

## INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

Welcome to the Gospel according to Luke. Luke was a doctor and an historian. He is the author of the Gospel as well as the book of Acts, which makes him the largest contributor to the New Testament of all authors. He was a companion of Paul, and so there are a lot of theological similarities between Paul's writings and Luke's writings. Luke was a Gentile and was writing to a predominantly Gentile audience.

As we work our way through the gospel I encourage you to keep an eye out for some of the peculiarities of Luke – his emphasis that the Gospel is for all people, yet only through Jesus Christ; the active role of the Holy Spirit, and the way that socially unexpected people (lepers, poor, women, Centurions, etc.) are given a prominent role to play.

The pattern these bible studies will follow is as follows

1. **Read** – read the text in a variety of ways
2. **Examine** – look closely at what is happening in a specific passage
3. **Reflect** – consider what this passage means and its implications
4. **Imagine** – dream of how your world would be impacted by the gospel
5. **Perform** – commit to one way of making that dream a reality

So... let's get started

## LUKE – CHAPTER 1

### PRAY

Spend a few moments together in prayer asking that you would be open to God's voice speaking through his Word today.

### READ

Take time to read through the first chapter of Luke's gospel.

### EXAMINE

Luke gives us more detail about the birth of Jesus than any other gospel writer. Chapter one gives us some context of the time of Jesus' birth. Luke is very specific in his account, given he "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" and we see some of this detail emerging in this chapter. Take, for example, the details regarding the priestly customs in verse 8 – 10.

More important than these details, though, is the way Luke is showing how God is at work in people's lives to bring about his purposes. In particular, it is a variety of ordinary people but they are also noted as being "righteous in the sight of God" (in the case of Zechariah and Elizabeth – vs 6) and "favoured" (in the case of Mary – vs 28).

Skim through the passage again and take note of all of the times the Holy Spirit is at work (vs 15, 35, 41, 67). This is one of the characteristics of Luke's gospel.

1. What is the role of the Holy Spirit at this time?

The Spirit is God's power at work in the world. Luke (as the author of Acts as well) is writing *after* the events of Pentecost and would have had firsthand experience of the Spirit's work in people's lives. Here he is keen to emphasise that God was at work *before* Jesus' birth to bring about Salvation for all people

2. Note where the Gabriel meets with Zechariah (the temple) and Mary (Galilee). The temple represents the great meeting place of God with his people. Nazareth is a small, insignificant town in the north (Galilee – see John 1:46). What can we learn about God and the gospel from comparing these two meeting points?

God is at work to save all the world. We might expect God's message to come to a priest in the temple, but we're surprised that it also comes to a young woman in Nazareth. God's message of salvation will be for all people, but it will also come through people whom we will least expect it to. (Keep an eye out for this throughout the gospel).

3. Look at the different responses of Zechariah (vs 18), Elizabeth (vs 25) and Mary (vs 34-38). Compare these responses, as well as the different reactions from Gabriel. What can we learn from this?

Whilst both Zechariah and Mary question the news they are given Zechariah is a priest standing in the temple hearing from an angel. Mary, on the other hand, is a young girl in Nazareth. Zechariah should have known better and so the response is firmer. Both Elizabeth and Mary are portrayed in a positive light because of their more immediate faithfulness. This is unexpected given Elizabeth's social disgrace and Mary's gender and young age. Zechariah, on the other hand, is faithful but this is a *learned* faithfulness (vs 63-64).

4. Look at Mary's song of praise (vs. 46-55). Discuss amongst the group what stands out in the song, what this tells us about Mary, and what this tells us about God.

Here we note Mary's faithful response to God through praise. Mary recognizes her lowliness yet responds with trust at God's word through Gabriel. The word is confirmed in her encounter with Elizabeth. Mary's song emphasizes God's faithfulness to Israel and she demonstrates how Israel should respond now (and should have responded previously) to God's word. Through Mary's faithful response we see God's faithfulness to Israel. We're reminded of his promises to Abraham and his descendants and, as readers, know that what is to come in the rest of the Gospel will be the fulfillment of these promises.

5. Discuss anything else that has stood out in this chapter.

## REFLECT

1. Think back upon your journey as a disciple of Jesus. Where can you see the Holy Spirit at work in your life.
2. How have you responded to God's direction in the past. Has it been a struggle? Have you questioned God? Has trust been a simple or a difficult thing?
3. What would your song of praise sound like? What would you praise God for today?

## IMAGINE

1. List three things that have really stood out from this passage.
2. Without worrying about any restrictions, what would the church look like if those things were always present? You might like to consider this from a global or local perspective (or both).

## PERFORM

1. What action can you take today (taking account of real world restrictions) that is a step towards that dream becoming a reality?

## PRAY

Spend time in prayer for each other, particularly for the actions you've committed to.

*For next week....*

1. Long Slow Read (LSR). Read chapters 1 - 3, slowly over the course of week. You can do this as many times as you like.
2. Tempo Read – Read and reread Chapter 2 several times. Take note of verses/phrases/characters that stand out – e.g. Jesus, Holy Spirit, poor, women.
3. Repeats – Choose one verse to memorise. Repeat it many times throughout the day and over the course of a week or so. Meditate on the verse and pray it in and out. Repeat the verse many times throughout your day.