



Head and Heart

Then Christ Came #3 | Dec 17, 2023 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

Baby Shower



Imagine this with me...

You pull up to the address listed on the invitation, and you see cars parked in the driveway and on the streets. There are blue balloons tied to the mailbox, and people making their way to the door.

Your husband pulls to the curb to let you out. "How long is this thing gonna last?"

You grab the gift bag and fluff the tissue paper to get the perfect effect. "I don't know...a couple of hours, maybe?"

You kiss goodbye, then hop out and head up the walkway. He puts the car in gear and heads out of the neighborhood.

*You ring the doorbell, and it opens with cries of delight! **"Welcome to the baby shower!!!!!"** (Yaayyy!!!)*

What happens next?

I'll be honest... I have no idea! I've heard rumors that a baby shower typically involves food, presents, and maybe some party games. But I'm the husband driving away...and saying a not-so-silent prayer of thanks that I don't have to attend!

Aside from the mandatory activities and the "ooohs" and "ahhhhs" over each gift, I imagine that there is quite a bit of friendly interaction amongst the guests. I can imagine several conversations establishing and understanding the connections between you and the mom-to-be.

- "I'm her sister from Wyoming"
- "I'm going to be Grandma for the first time!"
- "I'm her best friend from work."

The names and relationships are identified, but then the conversation centers around the baby boy who's on the way. **When** and **how** you found out that she was expecting, what kind of family it is going to be, how you feel about the baby's arrival, etc.

Other conversations might happen, but the most important ones for the moment help tell the story of the birth to come!



Sermon Series Tie-In

We're in week three (out of four) in our Christmas series entitled, "Then Christ Came." In this series we are looking at the way the gospel writers introduce us to Jesus. Instead of presenting Jesus' arrival with the traditional nativity scene, the gospel writers give us our *first glimpse* of Jesus in *other* ways. They might *include* the birth narrative, but their *introduction* starts elsewhere. They tell us some information, and *then...Christ came*.

Two weeks ago, we had the pleasure of meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew's introduction was wrapped up in a carefully constructed genealogy, helping us to have **confidence** in the **legitimacy** of Jesus! After Mathew finishes his gospel, we can have no doubts that Jesus is the Messiah!

Last week we met Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Mark helped us to build **anticipation** as we await the **resolution** of God's plan. We heard the prophets prepare us for the arrival of John the Baptist; we heard John the Baptist prepare us for the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus. After reading Mark's gospel, we're ready to help others anticipate Jesus' arrival in their own lives!

Today we'll look at the third gospel in our New Testament, the gospel of Luke. Luke's introduction is the longest and most involved...and maybe the most familiar. You recognize the birth narrative that Kyndall read for us during our song time, the same one read at Christmas services everywhere each holiday season...even including Linus in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

And yet, as familiar as Luke's story is, we have a tendency to skip over the introduction. How does Luke get us into the story of Jesus? How do we meet him? What else does he share? Luke's approach is going to remind us of an important application today.

...So, let's dig in!



Meeting Jesus in Luke

Preface

Luke starts off his gospel with a preface directed to his original audience. Such an opening was customary among the best historians of the day, helping to explain and justify historical works. The preface helped to convince readers that the person writing was trustworthy, reliable, and honest...and therefore so would be the things he wrote.

"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 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, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:1–4, NIV)

Here we have the opening not just of this book, but of a two-part work. Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts (*remember the one we spent 28 weeks teaching this past year?*).¹ Luke wasn't there as an eyewitness to Jesus' life, but the stories had been "handed down" from those who were there. Luke took it upon himself to carefully research the material and make sure that he wrote down accurate information, and then he shared it in a way that would be easily understood by this Theophilus fellow.

Note: "Theophilus" is most likely a proper name and a person to whom Luke is writing...though it could be translated as "friend of God" and be a more universal address to generic Christians.

Theophilus needed to know about Jesus with *certainty*, and so Luke embarks on a quest to provide that certainty and to connect it with the truth that had been handed down from the apostles.

He begins with an extended introduction, spanning two lengthy chapters (80 verses and 52 verses, respectively). In this introduction, we begin to meet many different people connected with the coming of Jesus. The introduction almost seems like our fictional baby shower earlier: as we meet each person, we have a chance to hear their story and see how they react to the upcoming birth.



Meeting the People

Some of the people we meet are just extras, such as the Roman emperor (Caesar Augustus) and the Syrian governor (Quirinius) or tribal/family members (Abijah, Asher). These names of people and places are important since they ground the story in its historical context and they confirm the validity of Luke's information...but most of these names are secondary to Luke's main focus. As we await a baby boy, in this extended introduction to Jesus, we discover **ten people** that we need to know:



1. **Luke (1:3) – The Author.** Luke isn't prominent in the text itself, but his presence in every verse as the author is important to note.
2. **Theophilus (1:3) – The Reader.** Theophilus is only mentioned in the introduction, but every detail has been written for his sake.

¹ Acts of Peter/Acts of Paul Sermon Series • 2023, Tonganoxie Christian Church

3. **Zechariah (1:5) – The Priest.** We met Zechariah last week as the father of John the Baptist. He receives an angelic message informing him of John’s miraculous upcoming birth – miraculous because he and his wife are both “advanced in years.”
4. **Elizabeth (1:5) – The Priest’s Wife.** Elizabeth is the soon-to-be mother of John.
5. **Joseph (1:27) – Mary’s Husband-To-Be.** He gets a nod here, though not with as much detail as we get from Matthew’s gospel.
6. **Mary (1:27) – Mother of Jesus, Relative of Elizabeth.** Mary, did you know? Yes! Because an angel shares some important information about her upcoming miraculous birth.
7. **Baby John (1:41) – Child of Zechariah and Elizabeth.** John the Baptist is here before the camel hair duds and wilderness preparation, showing up as a baby bump...but an active one!
8. **Shepherds (2:8) – Literal Shepherds.** Random dudes watching their flocks of sheep by night.
9. **Simeon (2:25) – Righteous Guy.** Simeon is an old, devout follower of God, who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would see the Christ.
10. **Anna (2:36) – Prophetess.** Anna hung out at the temple as a long-time widow and proclaimer of God.

These are the ten subjects who stand out in this introduction.

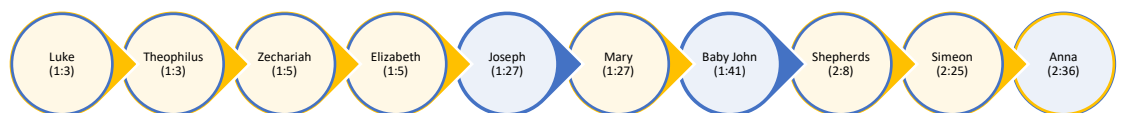
I want to encourage you to read through chapters 1-2 of Luke on your own time. It’s not too lengthy if you sit down to read it, but it *is* lengthy if you try to read it aloud as part of a sermon! I’ll share some portions as we consider today’s message, but I want you to know what it says in its entirety. (Deal?!?!) In the meantime, let me help you see what you’ll read – what Luke has crafted as he tells the story.

The introduction may have seemed similar to baby shower conversation -- like nothing more than a compilation of different scenes and encounters about **when** and **how** you found out that mom was expecting -- but the information is far from random. There is purpose here in what Luke writes!



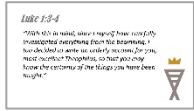
Belief

As we prepare for the arrival of Jesus, Luke first paints a picture of *belief*.



Belief is a key concept as we hear from our top ten. It stands out in many of their stories (marked in yellow).

Belief is the focus of Luke’s introduction. He uses words and phrases that indicate intellectual assent.

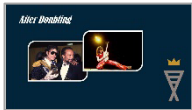


*“With this **in mind**, since I myself have **carefully investigated** everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an **orderly account** for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may **know the certainty** of the things **you have been taught.**” (Luke 1:3–4, NIV)*

Luke and Theophilus approach this gospel with a pre-existing faith in Christ. But some people in the story Luke tells did NOT have faith. Instead, they struggled with belief. Their belief came only after doubting.

After Doubting

Sometimes it’s just hard to believe.



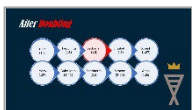
In Michael Jackson’s 1984 hit, Beat It, there is a classic guitar solo played by none other than legendary rock guitarist Eddie Van Halen. But it almost didn’t happen. As the story goes, Jackson’s album was being produced by Quincy Jones – a well-known figure in the 1980’s music world. He wanted a guitar solo and had his sights set on Mr. Van Halen.

*After obtaining Van Halen’s number, Jones made an out-of-the-blue call to the guitarist to request his services for a solo. But a rock star being called by Quincy Jones to play a solo on a Michael Jackson record? This was a joke, right? Van Halen hung up on his prank caller **four times** before talking!*

“I went off on him. I went, ‘What do you want, you [Insert Colorful Language here]!’ And he goes, ‘Is this Eddie?’ I said, ‘Yeah, what ... do you want?’ ‘This is Quincy.’ I’m thinking to myself, ‘I don’t know anyone named Quincy.’”

“He goes, ‘Quincy Jones, man.’ ‘Ahhh....”

And the rest is history.²

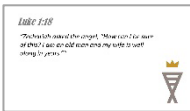


We can understand Eddie’s reluctance to believe. It was hard for people to believe in Luke’s story, too. Zechariah had an encounter with someone more impressive than Quincy Jones, and he STILL didn’t believe. Zechariah got a visit from the angel Gabriel.

² [The incredible story of Eddie Van Halen’s Beat It solo: “I’m thinking to myself, “OK, ABC, 1, 2, 3 and me? How’s that going to work?” | MusicRadar](#)

“Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.” (Luke 1:8–12, NIV)

In this gospel, Luke is sharing parallel birth stories – one of John the Baptist and one of Jesus. The angel gives Zechariah a message about having baby John (we covered this last week). But I want you to hear Zechariah’s reaction as the angel shares this news:



*“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, NIV)*

In other words, “Mr. Angel sent from God Himself” ...*Can I really trust you?*

Maybe you can relate. You don’t like to be gullible. You don’t want to be a sucker as you consider the spiritual stuff that’s going on in the world. You want to make sure you *know* before you commit.

Well, here’s a tip from the Z-man: If you have a word from God, don’t doubt it!

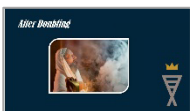
I’m not saying to blindly believe every voice that claims to be from God. That can be dangerous.



“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14, NIV)

But if, after examining and testing (*to ensure that the Bible is His Word, to make sure you understand what it actually claims or commands*)...if after that you STILL doubt God’s message?!? God might take extra steps to get your attention because His word will not return void.

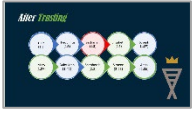
In Zechariah’s case, the angel gives him a little bit of additional proof:



*“The angel said to him, “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. 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 appointed time.”” (Luke 1:19–20, NIV)*

Zechariah doesn’t speak again for the next nine months! He’s silent through the pregnancy, silent through the birth, and silent until 8 days after the birth. At last, during his baby’s Jewish initiation ceremony of circumcision, Zechariah communicates in writing that the baby should be named John – in accordance with the angel’s original message. Immediately he could speak! (John 1:64)

So, Zechariah had doubts...but they eventually turned into beliefs.



After Trusting

Yet most of the people in Luke's introduction **believed** right away, after **trusting**.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth just went with the news from her husband! She **trusted** God and went through her pregnancy, and through the Holy Spirit she celebrated and **believed** when Mary arrived with her own pregnancy.

Mary

Given a similar angelic message, Mary believed. She did have a question:

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”
(Luke 1:34, NIV)

But this was more of a logistics question (“How are we doing this?”) than Zechariah’s “How can I be *sure*?” Mary **trusted**, and she **believed**.

Shepherds

When angels spoke to the shepherds, they didn’t question. They just **trusted** and **believed** the angels, saying “Let’s go!”

“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”
(Luke 2:15, NIV)

Simeon

Simeon had received a promise that he would see the Christ before he died. Simeon **trusted** that promise. The Spirit prompted him to go to the Temple, and he **believed**...and he met baby Jesus!

Anna

Anna **believed** and responded immediately when introduced to Jesus. There was no moment of doubt, just **trust**.

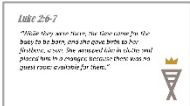
Luke paints a picture of **trust and belief** that we are wise to follow. When we encounter Jesus, **trust and belief** is essential. It is a necessary component of the salvation process.



“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”” (Romans 10:9–11, NIV)

Such belief then responds in obedience through baptism/immersion in water. But trust and belief is essential, and Luke’s introduction highlights both.

God revealed. People trusted. People believed. **And then...Christ came.**

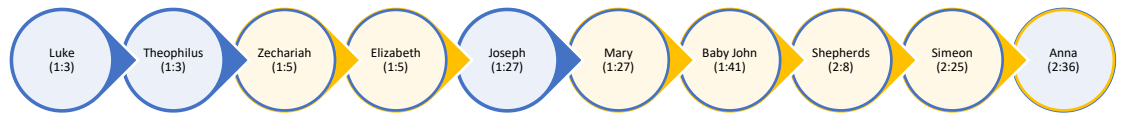


“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.” (Luke 2:6–7, NIV)

Belief is an important precursor to Jesus’ arrival...but Luke wants us to see something else in his introduction to Jesus.



Worship



Luke shows that the proper response to belief is **worship**.



Poetry and Prophecy

One of the interesting features of Luke 1-2 is the presence of poetic prophecy and song.

If you’ve ever watched a Broadway musical, you’ll feel at home here. Narrative is interrupted with verse, in a way that feels a little unnatural. Luke might not include the dance numbers, but in his writing, we find impromptu poetry and lyrics from:

- **Zechariah** (1:67-79) – A song now called “The Benedictus”
- **Mary** (1:46-55) – A song now called “The Magnificat”
- **Angels** (2:14)
- **Simeon** (2:29-32)

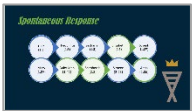
These songs may not have happened on the spot; they may have been composed later and applied here. Yet they show an intentional response to God’s work...and a focus on worship!

Each song has rich connections to and echoes of the Old Testament. Each song richly proclaims God’s salvation and mercy. Each song is focused more on God and His plans than on the baby.

Listen to their statements:

- “My soul magnifies the Lord!”
- “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel”
- “Glory to God in the highest”

These words show intentional, carefully crafted worship.



Spontaneous Response

Yet the worship doesn’t stop there. The other people in our story are just as invested in worship. They just do so spontaneously and without song.

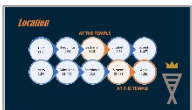
- Baby John starts bouncing around inside the womb when he is in the presence of Baby Jesus!
- Elizabeth exclaims praise with a loud cry!
- Anna began giving thanks!
- The shepherds were hyped up after meeting Jesus!

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.” (Luke 2:20, NIV)

What do these people communicate? They direct attention and glory to God. They take the good news of God’s action in this world, and they focus on its author. They proclaim God’s praise!

Is this accidental? Is this a coincidence? No! It is an intentional framing by Luke so we can join in the praise of God ourselves.

Location

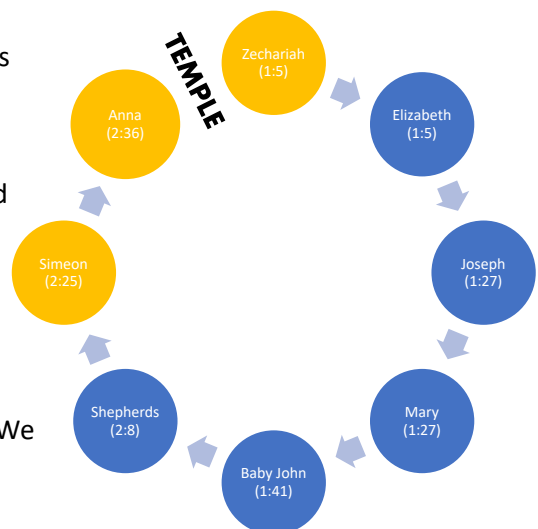


Even the setting of these praises helps us focus attention on worship.

Where does Luke **start**? With Zechariah ministering in the **temple**, the place associated with God’s presence.

Where does Luke **end** his introduction? With Simeon and Anna worshipping at the **temple**!

We begin and end with prophets and priests! We start and finish with worship and fasting and



prayer! We bookend the introduction with people who display blamelessness and righteousness and devotion to God!

Each person in Luke's introduction began with a moment of trust and belief as God's plan was set in motion...

THEN, CHRIST CAME into their situation...

BUT THEN... WORSHIP CAME in response to what God was doing!!!!

Closing: How We View Jesus



Toward the end of the baby shower, you text your husband that it's time for a ride. He shows up, you give hugs, and then you're out the door ready to grab a Sonic drink because that punch was gross.



But you don't leave with only intellectual information – my best friend is having a baby. You leave with an intention of loving that child when he arrives! You look forward to visiting your friend at the hospital after delivery and holding this precious new life.

You want to cuddle him. You want to spoil him. You want to be the best “aunt” he's ever had. Knowledge isn't the goal; love and adoration are the goal.



Luke makes it clear that while he is providing an intellectual, well-researched account of the facts of Jesus' life, an intellectual response is not enough for us.

We need to respond to Jesus in worship!

We should want to love Him. You should want to build your life around Him, sing songs of praise to Him, sit in awe of Him, stand and serve Him. We should be praising God because of Him.

As we read the gospel of Luke, our introduction to Jesus includes a baby...but it shows us the kind of praise and worship that should surround His arrival and his presence.



Is your response to Jesus simply acknowledging Him as Lord and Savior... or is it WORSHIPING him as Lord and Savior?

- One *knows* the truth. The other EMBRACES the truth!
- One *recalls* the incarnation. The other DANCES WITH JOY for of His arrival!
- One *sees* what Jesus has done. The other SHOUTS PRAISES for His work!
- One *explains* the cross. The other BOWS IN HUMILITY before the cross!

Luke reminds us that it's not enough to know there IS a baby. We must LOVE THE BABY! **We must allow our belief to lead us to worship.**



Prayer

Invitation

"Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God." (Psalm 43:3–4, ESV)

There is only one proper response to this message of truth: to worship.

So, please stand as we sing...and allow your heart to respond with adoration and praise this morning.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

Meeting Jesus in Luke

Preface (Luke 1:1-4)

Meeting the People

Belief

After Doubting (Luke 1:8-12, 18-20; 2 Corinthians 11:14)

After Trusting (Luke 1:34; 2:6-7, 15; Romans 10:9-11)

Worship

Poetry and Prophecy

Spontaneous Response (Luke 2:20)

Location

How We View Jesus

Sermon Discussion ?s

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- Have you ever been excited to meet a new arrival (your own child, a sibling, a niece or nephew, a grandchild)? Compare your expectations with the reality of meeting this child. How did you react? How did you feel?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Read the entirety of Luke 1-2. It should take you 10 minutes or less.
- In Luke's preface (1:1-4), how does he explain his purpose for writing? Why is it important for Christians to have certainty in our beliefs?
- Luke focuses on a lot of people in his introduction. Look up the following verses from Luke and list the people we should notice: Luke 1:5, 1:27, 1:41, 2:8, 2:25, 2:36. Who tends to get your attention? Who do you typically ignore? Why?
- Luke focuses on two parallel birth stories: the birth of John the Baptist, and the birth of Jesus. What is the relationship between these two?
- Read Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. Restate it in your own words. How does God's reversal of expectations for the humble and the proud relate to His work in Jesus?
- Read Zechariah's song in Luke 1:68-79. What enemies of God do you think came to mind when Zechariah prophesied this? What enemies of God would Jesus defeat?
- Why do you think God announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds in Luke 2:8-20? How does each person in this scene demonstrate belief? How does each person demonstrate worship?
- Why should belief in God always result in worship? Would God be pleased with the level of your worship today? Why or why not?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for God to expand your heart for Him. Ask for help to rejoice and praise Him for the work of salvation He has accomplished through Jesus.