

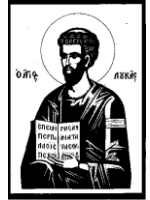


Luke's Christmas Chronicles

December 2023

Luke 1:1-38 The Tale of Two Angels

(sermons: Dec 3)



Luke 1: 1-4 Luke's Introduction *See separate notes of Introduction to the series*

Luke 1: 5-10 Zechariah the Priest

- v.5 *Herod king of Judea – Herod was the half-Jewish king who ruled an area larger than present-day Israel on behalf of the Romans from 37BC to 4BC (Jesus was born around 6 'BC')*
- v.5 *the priestly division of Abijah – most priests did not live in Jerusalem but farmed in the surrounding area, coming to the Temple when it was their division's turn for a week on duty, twice a year.*
- v.5 *his wife Elizabeth – also from a priestly family (descendant of Aaron, the first high priest)*
- v.7 *but they had no children – especially hard for them to understand, given their upright behaviour (v.6) as in those days childlessness was often seen as a punishment from God.*
- v.9 *chosen by lot.. to burn incense – this was the only time in his life for Zechariah to perform this task rather than the more routine duties; he would go into the inner building of the Temple (the 'holy place') where only priests were allowed to go, then be left alone to burn the incense.*

1. Why was this both a routine occasion and a special day for Zechariah?

What disappointment had Zechariah and Elizabeth experienced in their private lives, as well as in the state of their country? How had they reacted to their disappointment?

What can we learn from Zechariah and Elizabeth, and from the way that God chose to use them?

Luke 1: 11-17 The Angel's Message

- v.11 *an angel of the Lord – Gabriel (v.26); his appearance is not described but it inspired fear in Zechariah, who would not have expected anyone else to be with him in this part of the Temple*
- v.13 *your prayer has been heard – probably for freedom for his people, perhaps for a son; in fact he is told that his unexpected son will play a part in bringing new hope to his people*
- v.13 *the name John – means 'God is gracious'*
- v.15 *never to take wine or strong drink – a sign of dedication to God*
- v.15 *filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth – unlike the Old Testament prophets who were filled with the Spirit for particular tasks*
- v.17 *in the spirit and power of Elijah – one of the greatest prophets; the last words of the Old Testament (Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6), written 400 years earlier, prophesied that Elijah, or someone like him, would return, to prepare the people for God to be with them in power again, for rescue or for judgement.*
- v.17 *turn the hearts of the fathers to their children... – either a picture of family reconciliation, or of the people returning to the teaching and way of life of their 'fathers' in the Jewish faith*

2. How did Zechariah react to the appearance of the angel? Why did he react in this way?

Have we ever been surprised by some evidence of God's activity around us?

3. What was the angel's message for the nation, and for Zechariah?

How was it a fulfilment of the last words of the Old Testament?

How did it show that God was doing something new but also something that was in line with his words and actions in the past?

4. How can we help 'to make ready a people prepared for the Lord'?

When might this involve removing misunderstandings, challenging what is going on around us, or living in a way that makes people want to find out more about our Christian faith?

Luke 1: 18-25 Zechariah's Response

- v.21 *wondered why he stayed so long in the Temple – usually the priest would spend as little time in the 'holy place' as possible, in case they did something wrong*
- v.24 *for five months remained in seclusion – perhaps until the pregnancy was obvious; otherwise people might not have believed her*
- v.25 *taken away my disgrace- the 'shame' of childlessness, which was seen as a punishment from God*
5. How did Zechariah respond to Gabriel's message of good news for his people and for him personally?
What happened to him that was both a punishment and a sign?
6. Can we be encouraged by the way that God continued to work through Zechariah and Elizabeth, despite their mixture of faith, doubt and obedience?
Are there times when we have found it hard to accept God's will for our lives?
Who, or what, has helped us to respond more positively to God's call?

Luke 1: 26-28 The Angel Gabriel Visits Mary

- v.26 *In the sixth month – that is, of Elizabeth's pregnancy; Mary and Elizabeth were relatives (v.36)*
- v.26 *Nazareth – in the hill country of Galilee, about 70 miles north of Jerusalem*
- v.27 *a virgin pledged to be married – this was a more serious commitment than a modern engagement: there would be serious financial and social consequences if the agreement was broken by divorce*
- v.27 *a descendant of David – so of the royal line (see Luke 3:23-31 for that part of the genealogy)*
- v.28 *you who are highly favoured – the grace is God's rather than Mary's (unlike what is implied in the Roman Catholic prayer: 'Hail Mary, full of grace')*
1. What was special, and what was ordinary, about Mary?

Luke 1: 29-33 Gabriel's Message

- v.31 *you will be with child – echoes of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14*
- v.31 *the name Jesus – which means 'God saves', as in the angel's words to Joseph in Matthew 1:21.*
- v.32 *Son of the Most High – the Most High is another title for God*
- v.32 *the throne of his father David – or 'ancestor' David, the greatest of Israel's kings, when they were fully independent. There are Old Testament promises of another King in succession to David, which were not completely fulfilled in David's son Solomon (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16).*
- v.33 *the house of Jacob – all Jewish people, who were descended from Israel (Jacob's other name)*
2. Why, do you think, was Mary 'greatly troubled' at the Angel Gabriel's words?
How did Gabriel reassure Mary?
3. What names, or titles, did the angel give to Mary's promised child? What does each one mean?
How did they point to the fulfilment of promises in the Old Testament?

Luke 1: 34-38 Mary's Response

- v.36 *Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child – it seems she hadn't told Mary by this time*
- v.38 *I am the Lord's servant – or even 'slave': complete acceptance of God's will*
- v.38 *May it be to me as you have said – even though, at this time, Mary didn't know what the reaction of Joseph and his family might be*
4. Does Gabriel explain how Mary will become the mother of 'the Son of God'?
5. What does Mary's final response show about her?
What can we learn from Mary here, and in the rest of the passage?