



Gospel of Luke - Chapter 1

Summary of Chapter One

The first chapter of Luke gives the reason for the writing of this Gospel. Luke told Theophilus that he was writing in order to explain what eye witnesses had seen, and thus give him the truth about what had happened. Theophilus means 'Friend of God' and some say 'Lover of God'. As such, some commentators use this to state the Gospel was, therefore, directed to all those who would come into that category, but most hold that Theophilus was a real person but nothing else about him is known about him.

He writes about the visit of the angel Gabriel to an elderly priest called Zechariah. The angel foretold that Zechariah's wife Elizabeth would have a son, who would have the power of the Holy Spirit upon him from the day of his birth. The son was to be named John and he would lead many people in returning to the Lord. Zechariah doubted the message and was struck mute.

A few months later, Gabriel was sent to Nazareth in Galilee, with a message for a virgin named Mary, who was engaged to be married to Joseph; a direct descendant of King David. Mary was told that she would bear a son to be named Jesus, who would be called the Son of God and who would rule the people of Israel forever. Mary was told that her cousin Elizabeth would also have a son, even though she was past the age of motherhood.

Not long after, Mary went to see Elizabeth and the Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth at their first meeting. She called Mary 'the mother of my Lord' and the baby John leaped with joy in her womb.

Mary sang praises to the Lord about what he had done and she remained with Elizabeth for about three months, probably for the birth, although we are not told that, before returning home.

When John was born, Zechariah was freed from his silence allowing him also to praise God.

I. Luke 1:1-4 - Introduction

The prologue to Luke's Gospel comprises a single sentence and ranks among the finest Greek writings of the 1st Century. It demonstrates Luke's skill and credentials as a writer; further examples of which are found in Luke 3:1-2 and Acts 1:1-2.

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,

Luke 1:1

Many almost certainly includes more people than just the authors of the Gospels, i.e. other disciples and eye-witnesses to the ministry of Christ.

Fulfilled emphasises that Jesus' ministry constitutes the realisation or accomplishment of what is prophesied in the OT.

² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

Luke 1:2-3

Handed down is from a technical Greek term for passing on tradition.

The sources for these narratives were the eye-witnesses and servants, especially the 12 apostles as listed in Luke 6:13-16.

Word is a synonym for the word of God. Luke's credentials, as a writer, are shown because he carefully investigated everything from the beginning.

Orderly refers to logical orderliness. For example, after the Holy Spirit was received by Gentiles, Peter returned to Jerusalem to explain what had happened to them: <<Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened>> (Acts 11:4).

Most excellent is an address for officials, e.g. Claudias Lysias in his letter to Felix, when he sent Paul to him in Acts 23:26; Tertullus, the lawyer representing the Jews, who presented their case against Paul before Felix in Caesarea (Acts 24:2), and, Paul giving his defence before Festus and King Agrippa some time later, when it is recorded: <<"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable>> (Acts 26:25). It is clearly an address used for people of high social standing.

⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke 1:4

Luke's purpose in writing is so that Theophilus may know the certainty of what he has been taught. Written scripture gives believers more certainty and carries more authority than the memory of an oral proclamation. It also shows that Theophilus was almost certainly as convert to Christianity.

II. Luke 1:5-2:52 - The Infancy Narrative

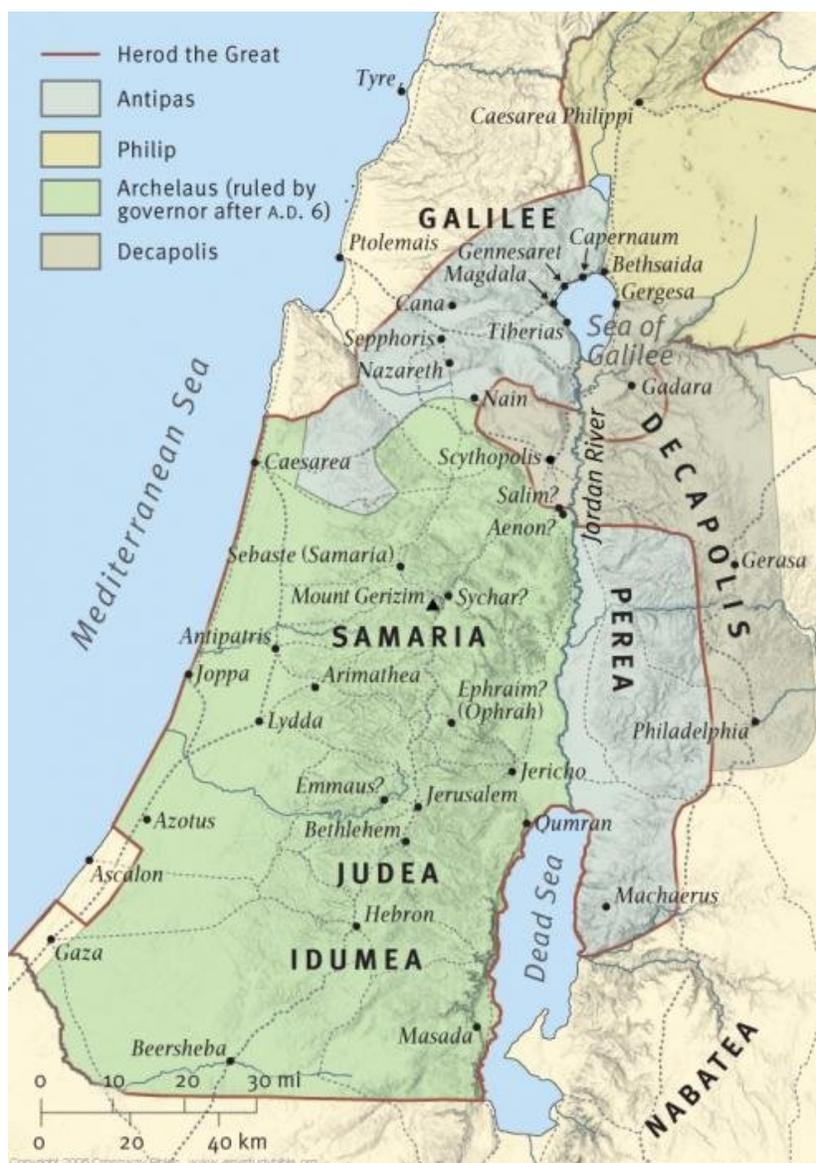
This is the start of a major section of the Gospel of Luke. The opening (Luke 1:8-23) and conclusion (Luke 2:21-52) of this section take place in the temple and form literary bookends indicating its unity.

II.a Luke 1:5-25 - The birth of John the Baptist foretold

In Jesus' day, most Jews believed that, for more than 400 years, the Holy Spirit had not been active in Israel because there had been no more prophets since Malachi. Now God once again visits his people.

John the Baptist was born around 6BC to devout parents, who were both of the priestly line and well advanced in age. John will play an important historical role in linking God's saving activity in the OT, and his saving activity in the person and work of Jesus.

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judæa there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. ⁷ But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.



Luke 1:5-7

Division of Abijah. To provide service for the temple, the priests were divided into 24 divisions, each of which served for a week, twice each year. This was instituted by David and is recorded for us in 1 Chronicles 24:1-19, with Abijah being drawn eighth by lot in v.10. Extra-biblical tradition has Abijah serving in the month of Sivan, about late May or early June. Thus John would have been born around February or March of the following year. However, we need to note that Abijah would be required to serve every six months!

During the major festivals, i.e. Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, all the divisions served. Luke focuses on the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Luke records that they were both upright or righteous and blameless, observing all the Lord's commandments, and that they had no children for Elizabeth was barren. Their childlessness was not due to any personal sin on their part but to God's sovereign and wise plan. Elizabeth is also shown to be a descendant of Aaron, as it is common for the priests to retain a pedigree of their heritage.

John the Baptist's birth is foretold during the reign of Herod the Great, who is described as the king of Judæa. After being granted kingship by Rome in 40BC, Herod ruled Judæa, Galilee, Samaria, Perea and Idumea from 37-4BC. Judæa is used broadly here to describe the land of the Jews rather than narrowly to refer to the Roman province.

Herod the king was more commonly known as Herod I or Herod the Great. He ruled Israel and Judæa from 37-4BC. He was an Idumean and was appointed king of the Jews under the authority of Rome. Idumea was formally Edom, a land to the south of the Promised Land given to Jacob's twin brother Esau, the story of which is told in Genesis Chapter 36. But by this time it incorporated the southern portion that was formerly the land given to the tribe of Judah.

Herod ruled firmly and, at times, ruthlessly. He murdered his own wife, several sons and other relatives. He was a master builder, who restored the temple in Jerusalem and built many theatres, cities, palaces and fortresses. Herod's building programme included his magnificent palace in Jericho, the fortresses of Herodium, Machærus, Sebaste and Masada; and he also extensively rebuilt the harbour and city of Cæsarea Maritima, which was a Hellenised sea port, much improved by Herod, with many sophisticated buildings and one of the flash points of the Jewish revolt in AD63-73. He was especially known for building the temple in Jerusalem.

He financed structures including pagan temples throughout the Roman Empire: including Antioch, where the first major Gentile church was established; Nicopolis, a port city in Epirus, on the west coast of the Greek peninsula and about 200 miles or 322km northwest of Athens. It is here that Paul hoped to meet with Titus after his release from imprisonment in Rome, see Titus 3:12. For Paul in Athens, see Acts 17:16-34.

Ravaged by disease, Herod died in his Jericho palace, which will be discussed in Luke 19:1, and he was buried at Herodium according to Josephus (Jewish Antiquities 6.168-181). Excavations at Herodium since the 1960s have revealed the circular palace-fortress, built atop its mountain, as well as the monumental buildings and huge pool below. In 2007, the excavator announced the discovery of Herod's mausoleum and sarcophagus.

⁸ Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into

the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Luke 1:8-10

Zechariah, chosen by lot, is serving in the temple sanctuary. Outside the sanctuary, assembled worshippers were praying, which may indicate that it was a Sabbath or festival, but not necessarily the Day of Atonement as some commentators have said! They would have waited for the priest to come out to dismiss them with a blessing.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

Luke 1:11-12

Gripped with fear is a typical reaction to an angelic or divine presence, as confirmed in vv.29-30, when Gabriel appears to Mary, and in v.65, when Zechariah receives his hearing and speech back. This is later seen in Luke 2:9, when the angel appears to the shepherds to tell them of the birth of Jesus.

¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,

Luke 1:13-14

Your prayer has been heard. Although the specific content of Zechariah's prayer is not given, it is most likely that Zechariah would have been interceding on behalf of Israel as a nation. He is unlikely to have raised a second petition requesting a child of his own, as indicated by v.13b, at this time, due to his and Elizabeth's ages. This is confirmed by his doubt, for which he was justly punished. Had he continued to pray for a child in unlikely circumstances, it may have invoked a similar response that God gave to Moses about crossing the Jordan: <<But because of you the Lord was angry with me and would not listen to me. "That is enough," the Lord said. "Do not speak to me anymore about this matter" >> (Deuteronomy 3:26).

But he may have had such a prayer request on this occasion, as God has granted them in the past, similar perhaps to where: <<Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant>> (Genesis 25:21), and in Jacob's time: <<Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace" >> (Genesis 30:22-23). We also have Hannah's similar and heartfelt plea in 1 Samuel 1:10-17. To have prayed for a child would have been in line with what Paul would later write to the Roman Church: <<Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God>> (Romans 4:19-20). Prayers are filed in heaven and not forgotten. Zechariah must have prayed for a child hundreds of times over many years and now, at last, the answer had come.

Calling him John would, in Hebrew, be Johanan which means gracious. This would tie in with Malachi 1:9a, which states: <<Now implore God to be gracious to us>>. Also refer to Isaiah

30:18-19, which states: <<Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you>>.

Joy and delight or gladness, as used in many translations, came to Zechariah and Elizabeth both because their childlessness has ended: <<"The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people">> (v.25), and because of what God will do through their son.

¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

Luke 1:15

Abstinence from wine or other fermented drink indicates John's ascetic lifestyle, akin to the Nazirite's in the OT, as recorded in Numbers 6:1-3. His being filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth, is stated in: <<When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit>> (v.41). This reveals God was equipping him for his ministry. It also indicates that he was a distinct human person before birth and suggests that, in an uncommon way, God imparted regeneration to him before he was born.

¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1:16-17

Bring back; turn, used twice in these verses to describe a change in direction, often in the sense of conversion. For example, where Peter healed the paralytic Aeneas in Lydda: <<All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord>> (Acts 9:35), where the disciples were scattered following the persecution of the church in Jerusalem: <<The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord>> (Acts 11:21), and when the people of Lystra tried to worship Barnabas and Paul, believing them to be gods, they said: <<Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them>> (Acts 14:15).

Go on before the Lord compares with 'prepare the way' in Luke 3:4.

The terms spirit and power are frequently associated as in the words of Luke 4:14 <<Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside>>; or Jesus, instructing the disciples shortly before his ascension: <<But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth>> (Acts 1:8), and where Peter was addressing Cornelius and said: <<how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him>> (Acts 10:38). And again, when writing to the Roman church Paul states: <<May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit>> (Romans 15:13), then to the Corinthians: <<My message and my preaching were not

with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power>> (1 Corinthians 2:4), to the Ephesians: <<I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being>> (Ephesians 3:16), to the Thessalonians: <<because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake>> (1 Thessalonians 1:5), and in his final letter to Timothy: <<For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline>> (2 Timothy 1:7), for the Holy Spirit imparts power for ministry.

For John's association with [Elijah](#), we read: <<Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed, because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, "I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?" And he tried to see him>> (Luke 9:7-9), and before Peter's confession of Christ, the apostles are in view, when: <<They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life">> (Luke 9:19).

Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would prepare the way for the Messiah in Malachi 3:1 and 4:5. He did not actually imply a literal reappearance of Elijah, and John the Baptist's earlier denial that he was Elijah in John 1:21, was probably an attempt to correct a popular belief that Elijah himself would reappear. Before John's birth, he was designated as the one who would minister in the 'spirit and power of Elijah' (v.17), thereby fulfilling Malachi's prophecy.

After his transfiguration, Jesus explains how John the Baptist's ministry fulfils the prophecy of Elijah's return: <<The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognise him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist>> (Matthew 17:10-13). Elijah, who never died but was translated into heaven in 2 Kings 2:11, was expected to return in the end times, according to Malachi 4:5 <<See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes>>, to 'restore all things'.

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

[Luke 1:18](#)

[How can I be sure of this?](#) Zechariah requests a sign confirming the angel's prediction in v.13 that Elizabeth would have a son. His doubting response elicited the following:

¹⁹ The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

[Luke 1:19](#)

[I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God.](#) This astounding job description identifies Gabriel as an angel of surpassing faithfulness, holiness and responsibility. Gabriel also appeared to Daniel, see Daniel 8:16 & 9:21, and to Mary later on in vv.26-29.

²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.”

Luke 1:20

You will be silent. The sign given by Gabriel is both gracious and a rebuke. It results in muteness and probably also deafness as implied by v.62, which we will look at a little later.

But until the day this happens affirms that the promise will still be fulfilled.

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realised he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

Luke 1:21-22

Unable to speak. The Greek word *kōphos* can mean either mute or deaf, depending on the context and there is some evidence that it can, at times, mean deaf and mute. This will be discussed in vv.62-63.

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵ “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

Luke 1:23-25

Why Elizabeth remained in seclusion five months is unclear but she kept her pregnancy secret for a while, allowing her time to worship God (v.25) and prepare for this special child.

Taken away my disgrace. Childlessness was considered a disgrace in their culture, as confirmed by: <<She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, “God has taken away my disgrace” >> (Genesis 30:23), and the prophet Isaiah cries out: <<In that day seven women will take hold of one man and say, “We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace!” >> (Isaiah 4:1).

II.b Luke 1:26-38 - The birth of Jesus foretold

Luke moves from announcing the birth of John the Baptist to announcing the birth of Jesus. The mighty work of God, through John’s conception and ministry, will be surpassed by the greater miracle of virginal conception and the greater work of Christ.

²⁶ In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,



Luke 1:26

Sixth month refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, see v.24.

Luke's specifying that Nazareth was a town in Galilee suggests that his intended readers were not from Palestine and would, therefore, be unfamiliar with the city's location. We have a similar situation reflected in these words: <<Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people>> (Luke 4:31).

Excavations at Nazareth have located tombs, olive presses, wells and vaulted cells for wine and oil storage, indicating that the village was a small agricultural settlement. Nazareth was located on a road leading from nearby Sepphoris into Samaria.

The current Church of the Annunciation lies atop previous early Byzantine church structures and caves from the 4th Century or possibly earlier. These commemorated the early life of Jesus and his family.



²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Luke 1:27

Virgin describes Mary's state both before the conception and during pregnancy: <<But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus>> (Matthew 1:25). There is no biblical evidence to support the perpetual virgin state of Mary as some traditions hold to. In fact, the bible seems to directly teach the opposite: <<A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you" >> (Mark 3:32). It is almost certain that Joseph and Mary had a normal marriage following the birth of Jesus and had children together. This would bring more honour to Mary and to God than her perpetual virginity could ever do, as it was the purpose for which God had created her in his own image.

As stated in the introduction, Dr David Jenkins, ordained as the next Bishop of Durham, shocked many people by doubting the Virgin Birth. It is unhelpful, especially for those who are seekers of the faith, when Christian leaders cast doubt on the authenticity of passages of scripture. If one part isn't true, what is to say that other parts are, e.g. the Resurrection?

Extra-biblical evidence confirms that Mary, although from a poor family, was also a descendant of David, thus we have the biological link for the Christ from David.

Pledged to be married or betrothed was a legally binding engagement, breakable only by divorce or death: <<Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly>> (Matthew 1:19). Also note, that if Mary had lost her virginity to Joseph before the wedding, both of them would have been liable to death by stoning under the law. If Mary alone had been guilty, then Joseph could have had her tried for this serious crime under the Law of Moses, and contrary to the seventh commandment. The Law states: <<If a man commits adultery with another man's wife – with the wife of his neighbour – both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death>> (Leviticus 20:10), and: <<In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?>> (John 8:5).

Note that John 7:53 - 8:11 is not recorded in early manuscripts.

Joseph is a descendant of David, as confirmed in Christ's genealogy; see Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38. It is also noted in these words: <<But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit">> (Matthew 1:20). There is further confirmation in Luke: <<So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judæa, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David>> (Luke 2:4).

²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God

Luke 1:28-30

You who are highly favoured; found favour with God. Mary is the recipient of God's grace, not the giver of grace. Similarly, <<But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD>> (Genesis 6:8). Mary is from the Hebrew name Miriam, the same as Moses' sister. Mary was indeed blessed by God, something that was said of Jael, who slayed Sisera, the story of which is told in Judges Chapter 5. In original translations, the word hail appears instead on greetings. 'Hail Mary' is something that was picked up during early church history and has since been misused or misunderstood.

We should give praise to God for Mary but we must never give praise to her!

³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Luke 1:31-33:

Most High is the name for the true God and comes from Genesis 14:18-22. God Most High in Hebrew is 'El 'Elyon. 'El is the common Semitic term for God. To this is added the attribute 'Elyon meaning Most High. Melchisedek was the king of Salem, and priest of God Most High in Genesis 14:18, and this title is confirmed by Balaam, who was a Gentile: <<the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened>> (Numbers 24:16). The term in these passages means the Most High or the Almighty. It became a common title for the Lord among the monotheistic Israelites, especially in the Psalms.

In Daniel 3:26, 4:24 and 4:34, it is the title for God that both Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar hold in common. It is a favoured name in the inter-testamental book of Sirach, also called Ecclesiasticus.

Whereas John is the prophet of the Most High (v.76), Jesus is the Son of the Most High. He is the promised successor to the throne of his father David, as God promised David with these words: <<When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever>> (2 Samuel 7:12-13). Although this passage was in part fulfilled by Solomon, the undertone is messianic. A similar promise to David was: <<Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever>> (2 Samuel 7:16).

³⁴ How will this be, Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin?

Luke 1:34

Since I am a virgin is literally 'since I know no man'. Mary assumes that she will conceive (v.31) supernaturally, while still a virgin. Her response is not one of doubt, as was Zechariah's, as she would be aware from scripture that the Messiah would be born of a virgin, for it is written: <<Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel>> (Isaiah 7:14). Her response is more one of genuine interest and intrigue. She doesn't object to the probability of having her forthcoming wedding ruined, her reputation tarnished beyond repair, and even the possibility of being stoned for her sin. For this was a time that was awaited and expected: <<In those days and at

that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land>> (Jeremiah 33:15).

Jesus is the Son of the Father by eternal generation. The instances of birth, such as Sarah in old age, and Rebekah and Hannah after long periods of barrenness, were probably given, in part, to help people's understanding that the Messiah could and would be born of a virgin. In Romans 4:20-21, Paul describes how it was with Abraham, as he waited for God's promise of a child through Sarah: <<Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised>>.

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Luke 1:35

The Holy Spirit will perform this great miracle, so that Mary will become pregnant without having sexual intercourse with a man. Mary is not given a direct answer, as it comes under the power of the Most High God, who reveals what we need to know, yet retains mystery around that which we need not know. Biologically, we know how babies are formed in the womb, but it remains a mystery how their spirit enters them and is developed. This is confirmed by: <<As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything>> (Ecclesiastes 11:5 ESV). It should be noted that many translations use wind instead of spirit, which are the same words in both Hebrew (ruah) and Greek (pneuma).

And the theme continues that God sees what we cannot in these words: <<My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be>> (Psalm 139:15-16), and, specifically with relation to Christ as a human: <<Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory>> (1 Timothy 3:16).

No word of God must be incredible to us, as long as no work of God is impossible for him!

So the holy one to be born indicates that Jesus' holiness derives from his being conceived by the Holy Spirit. Although Jesus was a genuine human being, he did not inherit a sinful nature and disposition from Adam, as all other human beings do. Paul writes: <<God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>> (2 Corinthians 5:21), and the writer to the Hebrews says: <<For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin>> (Hebrews 4:15). Peter writes: <<"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" >> (1 Peter 2:22), and John writes: <<But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin>> (1 John 3:5).

This compares with our own ways of living within sin, where Paul writes of its consequences: <<All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath>> (Ephesians 2:3).

In my understanding, it is possible for Jesus to be fully man born of woman yet to be without sin, only if the Holy Spirit implanted a perfect foetus in Mary, rather than fertilising one of her eggs. The Christ must not share the common corruption and pollution of our human nature that comes about through natural generation, and is inherent in our DNA. If it were an implant, it would mean that she was Jesus' surrogate rather than his biological mother, and brings his family relationships into a different perspective, helping to explain some of the comments he made about them.

³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:36-38

I am the Lord's servant. The section ends with Mary's example of true discipleship and obedience in her submission to God's word and promise.

II.c. Luke 1:39-56 - Mary visits Elizabeth

This section builds upon the previous two and contains an introductory narrative (vv.39-41), two hymns (vv.42-45 & vv.46-55), and a conclusion (v.56).

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judæa, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

Luke 1:39-41

At that time or in those days is also used elsewhere: <<One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God>> (Luke 6:12), and: <<In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)>> (Acts 1:15), this phrase links the present account with the preceding.

It is likely that the hill country of Judæa refers to the largely hilly region of Judæa around Jerusalem. Although the town is not named, it could well be Hebron, which is described in a similar way in the OT, and was a town given to the descendants of Aaron. This is confirmed in Joshua 21:10-11 <<(these towns were assigned to the descendants of Aaron who were from the Kohathite clans of the Levites, because the first lot fell to them): They gave them Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), with its surrounding pastureland, in the hill country of Judah. (Arba was the forefather of Anak)>>.

The baby leaped could be seen as a prophetic, first instance of John preparing the way for Jesus; refer to v.17 and v.76. John's prophetic role is evidenced even as an unborn child in the womb. The word for leaped is the Greek eskirtese, which is used in Genesis 25:22 as the struggle between Rebekah's twins in her womb: <<The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to enquire of the Lord>> (Genesis 25:22 ESV), and is used in Psalm 114:4, as skipped: <<The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs>>. This would not be the only time that John would express his joy at serving Jesus, as we see in John 3:29 <<The bride belongs to the

bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete>>.

Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, explains the baby's leaping (vv.42-45).

⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" ⁴³ But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Luke 1:42-45

Blessed are you among women. The reason for Mary's blessedness is located in the second blessed is, i.e. because of the blessedness of the child she will bear, literally the fruit of your womb.

The KJV translation uses the same words by the angel to Mary in v.28, instead of highly favoured. Elizabeth also recognises him as her Lord, just as David did in Psalm 110:1a <<The LORD says to my Lord>>.

The baby in my womb leaped for joy pictures the unborn child at the sixth month of pregnancy as a distinct person able to feel joy.

Mary is blessed for her faith but she is most blessed for the privilege of bearing the Son of God.

We have an interesting encounter when a woman spoke to Jesus of a similar blessing, recorded in Luke 11:27-28 <<As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it">>. Jesus clearly sees that we are all blessed who know and follow God's will for us in his name.

II.c.i Luke 1:46-55 - Mary's song

Mary's song of praise in these verses has traditionally been called the Magnificat, a title derived from the opening word *magnificat* in the Latin Vulgate translation, which means magnifies. The Magnificat is the first of three hymns in Luke Chapters 1 & 2; the other two being the Benedictus, i.e. Song of Zechariah or Canticle of Zachary in vv.68-79; and the Nunc Dimittis, i.e. Song or Canticle of Simeon in Luke 2:29-32.

Mary's song is similar in context to that of Miriam, after Israel had miraculously crossed through the Red Sea: <<Miriam sang to them: Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted>> (Exodus 15:21a), and also the prayer of Hannah, when she was blessed by the Lord with the birth of her son: <<Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance">> (1 Samuel 2:1).

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

Luke 1:46-47

My soul glorifies or magnifies the Lord. Mary's hymn of praise, the Magnificat, follows the common form of Psalms of thanksgiving, which begin by thanking God and then telling why one is thankful. The Magnificat carries echoes of the content and form of David's Psalm 103:1 <<Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name>>.

My spirit rejoices. Mary's entire being is caught up in praise to God.

God my Saviour. Mary herself is not free from sin but is in need of a Saviour, just as we all are.

48 for he has been mindful
 of the humble state of his servant.
 From now on all generations will call me blessed

Luke 1:48

Here, for indicates that Mary is about to present the grounds or foundation of her praise (vv.46-47).

He has been mindful. This first reason for Mary's praise recalls Hannah's hymn. (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

Humble state is confirmed in v.52 and by Paul: <<Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him>> (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). God often uses people, who are not great in the world's eyes, to work his great purposes on the earth.

From now on. As confirmed in Luke 12:52 <<From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three>>, or: <<For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes>> (Luke 22:18), then: <<But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God>> (Luke 22:69), and about Paul, while in Corinth: <<But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles">> (Acts 18:6).

All generations will call me blessed recalls v.42b <<Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!>>.

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me —
 holy is his name.
50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
 from generation to generation.
51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
53 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers. "

Luke 1:49-55

The hymn moves from Mary to what her son's birth means for believing Israelites.

Fear indicates reverent humble obedience that seeks to please God.

The second ground for Mary's praise is introduced by he has performed mighty deeds with his arm, which is an anthropomorphism or attribution of human motivation to natural, or perhaps supernatural phenomena, for God's might.

Has scattered; has brought. Mary's use of the aorist tense expresses her certainty of what God will do.

To Abraham and his descendents emphasises the fulfilment of salvation history.

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Luke 1:56

It appears Luke wanted to complete the story of Mary before turning his attention to the next phase in the story, i.e. the birth of John the Baptist. This is a natural way to relate the story but most commentators believe that Mary probably stayed with Elizabeth during her confinement, to assist with the birth, then returned to Nazareth shortly afterwards.

II.d Luke 1:57-80 - The birth of John the Baptist

This section includes Luke's account of John's birth (vv.57-66), and Zechariah's hymn of praise (vv.67-79).

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

Luke 1:57-58

Shown her great mercy refers back to v.25, where she has had her disgrace of barrenness taken away.

Shared her joy, or rejoiced with her, is a partial fulfilment of v.14, and later shared with the shepherds: <<But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" >> (Luke 2:10).

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,

Luke 1:59

Circumcision on the eighth day and its meaning is commanded in Genesis 17:11-14 <<You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner – those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” >>; then in Genesis 21:4 <<When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him>>; and Leviticus 12:3 <<On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised>>.

My understanding is that circumcision is a mark of the covenant between God and the Jewish people, and was one of the things that set them apart from others. The generation that was born in the wilderness were not circumcised on the 8th day, but waited until they arrived in the Promised Land, partially because there was no need for them to be segregated from other nations in the wilderness, and partly as an opportunity for the covenant to be re-established at this significant juncture in their history.

⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.”

Luke 1:60

Elizabeth names her son John as the angel instructed in v.13, but the choice is questioned.

⁶¹ They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”

⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.”

Luke 1:61-63

They made signs to his father indicates that Zechariah was deaf as well as mute, or else they would simply have spoken to him, as commented on at v.22. This is confirmed by the people’s amazement (v.63), that he chose the same name as Elizabeth chose, something that would not have been surprising if he had been able to hear her. Zechariah, using a writing tablet, a wooden tablet covered with wax, affirms Elizabeth’s choice.

The above is the rationale of several eminent scholars. In defence of them, some believe that Zechariah had actually suffered some form of stroke that had left him unable to communicate at all. My own opinion is that, despite being deaf and mute, it is almost certain that Zechariah would have been able to communicate with his wife Elizabeth through sign and writing. No doubt he made her fully aware of the full account of God’s promise about their son and the requirement to name him John. Either way, both Zechariah and Elizabeth would have been under the guidance of one Spirit.

⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ The neighbours were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judæa people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

Luke 1:64-66

Awe or fear comes upon all the neighbours of Zechariah and Elizabeth, as confirmed in v.12, for they suddenly realise that God is working among them. Luke emphasises the greatness of John's fame by his expressions the neighbours, the hill country of Judæa and everyone who heard.

II.d.i Luke 1:67-79 - Zechariah's song

⁶⁷ His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

Luke 1:67

Zechariah filled with the Holy Spirit, as was Elizabeth at v.41, gives a prophecy (vv.68-79), that is a single sentence in the Greek text. It is often called the Benedictus from its first word in the Latin Vulgate.

⁶⁸ "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come and has redeemed his people

Luke 1:68

Like the Magnificat (vv.46-55), the Benedictus begins with a word of praise, i.e. praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel.

Because indicates that all of the following (vv.68-79) is the cause of Zechariah's praise.

He has come or visited and has redeemed his people. With the events of vv.5-67, the promised time of salvation has begun, confirmed in v.78, which also speaks of God visiting his people with the dawning of the 'sunrise ... from on high'. That is with the coming of Christ.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

Luke 1:69

The horn symbolises an animal's strength and refers to Jesus.

David was confirmed as King David in v.27.

⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

Luke 1:70

As he said or spoke; long ago or from of old; emphasises the fulfilment and continuity between the old and new covenant as confirmed in vv.72-73.

71 salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us —
72 to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Luke 1:71-75

Swore to our father Abraham. The content of the oath (v.73) is given in vv.74-75. That is, to bless the world through Abraham's offspring. The Benedictus proper ends at v.75.

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,

Luke 1:76-77

The prophet of the Most High is John's relationship to Jesus, who is the Most High: <<who is God over all>> (Romans 9:5c), and one with the Father. This reminds us of the relationship between Moses and Aaron, where: <<Then the Lord said to Moses, " See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet>> (Exodus 7:1). Jesus is not just a God to Pharaoh but to everyone.

This knowledge, brought by John the Baptist, prepares the way for the coming of Jesus. Such knowledge is not merely theoretical or cognitive, but deeply experiential, resulting in a fundamental change of heart and behaviour, e.g. repentance as confirmed in Luke 3:7-8 <<John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, " You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham>>.

Salvation and the forgiveness of their sins. It is recorded of John that: <<He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins>> (Luke 3:3), to reveal the nature of the redemption brought by the Christ.

78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
79 to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace."

Luke 1:78-79

The rising sun will come to us or sunrise shall visit us; to shine on or give light. Probably a metaphor referring to the coming of the Messiah: <<See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn>> (Isaiah 60:2-3), <<But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall>> (Malachi 4:2), and perhaps Balaam's prophecy: <<I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth>> (Numbers 24:17).

Again, these are remarkable prophecies. Malachi lived some 400 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah 800 years, and Balaam, a Gentile, about 1300 years.

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Luke 1:80

The child grew and became strong in spirit. Similar to Jesus as confirmed by these words: <<And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him>> (Luke 2:40).

This does not necessarily mean that John lived like a recluse and he almost certainly would have travelled up to Jerusalem from age 12 to attend the festivals. It appears that he would have spent time with members of his priestly family, being taught and prepared by them, and by the Holy Spirit, for his unique ministry that would come when he was about 30 years of age.