’s purpose? John would turn many of Israel to the Lord ([Luke 1:16](#)). In the spirit and power of Elijah, he would turn the hearts of children to their fathers and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just (righteous). He would prepare people for the Lord ([Luke 1:17](#)). These descriptions refer to Malachi’s prophecy. [Malachi 3:1](#) “1 “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me ...” In the NT, this verse is directly applied to John the Baptist ([Matt 11:10](#); [Mark 1:2](#); [Luke 7:27](#)). [Malachi 4:5-6](#) “5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”” (see also [Sirach 48:1-12](#) [Pao & Schnabel]). This prophecy refers back to Elijah’s challenge to the prophets of Baal in [1 Kings 18:36-37](#) “36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. 37 Answer me, O Lord,

answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back” (JFB).

Throughout the Gospels, John is compared to Elijah and is shown to fulfill these prophecies from Malachi. Speaking of John’s preaching Jesus said, “9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you”” ([Matt 11:9-10](#)). This is a quotation of [Malachi 3:1](#). Jesus continued, “13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come” ([Matt 11:13-14](#)).

As Jesus came down from the Mountain after transfiguration, his disciples asked Him about the prophecies of Elijah. [Matthew 17:10-13](#) “10 And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” 11 He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. 12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” 13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.”

[Luke 1:18-20](#) “18 And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” 19 And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.””

What information did the angel give about himself? The angel’s name was Gabriel and he stood in the presence of God. The Bible only identifies the names of two angels, Gabriel ([Dan 8:16](#); [9:21](#); [Luke 1:19, 26](#)) and Michael ([Dan 10:13, 21](#); [12:1](#); [Jude 9](#); [Rev 12:7](#)).

What sign did the angel give to Zechariah to confirm his message? Zechariah expressed some level of doubt by asking for a sign (cf. [Gen 15:8](#)). The sign was that he would not be able to speak until his son was born.

[Luke 1:21-25](#) “21 And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. 23 And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. 24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, 25 “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.””

What did the people realize when Zechariah came out of the temple? Those who were praying outside of the temple realized that Zechariah had seen a vision. He was unable to speak, but tried communicating through gestures.

What was Elizabeth's reaction to her conception? Elizabeth praised God for taking away her reproach. This parallels Rachel's praise when Joseph was born. [Genesis 30:23](#) "23 She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach.'" Elizabeth stayed hidden the first five months of the pregnancy.

Prophecy of Jesus's Birth

[Luke 1:26-29](#) "26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be."

Where did God send Gabriel next? God sent Gabriel to Nazareth, where Mary lived. Nazareth was a fairly insignificant town that is absent from history before the New Testament (Koiter). The town could hold a population of nearly two thousand (Keener), but may have had less than five hundred in the first century (Koiter). The time reference (sixth month) refers back to [Luke 1:25](#) concerning Elizabeth's pregnancy.

[Luke 1:30-33](#) "30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

What name did Gabriel say Mary should name her child? The Son would be named Jesus, or Joshua, which means "the Lord saves." Verse 31 parallels [Isaiah 7:14](#) "14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall **conceive** and **bear a son**, and shall **call his name** Immanuel."

What did Gabriel tell Mary about Jesus? Jesus would be the Son of the Most High. He would sit on David's throne. He would reign forever. This fulfills the Davidic Covenant. [2 Samuel 7:12-16](#) "12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' ""

[Luke 1:34-38](#) "34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High

will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”

What aspect of the prophecy did Mary question? Mary was a virgin; it was inconceivable that she would have a child. Mary and Elizabeth did not have children for different reasons. Both conceptions were miraculous, but Mary’s conception was unique. This fulfills the prophecy of [Isaiah 7:14](#) “14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (cf. [Matt 1:23](#)).

What sign did Gabriel give (verse 36) to assure Mary? Elizabeth had conceived although she was old. Some versions refer to Elizabeth as Mary’s “cousin.” The word (συγγενίς, cf. συγγενής) is less specific than “cousin,” and refers to a relative.

Conclusion

What is the purpose of the Gospel of Luke? [Luke 1:4](#) “4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” Specifically, the book intends to give us assurance of Jesus’s life and teaching ([Acts 1:1](#)).

Notice, however, from the beginning of the book, the emphasis on faith. Zechariah and Elizabeth were people of faith, who were told something quite unbelievable - they would have a child in their old age. Mary was a person of faith, but she was told something quite unbelievable - she would have a child although she was a virgin.

The story of the gospel is far more miraculous. Jesus, the eternal God, became a man so that we who are dead in our sins might be made alive in Him. The Gospel of Luke gives us God’s revelation of Jesus so that we might have assurance. Ultimately, whether we believe it is a matter of faith.

Closing Scripture: [Isaiah 40:3–5](#) “3 A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.””