



Luke 1

Introduction

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled^[a] among us,

² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses** and **servants** of the **word**.

³ 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,

⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.

⁷ But they were childless because **Elizabeth was not able to conceive**, and they were both very old.

⁸ Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,

⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

- Who was Theophilus? (1:3)

The Gospel is specifically directed to Theophilus (1:3), whose name means "**one who loves God**" and almost certainly refers to a particular person rather than to lovers of God in general. The use of "most excellent" with the name further indicates an individual and supports the idea that he was a Roman official or at least of high position and wealth. He was probably Luke's patron, helping to fund his writing projects and responsible for seeing that the writings were copied and distributed. Such a dedication to a patron was common at that time.

- Who was this Herod? (1:5)

This was Herod the Great, who ruled Judea (one of the regions then in Israel) from 37 to 4 B.C. See Who was King Herod? (Mt 2:1).

- How were priests divided into groups? (1:5)

There were 24 divisions of priests (1Ch 24:1-4). Each division served twice a year at the temple for a week at a time. Given the distribution of labor, a priest like Zechariah would likely have prepared the sacrifice only once in his career.

- Why cast lots? (1:9)

The ancient Jewish commentary on the Law, called the Talmud, tells us about casting lots. Casting lots could be compared to throwing dice. Though we can't be sure what method was used, we know the Jews

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

¹³ But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,

¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is **never to take wine or other fermented drink**, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.

¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

¹⁷ **And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah**, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.”

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home.

²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

²⁵ “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,

did not view it as a random action depending merely on chance. They believed God sovereignly directed the event, and they trusted him to reveal his purposes through the casting of the lots. See how did God work through such an arbitrary process? (Pr. 18:18).

- Why was John supposed to abstain from wine? (1:15)

Abstaining from wine showed his special dedication to God. It did not make him more spiritual or holy, but it was a sign that he was totally focused on God. See What was a Nazirite? (Nu 6:2).

- How could a baby *be filled with the Holy Spirit*? (1:15)

Zechariah would have understood this promise from a Jewish point of view, not as we understand it from a New Testament point of view. We know that the Spirit is offered to those who repent and turn to the Lord (Ac 2:38), and we wonder how this could be the case for a newborn baby. But Zechariah saw this as an announcement that the Spirit would come as God’s call to his son, anointing him for a prophetic assignment. As with that of Jeremiah (Jer 1:5), John’s ministry was sovereignly directed by God even before his birth (Lk 1:41, 44).

- Who is *Gabriel*? (1:19)

He is one of only two angels mentioned by name in the Bible (Da 8:15–27; 9:20–27). **Michael** (Da 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev 12:7) is the other. **Gabriel** means “God is my hero/warrior.”

- Why did God make Zechariah mute? (1:20)

This was apparently a mild rebuke for his lack of faith. Since he could not grasp what God was doing, he was given a period of silent reflection that lasted until the child was born. **Zechariah, though a righteous man, still needed to learn to trust God for what he deemed the impossible**. His inability to speak was a supernatural sign

²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most-High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most-High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^b the Son of God.

³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.

³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,

⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!

⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his

that undoubtedly increased his faith and helped him believe that God's promise of a child would come to pass.

- How was Mary highly favored? (1:28)

God chose Mary for a special assignment, and Mary humbly accepted the call (v. 38). She knew her assignment was based on God's grace to her, not on her merit. Later Jesus said that those who hear God's Word and obey are blessed (11:27-28). In that respect, we all are highly favored by the Lord, because he calls each of us to a special purpose in his kingdom. We are blessed when we, like Mary, surrender to his will and obey his call.

- Why name the child Jesus? (1:31)

The name Jesus was a sign that God would save his people from their sins (Mt 1:21). Its Old Testament form was Yeshua or Joshua, meaning "Yahweh is salvation."

- Was Jesus a common name in those days? (1:31)

Yes. Jesus was a very common Jewish name in the first century. The Jewish historian Josephus mentioned more than a dozen people with that name.

- Why did Mary leave home after the angel's visit? (1:39-40)

She went to help Elizabeth, her elder relative, who was in her last months of pregnancy. Given her age, Elizabeth's pregnancy may have presented some complications, and Mary could have assisted her. Elizabeth was already six months pregnant when Mary heard the news (v. 36), and since Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months (v. 56), she likely stayed until Elizabeth gave birth.

- How much did Mary know about Jesus? (1:46-55)

Mary was told that Jesus would be called the Son of the Most-High, the Messiah (vv. 31-35). But the incident recorded in 2:41-52 indicates that she didn't realize Jesus was God in human flesh.

promises to her!”

Mary's Song

46 And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months
and then returned home.

The Birth of John the Baptist

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave
birth to a son.

58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her
great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On **the eighth day** they came to **circumcise** the child, and they
were going to name him after his father Zechariah,

60 but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called
John.”

61 They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who
has that name.”

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would
like to name the child.

- Was Mary boasting? (1:48)

No. She was filled with wonder that she—poor, young and female—could be used by God for an eternal purpose. Sinful pride would probably have caused her to refuse God’s call to serve or to claim credit for what God had done. But Mary joyfully and gratefully praised God.

- Why was circumcision so important for the Jews? (1:59)

God instituted **circumcision** to signify his covenant with **Abraham**, the father of the Jewish people. Circumcision indicated that the parents were giving their child to God, and it signified that the child would be committed to and serve God alone. Cutting off the foreskin illustrated severing the infant’s identity with the world. See God command circumcision? (Ge 17:10).

- Why did they make signs to Zechariah? (1:62)

Zechariah may have been deaf as well as mute, a detail not included earlier in God’s judgment through Gabriel (v. 20). Had Zechariah been able to hear, the neighbors and relatives could have asked him the question, and he could have written out his

⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.”

⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

⁶⁵ All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.

⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

Zechariah’s Song

⁶⁷ His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸ “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn^[c] of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit^[d]; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Footnotes:

- a. [Luke 1:1](#) Or *been surely believed*
- b. [Luke 1:35](#) Or *so the child to be born will be called holy,*

answer.

- In what ways was John a prophet? (1:76)

John was a prophet in that he both proclaimed God’s message (“forth telling”) and predicted what God was going to do in the future (“foretelling”). John called people to repentance in light of God’s coming judgment and the imminent arrival of the Messiah (3:1–18; Mt 3:1–12; Mk 1:1–8). He also fulfilled the end-time role of the prophet Elijah as the messenger who would prepare the way for the Lord (Isa 40:1–3; Mal 3:1; 4:5–6).

- Why did John live in the wilderness? (1:80)

- c. [Luke 1:69](#) *Horn* here symbolizes a strong king.
- d. [Luke 1:80](#) *Or in the Spirit*

The harsh climate may have helped to focus his attention on God. Being separated from the economic and political powers of his day allowed him to speak his words of judgment more freely. His chosen lifestyle also clearly distinguished him from other religious leaders who enjoyed living near the halls of power.