



# The Gospel of Luke

## Luke the Storyteller

Luke's gospel completes the three-year lectionary cycle as the major gospel in year C. Addressing Gentiles and other inquirers, Luke presents Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension and expected return as the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation for all people, both Jews and Gentiles alike. Luke's "orderly account" (1:3) of the Christian experience continues in the Acts of the Apostles.

With a gift for dramatic form and an interest in both men and women, Luke uses the story of Jesus' life as a vehicle for the good news. Only Luke's gospel also gives us such favorite stories as the angel's annunciation to Mary, the birth in the stable, the child Jesus in the temple, Zacchaeus in the tree, the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, and the risen Christ walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Luke emphasizes Jesus' compassion for the suffering and outcast and his eagerness to accept the repentant sinner. But if Luke's gospel is a light to enlighten the Gentiles with stories of the merciful Savior, it is also a fire of judgment convicting those, who by selfish use of power or by indifference, cause injustice to powerless men and women. Like the prophets, Jesus boldly proclaims God's demand for justice.

Luke reveals the fact that prayer is the touchstone of Jesus' life. Before making critical decisions or encounters, the Lord is pictured by Luke as going off by himself to pray and commune with the Father. Solitary prayer is compounded by corporate prayer in the community of God's people. The gospel begins

and ends in the temple, moving from the faithful prayers of Zechariah and Elizabeth, whose child would herald the Messiah, to the praise of the first disciples "continually in the temple blessing God."

## Luke's Portrait of Jesus

Luke also set about to adapt Mark's gospel to the needs of his primarily Gentile community in the mid-eighties. Luke wanted to show that what happened with Jesus was foreshadowed in the Old Testament and continued after Jesus' death in the life of the Christian disciples. Luke tells the story of our salvation in two volumes, the Gospel and Acts of the Apostles.

Luke's very engaging portrait of Jesus focuses on His activity as a healing-saving prophet. Born "a Savior" (2:11), He comes "to seek and to save what is lost" (19:10). The ambiguity of the Greek word for save/heal allows Luke to stress that our bodily and spiritual health are interconnected. When Jesus tells those He cures, "Go, your faith has saved you," this could also mean "your faith has healed you" (7:50, 8:48, 17:19, 18:42).

Jesus' ministry of healing is God's salvation and so breaks across all our humanly created boundaries. Like a magnet, Jesus draws the poor, the outcasts, the sick, women, and foreigners to Himself for healing. Through his powerful parables about the lost coin, the lost son and the lost sheep (15:1-32), Jesus challenges us to reach out beyond our narrow and comfortable borders to seek and save the lost.

Luke characterizes Jesus as a prophet, "mighty in word and deed" (24:19, see also 4:24, 7:16,



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7:39). His job description (4:16-30, 7:22-23) is from the prophet Isaiah. As a spokesperson for God, His prophetic message is an invitation to see the world from God's perspective rather than from a human viewpoint. His suffering is also part of the prophet's role (13:33-34). In the passion Luke portrays Jesus as an innocent martyr. Pilate (23:4,14,22), Herod (23:15) and the centurion at the foot of the cross all declare Him innocent (23:47). Jesus dies as He lived—forgiving His persecutors and saving a good thief.

## Luke's Portrait of Discipleship

For Luke, Mary stands out as a model of genuine discipleship. Like the prophets of old, she is characterized as a person who responds wholeheartedly to God's call. Her "Let it be" starts God's work both in her body and in her life to bring forth Jesus (1:26-38). She keeps all these things in her heart and ponders them (2:19). In the ministry of Jesus, she is identified as one who "hears the word and acts on it" (8:21). After the resurrection she is found praying in the community of disciples as they await the Pentecostal empowerment of the Holy Spirit for their mission (Acts 1:14).

When we think of Lukan discipleship, we ought to think of the many prophetic people who have called our attention to the oppression, hatred and violence that plague our society and those who have tried to break the boundaries which separate us. In the late fifties, Dr. Tom Dooley

gathered world-wide cooperation in his effort to bring medical aid to the people of Vietnam and Laos long before these places were household words. Mother Teresa of Calcutta worked with the "poorest of the poor" and dares to touch the "untouchables" of the lowest class of people in India's rigid class system. And we all remember the pictures of Pope John Paul II visiting in prison and forgiving his would-be assassin.

Closer to home, the Catholic Worker Movement of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin sensitized all of us to the problems of the poor and the need for better solutions to their problems. Martin Luther King's prophetic witness and non-violent tactics broke down many barriers of racial prejudice. Cesar Chavez gave pride and strength to Mexican-American migrant workers in their fight against injustice and exploitation.

In our families, there are always so many things that go wrong—addictive behaviors, abusive and dysfunctional relationships, inadequate parenting, divorce, sickness, suicide, tragic accidents, the list goes on and on. Healing witness is a constant need. Each of us is challenged to cross the boundaries of our own comfort zone to reconcile and be reconciled with others. To admit our mistakes, to say we are sorry, to forgive and be forgiven are Christian behaviors that have to be part of any family's everyday life.