

Getting Ready for John Luke 1:5-25

In his introduction, Luke tells us he was not,

- The first to write an account about Jesus
- Or an eyewitness to Jesus's life and ministry

But that he had

- Followed all things closely
- Intended to write an orderly account about Jesus

Luke was not an eyewitness, but he was a historian and conducted personal interviews to glean the information he needed for an accurate history. At some point he interviewed Zechariah and Elizabeth, to get their accounts of John the Baptist's births.

This section forms the bridge between the silence of the Old Testament silence and noise in the New Testament. After four hundred years of silence, the world is about to get loud.

First: The people Luke Introduces

'In the days" gives us the indication that Luke's account does not begin with John he, a Gentile, is writing as another volume in the history of God's work in Israel's history but now in a climatic sort of way. God isn't finished with Israel. He is going to keep his promises.

APP: Reading the Bible and seeing what God has done in the past is a prerequisite for faith in the present and hope in the future.

See **Note** at end of sermon notes

a) Herod. 5a

- Herod the Great
- Granted the title, "King of the Jews" by the Roman Senate

But it Jesus who is the real King.

Luke 23:37-38 - *The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."*

Herod will lose his temporary kingdom at his death.

Jesus will inherit an eternal kingdom by his death.

Luke 1:33 - *And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*

- Judea refers to the land of the Jews
- An Idumean, a decedent of Esau
- Foreign born
- Hostile to Israel

Here, Luke sets his account of Jesus in real history. This reminds us that history is important and that life is rooted in the physical and always will be. We will have physical bodies in a physical Heaven.

Unlike Matthew, who reports Herod the Great killing babies in Bethlehem, kings and governor's in Luke's account only serve to plant the story in time so that it can be verified. Otherwise, they don't take note of John or Jesus's birth and don't understand how their own world's will be turned upside down by what they deem inconsequential events. (It's Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas who kills John the Baptist).

- b) Zechariah. 5b
- Of the course of Abijah.

The divisions were named for the 24 decedents of Aaron (1 Chron 24:1-19)

- was a descendent of Aaron, Israel's first high priest.
- He was served in the temple and burned incense 8-9

The 24 divisions served in the Temple for once a week, twice a year. It's like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for him to be in charge of the incense. His job was to carry coal from the altar to the table of incense.

- c) Elizabeth. 5c
- Was a descendent of Aaron

- d) Both were v 6
- Righteous before God

Contrast that with *Luke 18:9 - He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous...*

- Walked blamelessness in God's commandments

Abraham was also '*blameless' before God*' (Gen 17:1)

Luke opens his Gospel with a blameless couple looking for a son and ends his Gospel with Joseph of Arimathea, "*a good and righteous man...looking for the kingdom of God*" (Luke 23:50-51).

God is not just answering the prayers of a desperate couple but a desperate people.

God promised Isaac that his decedents would be blessed and as numerous as the stars of Heaven...

Genesis 26:5 - because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

- The blessing that is about to be bestowed on Zechariah and Elizabeth is a direct result of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's faithfulness to God.
- It is also the result of God's covenant-keeping nature.
- God remembers his promises and keeps them.

This is essential because Zechariah and Elizabeth...

- Had no children
- Were beyond the years of childbearing

A small but important caveat:

1 – The promise to Israel - *Deuteronomy 7:14 - You shall be blessed above all peoples. There shall not be male or female barren among you*

2 – A judgement on Babylon – *Isaiah 47:9 - These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure*

Early in Luke's history of Jesus, we meet a righteous, married, childless woman in Elizabeth and a righteous, widowed woman, Anna (Luke 2:36-37).

It looks like Babylon's curse has fallen on Israel.

Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness is not simply their personal misfortune. It's a powerful metaphor for Israel's sorrow under Herod and Rome.

Zechariah and Elizabeth represent God's people, without a future hope unless God miraculously intervenes.

This explains why John's birth doesn't just bring private joy to Zechariah and Elizabeth but hope for Israel.

Luke 1:14-17 - *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."*

Luke remembers, and any of his Jewish readers will remember several righteous, childless couples in the OT:

- Abraham and Sarah
- Jacob and Rachel
- Manoah and his wife
- Elkanah and Hannah

But they've also seen God intervene and perform the miraculous. So, at the very mention of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Luke primes the pump of joy for his readers.

- e) John the Baptist
 - He is divinely named. 13

John = God is gracious/merciful

- He will bring joy and gladness to Z & E. 14

As far as Zechariah was concerned, the angel was going to stop there...and could have stopped there. But there is more....

- He will be great before the Lord. 15a
- He won't drink wine or alcohol 15b

Instead of being filled with wine and alcohol, instead of needing the world's remedy for sorrow –

- He will be filled by the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. 15c

Luke 1:39-44 – *In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*

Next Sunday is Sanctity of Life Sunday in the U.S. and it is a text like this that lets us know babies are babies, active and aware, even in the womb.

- He will be evangelically prosperous. 16
- He will have the spirit and power of Elijah. 17a = "powerful spirit"

The OT ended with a promise,

Malachi 4:5-6 - *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...*

- His ministry will be transformative. 17b-c
- The idea that he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children implies that it is the fathers who have turned away from their children, abdicating their divine roles, disrupting their relationship to God and leading Israel into ungodliness.
- He will prepare people for the Lord. 17d

Luke makes it very clear that John is not a competitor but forerunner to Jesus. His Gospel reaches its climax in Jesus, who is not Zechariah's son but God's Son, which the angel makes clear.

Second: The Angelic Encounter. 11-14

- a) An angel appeared to Zechariah. 11
- b) He was troubled and afraid. 12

Images of angels were inscribed on the Temple walls and were believed to occupy the Holy of holies as God's earthly throne room, but no one has ever actually seen an angel in the Temple.

Nor has anyone had heard from God in 400 years. What would he say?

- c) The angel's first words

The Gospel's first words are "*Fear not.*" That is 'good news' indeed!

- d) The angel prophecies that Elizabeth will have a son they should name John 13
- e) They will be very happy at his birth 14

These words gap four hundred years of silence that had been filled with Israel's sorrow. Israel had been kicked back and forth like a football between Syria and Egypt. Antiochus Epiphanies had arisen and gone. And then Rome had come with its heavy boot.

Third: A Most Unusual Conversation. 18-23

- a) Zechariah's doubts. 18

Zechariah's response begins with the Greek words *kata ti*, meaning "On what basis," or "How will I know?" He's asking for proof.

It is different from Mary's question, which begins, "*How*" / "*pos*" – v 34. Mary isn't doubting. She's just asking how God will do what he's promised to do.

This is very interesting because Zechariah's name means, "God has remembered," but Zechariah doesn't remember that God remembers.

- He is old
- His wife is also old

b) The angel's identification. 19

V 18 – *How shall I know this?*

V 19 – *I am Gabriel.*

I stand in the presence of God.

I was sent to speak to you.

Gabriel is only one of two angels mentioned by name in the Bible.

- He appeared to Daniel – Daniel 8:15-16; 9:21-27

This is a Daniel-like moment for Zechariah and once again, Luke is linking his history to the history of Israel in the OT.

- Gabriel is sent with a message of "good news"

"good news" = euangelizo = Gospel!

This is the first mention of "Gospel" in Luke's account.

What is the Gospel? It is good news!

c) The sign. 20

- Zechariah will be mute until John is born. 20a

God doesn't need Zechariah to preach this good news. It is a heavenly message, preached by a heavenly messenger and heaven will fulfil it.

"you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place..."

It isn't Herod who really reigns. It is God!

- It is a judgement. 20b

Zechariah could have been John's forerunner and come out of the Temple with a shout of the good news. He could have been the forerunner of the forerunner. Instead, his doubt seals his tongue for the next nine months.

d) The silence

The angel disappeared and Zechariah was left alone in the holy place, no doubt shaken, shamed and in silence. He bowed and backed out of the temple with hope in his soul.

He was supposed to appear before the people who were awaiting the priestly benediction.

Numbers 6:24-26 - The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Psalms were to be sung. A drink offering was to be poured out. Instead, Zechariah could only point to his mouth and play charades with the people, who eventually understood what happened to him.

But how could he explain it to Elizabeth...and would she believe him?

Fourth: Elizabeth's Conception. 24-25

- a) Elizabeth conceives 24a
- b) But kept herself hidden for five months 24b

No motive is given for Elizabeth's hiding. This means that Mary, Jesus's mother, is the first to hear of the good news from Elizabeth (1:36).

- c) Praising God for his goodness 25

Zechariah couldn't speak and when Elizabeth speaks, she speaks only to God.

God has answered Rachel's cry – "*Give me children, or I'll die*" (Gen 30:1).

But Elizabeth's declaration is entirely personal. Does she know of her pregnancy's wider ramifications?

Conclusion:

Let's go back to v 7 and tie it into v 25 because those two statements almost frame the entire section.

The mention of Elizabeth's barrenness in v 7 is called "reproach" in v 25. But the barren Elizabeth in v 7 became the conceiving Elizabeth in v 24.

In this regard, Elizabeth stands in the place of Israel who have been promised a child -

Isaiah 7:14 - Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

And in the place of every believer, ourselves included, who are still waiting for promises to be fulfilled.

John isn't Jesus but Malachi did prophesy his life and his birth is miraculous, something only God could do. And it is one more prophesy moving Israel toward Immanuel.

So Luke has opened his Gospel with all kinds of OT imagery, prophecies and promises. The echoes of the OT fill his NT teaching. Everything that occurs does so as God has promised and on God's timetable. He's talking about "the things that have been accomplished among us" (1:1) to remind Theophilus (and us) that the NT is a continuation/fulfilment of the OT.

And amongst all the people living in Israel at that time, there at least a few people, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon, and Anna, who still remember God's promises and live and pray accordingly. We too, looking forward to Jesus's second advent, live in that same hope.

Note

Luke is so organized in his retelling of these very important events. Look how he arranges the announcements and births of John and Jesus.

Section A:

- John's birth foretold – 1:5-26
- Jesus's birth foretold – 1:26-38
- Mary journeys to visit Elizabeth – 1:39-56.

Section B:

- John's birth - 1:57-80
- Jesus's birth – 2:1-14
- The journey of the shepherds to the family – 2:15-20)

Community Groups

- 1 – Read the text.
- 2 – Who is Luke?
- 3– Why did Luke write his Gospel?
- 4 – Herod plays no real part in Luke's birth announcement of John or Jesus. Why is he mentioned?
- 5 – What does Luke tell us about Zechariah
- 6 – What does he tell us about Elizabeth?
- 7 – Can you name other, OT couples who were righteous but barren?
- 8 - Why might Luke have emphasized Z and E's righteousness but barrenness?
- 9 - How might Zechariah and Elizabeth symbolize Israel?
- 10 – What angel appears to Zechariah?
- 11 – Where have we seen Gabriel before?
- 12 – Why might the Gospel's first words be "Don't be afraid."
- 13 – What does the angel Gabriel say about John the Baptist?
- 14 – What OT promises does John fulfill?
- 15 – Why might Zechariah have not believed the angel?
- 16 – How does Elizabeth respond to her pregnancy?

Daily Devotion

Mon, the 15th. Read Lk 1:1-7. Luke locates his Gospel “in the days of Herod” to remind us that God is the God of history and the Bible is real history. Real history has places, times, and people. Name a significant place and/or time God intervened in your life. It’s important to do so. Luke reminds Israel of God’s promises to give them hope. Remembering God’s goodness to you gives you hope about the future. What people has God used to bless your life? This is important because God uses people. Now ask yourself, “*Who am I blessing?*” Do that today. Bless someone.

Tue, the 16th. Read Lk 1:8-17. Zechariah was going about his normal day when Gabriel appeared. It is important to remember that it is in our daily routines, in the ‘boringness’ of life that God graciously intervenes. In fact, according to v 6, it was Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s faithfulness to God’s word that made them candidates for God’s blessing. Are you bored with the boring? Are you allergic to the routine? Do you dislike normal? Perhaps you need to re-think these terms, understanding those are the very moments that make you who you are and prepare your life for God’s blessings.

Wed, the 17th. Read Lk 1:18-20. Gabriel’s judgement on Zechariah reveals Zechariah’s unbelief/doubting prayers. Perhaps you’re faithfully praying in doubt. Notice that Zechariah’s doubt produces silence. It’s hard to rejoice or witness while doubt is assailing our hearts. But Luke links Gabriel’s prophecy to God’s OT promise about Elijah to demonstrate God’s faithfulness. Referencing Monday’s devotion, you’ve seen God work in your life. This is a good day to lift the shield of faith (Eph 6:16) to stop Satan’s doubting darts. Preach God’s faithfulness to yourself today. Otherwise, your joy and witness will be silenced.

Thu, the 18th. Read Lk 1:24. How did Elizabeth respond to her conception? God is removing both her and Israel’s reproach by giving Elizabeth a son. That’s what the Gospel is all about – removing reproach (shame/condemnation, guilt). What ‘reproach’ do you feel? From whom? How does the ‘good news’ about Jesus remove your reproach? Now, whose word are you going to believe about that, those who reproach you or God’s? Speak to the Lord about this and then, God at his word today.

Fri, the 19th. Luke is an accurate historian, providing us with people, time, and places so that we can know the Gospel is a true account of Jesus. Like Luke, we should strive to be accurate in our words and recollections of events, conversations, etc. How about you? Do you need to improve on your faithfulness to the truth in your words. We could all use a gut-check on this every once in a while. Think about your speech as you talk today. Make it consistent with the truth.