

03. Luke's Prologue : The birth of the Baptist & the Messiah

Luke 1:39 - 2:21



I. The two mothers rejoice and praise God : Luke

1:39-41

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb.



Luke 1:41-45

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?”

‘I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing the Messiah, Jesus my Lord’ (Philippians 3:8).

As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Luke 1:46-53

And Mary said, “My soul gives glory to God,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

You look on your servant in her lowliness.

Henceforth all ages will call me blessed.

The Almighty works marvels for me. You are holy!

Your mercy is from age to age, on those who revere you.

You put forth your arm in strength;
and scatter the proud-hearted.

You cast the mighty from their thrones,
and raise the lowly;

You fill the starving with good things,
and send the rich away empty.

Luke 1:54-56

You protect Israel your servant, remembering your **mercy**,
the mercy promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his posterity forever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months
and then returned to her home.

Hannah prayed and said,

1 Samuel 2:1-5

“My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in my God.

My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory.

“There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.

Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.

The Lord kills and brings to life;

he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

1 Samuel 2:6-10

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;

he brings low, he also exalts.

He raises up the poor from the dust;

he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour.

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,

and on them he has set the world.

“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,

but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;

for not by might does one prevail.

The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered;

the Most High will thunder in heaven.

The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;

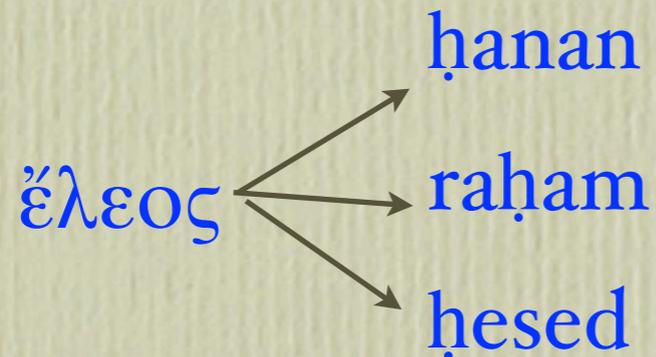
he will give strength to his king,

and exalt the power of his anointed.”

II. The Birth of the Baptist : Luke 1:57-80

Luke 1:57-58

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy (ἔλεος) to her, and they rejoiced with her.



Mercy (ἔλεος) speaks of God's gracious care and all the ways in which God looks after us. It speaks of God's tenderness, and there are innumerable texts in which it speaks of God's faithfulness to the commitment of love which he has made to us.

The words in blue translate ἔλεος in the Greek Version

Isaiah 54:8, 10

‘With everlasting **covenant love** I will have **compassion** on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer.

For the mountains may depart

and the hills be removed,

but my **covenant love** shall not depart from you,

and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,

says the Lord, who has **compassion** on you.’

Luke 1:59-64

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” They said to her, “None of your relatives has this name.” Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed.

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.



Luke 1:65-71

Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea.

All who heard them pondered them and said, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the **Holy Spirit** and spoke this prophecy:

“We thank and praise you, God of Israel,
for you have visited and redeemed us.

You have raised up for us a mighty saviour
in the house of David, your servant,

as you promised through our ancestors, your prophets from of old:

a saviour who would free us from our foes
from the hands of all who hate us.

Luke 1:72-75

Your love for our ancestors is fulfilled
your holy covenant remembered.,
You swore to Abraham our father,
to grant us that, free from fear and saved from our foes,
we might serve you, our God, in holiness and justice,
all the days of our life in your presence.

‘The Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. I will make my covenant between me and you ... You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations ... I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you’ (Genesis 17:1-7).

Luke 1:76-79

And as for you, little child,
You will be called a prophet of God, the Most High.
You will go ahead of our GOD to prepare the way,
to make known to God's people their salvation,
through forgiveness (ἀφέσις) of all their sins:
the tender mercy (σπλάγχνα ἐλέους) of the heart of our God
who visits us like the dawn from on high.

Our God will give light to those in darkness,
those dwelling in the shadow of death,
and guide us into the way of peace.”

Luke 1:80

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

III. The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-21)

Luke 2:1-5

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria (6AD).

Conscription & Tax : Zealot opposition!

All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was betrothed and who was expecting a child.

‘You, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

He shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.

And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace’ (Micah 5:2-5).

Luke 2:6-7

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son [‘Israel is my firstborn’, Ex 4:22). and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



Luke 2:7

there was no place for them in the inn.

The guest room (καταλύμα, see 22:11) was full. It is no place for Jesus, for he has not come as a guest. God is answering the plea of Jeremiah (14:8):

‘O hope of Israel, its saviour in time of trouble,
why should you be like a stranger in the land,
like a traveller turning aside for the night?’

Luke 2:8-12

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. An Angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they had great **fear**. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see I am bringing you **good news** of great **joy** for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a **Saviour**, who is the **Messiah**, the **Lord**. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

Once again (see 1:19) God (an **Angel of the Lord**) speaks.

Jesus is called **‘Saviour’** (see 1:47,69), **‘Lord’** (see 1:43), and **‘Messiah’**. This is the first time we have met this last title, though the idea has been there from the beginning of the gospel (1:17, 31-33, 69).

Messiah ('Christ') derives from chrism, an oil used for anointing. Associated especially with festive celebration, it had a special cultic use in the consecration of the king. As the chrism flowed down over the head and beard of the king, the Spirit of God anointed him. As the perfume filled the air around him, so did the glory of God radiate out from him throughout God's Holy Land.

We read of king David: 'The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."' Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward' (1 Samuel 16:12-13).

Virgil 70-19BC. See Aeneid final part of Book VI, in Hades

Virgil writes that shepherds heralded Augustus's birth. His birth was called 'good news' ('evangelion') Augustus the new born child is proclaimed **saviour** (soter) and **lord** (kyrios). He is seen as the bringer of a new age of **peace**. He is called the **son of God**. He shows exceptional qualities at the age of twelve, etc.

Suetonius (69-122AD) (*Lives of the Caesars*) says that there were prophecies, portents and prefigurements before the birth of Augustus. His was a miraculous conception. Upon his birth, Augustus was declared to be a **king**.

Luke takes a clearly political stance against Emperor worship and so against the Empire and its religion. He knows the 'god-words' it used for the Emperor. He applies them not to the Emperor but to Jesus. He is saying that faith in Jesus, not Emperor worship, is the only way to find true **salvation**. Luke places Jesus in this broad matrix of Greek-Roman imperialist life at this time.

Luke copied the going stories about Augustus and constructed parallel stories about Jesus. He gave Jesus the sort of Greek-Roman biography that Augustus had. But he highlighted the simple humanness of Jesus at all points.

Luke 2:13-18

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favours!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

Luke 2:19-20

But Mary treasured all these words pondering (συμβάλλουσα) them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



Mary, already portrayed by Luke as the one who always gave God her first love (1:27) and as the perfectly obedient ‘servant of the Lord’ (1:38), shows us how we should receive God’s favour. She ‘**treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart**’. The word translated ‘pondered’ in this verse is the Greek, **symballein**, from which we get our word ‘**symbol**’. Mary held all that had happened in her heart, knowing that the meaning of it all would one day come together, as God’s purpose unfolded through her and through her child.

Luke 2:21

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called **Jesus**, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

