

FBC POWELL, 1-8-17 PM NOTES  
"The Second Most Important Birth Announcement in History"  
Luke 1:1-17  
#1 in Series, "The Gospel According to Luke"

I. The Prologue of Luke (v. 1-4)

"The first preachers did not go up and down the world, proclaiming an elaborate artificial system of abstruse doctrines and deep principles. They made it their first business to tell men great plain facts. They went about telling a sin-laden world, that the Son of God had come down to earth, and lived for us, and died for us, and risen again. The Gospel, at its first publication, was far more simple than many make it now. It was neither more nor less than the history of Christ.

- J. C. Ryle

**2 Timothy 3:16** "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."

"...Christianity is an historical religion. It claims that God has intersected and intruded into human history, and therefore there is truth, there are facts, there are events, there are concrete things that have happened that form the basis of what God is doing in His plan of salvation."

- Ligon Duncan

II. The Birth of John Is Foretold (v. 5-17)

"Could the contrast be greater – the one a monster of iniquity, and the other a man of integrity? One of these men was a vicious prince; the other man a virtuous priest. One was a man of extraordinary talent, drive, and wickedness; the other was a retiring and godly old man. One of them hated God; the other loved Him. One was a man who murdered his [own] sons, his favorite wife, and countless other victims as well; the other was a gentle minister of the sanctuary. One was an Idumean, a descendent of Esau; the other was a Jew, a descendent of Jacob, Esau's twin. One was a foreign-born usurper; the other was a native-born citizen of Israel... One man gave Israel a scorpion's nest of sons to plague and torment them; the other gave Israel a son, set apart from birth to become the God-sent herald of the Messiah. One was Herod, king of Judea and the other was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah."

- John Phillips

**Matthew 2:16-18** "Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi."

A. The Sudden Presence of the Angel (v. 5-12)

"God has one son without sin, but no sons without sorrows."

- Unknown

“Outside, in the Court of Israel, faithful worshippers were praying. Then came the moment to step into the Holy Place. Before him rose the richly embroidered curtain of the Holy of Holies, resplendent with Cherubim woven in scarlet, blue, purple, and gold. To his left was the table of showbread. Directly in front of him was the horned golden altar of incense (Exodus 30:1-10; 37:25-29). To his right stood the golden candlestick. Zachariah purified the altar and waited joyously to for the signal to offer the incense so that, as it were, the sacrifices went up to God wrapped in the sweet incense of prayer.”  
- R. Kent Hughes

## B. The Stirring Prophecy of the Angel (v. 13-17)

**John 1:15** “John testified about Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”

**Malachi 4:5-6** “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

### **First Baptist Church Powell 01 08 2017 PM**

#### **Sermon 1: The Second Most Important Birth Announcement in History**

#### **Luke 1:1-17**

#### **Series: The Gospel According to Luke**

With this message, we begin a long journey that will probably last about two years. Luke is the longest book in the New Testament (word wise, not chapter wise). Luke also wrote the book of Acts and when you put Luke and Acts together, they make up one-fourth of the New Testament.

Let’s talk about Luke, the man. He was the only Gentile (non-Jew) to be the instrument that the Holy Spirit used to write a New Testament book (Colossians 4:10-11, 14). We know that Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14), a historian, and from Acts, we know that he was a traveler, but we know nothing of his origin. It seems that Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry, the cross, or the resurrected Christ. We do know that he stuck like glue to one of the apostles – Paul. The last days of Paul’s life were recorded in 2 Timothy and Paul sadly says in 2 Timothy 4:11a: “Only Luke is with me.” Because Luke was not an eyewitness, he spends considerable time in the prologue (verses 1-4) explaining his sources for the material in his Gospel.

The Gospel of Luke contains many things that are not recorded in the other synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Mark). A few of the things that only Luke records are the histories of Zacharias and Elizabeth, the angel’s announcement to the virgin Mary, the account of Zacchaeus, the Pharisee and the Publican, the rich man and Lazarus, the Prodigal Son, the account of the repentant thief on the cross beside Jesus, and the resurrected Christ speaking to the two believers on the road to Emmaus. That is only a partial list of the things Luke tells us about, that Matthew and Mark leave out.

## I. The Prologue of Luke (v. 1-4)

The word “prologue” refers to an introductory passage to prepare the reader for what is coming. Luke 1:1-4 (one sentence in the Greek) is telling the reader why he should trust the content that follows. The person Luke addresses is a man named Theophilus (verse 3). We have no idea who he was, but the fact that Luke addresses him as “most excellent Theophilus” suggests that he was a person of influence with high social standing. Theophilus had already been taught some things about Jesus, but it was incomplete or unclear. That is why Luke said in verse 4, “so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.” It is important that we understand this prologue before we continue with the main body of the book of Luke.

What I am about to share is basic, but many miss it. Christianity is built upon facts! Don’t ever forget that or allow anyone to convince you otherwise. Dr. J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) says:

The first preachers did not go up and down the world, proclaiming an elaborate artificial system of abstruse doctrines and deep principles. They made it their first business to tell men great plain facts. They went about telling a sin-laden world, that the Son of God had come down to earth, and lived for us, and died for us, and risen again. The Gospel, at its first publication, was far more simple than many make it now. It was neither more nor less than the history of Christ.

[J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels – Luke*, page 2]

In Luke 1:2 Luke tells us that what he is writing has its source in eyewitnesses. In other words, what Luke is compiling is objective truth that those who were eyewitnesses proclaimed to others. That phrase “servants of the word” is translated “ministers of the word” in other translations. Luke is saying, “Theophilus, these eyewitnesses, many who are alive, saw with their eyes and proclaimed with their mouths what I am writing about. They were not making it up! They became servants, ministers of these words of truth that I have written down.”

The point is this, truth matters and what Luke wrote down is truth without any mixture of error. Let me illustrate why that is so important. I read some comments the popular actor, Will Smith made a few years ago in an interview. The interviewer said:

Will, it is rumored you are involved in or enamored with Scientology. But Will, you grew up a Baptist. How do you reconcile those things?” Will Smith answered, “Well, you know, I grew up in a neighborhood where there were Muslims and Christians, and Jews and Hindus, and atheists and others. And I believe that any way someone approaches God, if it works for them, that’s wonderful. I think that everyone has truth. We all call the same God by different names. And anyway, my grandmother taught me ultimately it was about being a good person, doing good things.

[Quoted in a sermon by Ligon Duncan, [fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/gospel-beginnings](http://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/gospel-beginnings)]

That is an interesting viewpoint! I think it is a viewpoint that would be fully accepted as correct by a large percentage of Americans. If Will Smith could have spoken to Luke, he would probably have said something like this: “Luke, my good buddy, I don’t want to get all hung up in that narrow view of truth and doctrines and eyewitnesses; I just want to be a good person and do good things.” Luke would have answered him, “Okay, but you are not a Christian. Christianity stands on objective truth, not being a good person and doing good things.”

Certainly, Luke is not saying that everything in the Scriptures is based on eyewitness. The trustworthiness of all the Scriptures is in the fact that they are inspired by God. 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” The recorded events and teaching of Jesus in Scripture are true first because the recording of them was inspired and superintended by God, but they can also be trusted because they were attested as true by eye witnesses who saw and heard them; I am speaking of the teaching of Jesus, the miracles of Jesus, His baptism, His arrest, His trial, His crucifixion, the empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances, etc.

These are “handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses.” Luke is saying that he is not making this up; he is making it plain. What he shares are the facts that provide the foundation for faith.

One Bible teacher summarized it this way: “...Christianity is an historical religion. It claims that God has intersected and intruded into human history, and therefore there is truth, there are facts, there are events, there are concrete things that have happened that form the basis of what God is doing in His plan of salvation.” [Ligon Duncan, [fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/gospel-beginnings](http://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/gospel-beginnings)]

## **II. The Birth of John Is Foretold (v. 5-17)**

The first event that is recorded in Luke’s Gospel is the appearance of an angel to an obscure priest named Zacharias. The fact that this took place “in the days of Herod, king of Judea” is significant. It is interesting to contrast these two men – King Herod and the priest of God named Zacharias. John Phillips contrasted the two this way:

Could the contrast be greater – the one a monster of iniquity, and the other a man of integrity? One of these men was a vicious prince; the other man a virtuous priest. One was a man of extraordinary talent, drive, and wickedness; the other was a retiring and godly old man. One of them hated God; the other loved Him. One was a man who murdered his [own] sons, his favorite wife, and countless other victims as well; the other was a gentle minister of the sanctuary. One was an Idumean, a descendent of Esau; the other was a Jew, a descendent of Jacob, Esau’s twin. One was a foreign-born usurper; the other was a native-born citizen of Israel... One man gave Israel a scorpion’s nest of sons to plague and torment them; the other gave Israel a son, set apart from birth to become the God-sent herald of the Messiah. One was “Herod, king of Judea” and the other was “a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah.”

[John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke*, page 60]

From the Bible and history let’s look a little deeper at this man, Herod, since he is a key person in the beginning of Luke’s Gospel. There are several different men called Herod in the New Testament, but all of the others were descendants of this Herod who was often called Herod the Great (he obviously wasn’t a humble man). There was Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa I, and Herod Agrippa II, as well as some of the descendants of Herod the Great who did not use “Herod” in their title (Philip and Archelaus).

Herod the Great truly had some “great” accomplishments. He rebuilt the Temple, he constructed the port city of Caesarea, and he built the practically impregnable fortress of Masada. He was (early on) so popular that some Jews formed a pro-Herod party called the Herodians (Mark 12:13). There was a vicious and evil side of Herod. He was insanely jealous and paranoid toward those he felt were a threat to his power and rule. Herod murdered his wife, her brother, her mother, and several of his own sons. It was said that it would be safer to be Herod’s pig than one of his sons! The height of his cruelty was the incident called “the slaughter of the innocents.” When Herod found, from the wise men (magi), that the King of the Jews was to be born in Bethlehem, he deceitfully asked that they report to him where this King of the Jews was located so he could worship Him. His real plan was to kill Him. When the wise men decided not to tell Herod, he committed one of the worst atrocities in history. Matthew 2:16-18: “Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.” Jesus was saved from this death when Joseph was warned in a dream to take Mary and flee to Egypt.

Let’s examine the details of the announcement of John’s birth.

### **A. The Sudden Presence of the Angel (v. 5-12)**

Before we can really understand what is happening in this passage, we need to understand some details about Zacharias and Elizabeth and some details about the duties of the Jewish priests and what was going on when the annunciation (announcement) came to Zacharias. We are told in verse 6 that both Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God. It is one thing to seem righteous in the sight of man, but

what counts is who we are in the sight of God. To say that they were righteous in the sight of God is saying they were saved in New Covenant terminology. To be righteous is to be in right standing with God. In the Old Testament, that meant that they both had responded to God in faith, looking to God to provide the payment for their salvation. They kept the law concerning the sacrifices and believed God it was counted to them, put on their account as righteousness. Out of their love and gratitude for God's salvation, they walked in a pattern of obedience to the Lord (v. 6).

Another significant fact about Zacharias and Elizabeth is that they were unable to have children – a common word used in Scripture is “barren” (v. 7). Being infertile in our day is hard, but in biblical times it was much worse. In that culture barrenness was a sign of disfavor with God. The inability to have children brought serious grief into the heart of both husband and wife. When the events of Luke 1 take place, Zacharias and Elizabeth were past child-bearing age. Verse 7 says that they were “advanced in years.” The NIV translates that, “they were very old.” The KJV says “well stricken in years.” I like that one – sometimes getting old makes one feel “well stricken.” This term probably doesn't refer to a specific age. It would be equivalent to our phrase, “They were getting up in years.” Here is a reminder for us and a rebuke to the “health, wealth, and prosperity” false teachers. The barrenness that Elizabeth and Zacharias had experienced was a part of God's plan for them. If you are “righteous in the sight of God”, you are not exempt from trials. One of the Puritans said, “God Has one son without sin, but no sons without sorrows.” At this point, I want to share a lesson about answered prayer. Without a doubt, Zacharias and Elizabeth had diligently prayed for a child. No child came. Sometimes, God has not refused what you are asking; it is that He has something better for you. Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed for a Son, and the answer they desired didn't come. However, God had something better. It was not just any son that He gave them; it was the forerunner of the Son of God. It was the one of whom Jesus said that there was none greater than John the Baptist. He wasn't speaking of John's personal worth; He was speaking of the importance of His task – to prepare for the Son of God. You may be praying and you sense that it is His will that you have what you are asking, but nothing is happening. If what you are asking is the will of God and for His glory, He just may be delaying because He has something even better than what you are asking.

To understand how the announcement came to Zacharias in the Temple, we must understand why he was in the Temple (v. 8-10). The “priestly service” that Zacharias was fulfilling was his assigned duties that were carried out twice a year. The priests who served all over Israel were all a part of one of twenty-four divisions of the priests. There were about 300 priests in each division. Twice a year, each of the groups served a week in the temple ministry. Zacharias was a part of the division of “Abijah” (v. 5). The group of priests “on duty” had various perfunctory duties to perform in the administration of the temple and the offering of sacrifices. But, the task that was most desired, and that carried the greatest honor, was going into the holy place (not the Holy of Holies that only the High Priest went in on the Day of Atonement) to put incense in the Altar of Incense which burned perpetually symbolizing the prayers going up before God with a sweet smell. Most priests never in their lifetime got to go into the Holy Place to burn the incense. The priest designated to do this sacred task was chosen by casting lots. We see in verse 9 that Zacharias was chosen. This would have been one of the highlights of his life.

Kent Hughes gives us what Zacharias must have experienced.

Outside, in the Court of Israel, faithful worshippers were praying. Then came the moment to step into the Holy Place. Before him rose the richly embroidered curtain of the Holy of Holies, resplendent with Cherubim woven in scarlet, blue, purple, and gold. To his left was the table of showbread. Directly in front of him was the horned golden altar of incense (Exodus 30:1-10; 37:25-29). To his right stood the golden candlestick. Zacharias purified the altar and waited joyously to for the signal to offer the incense so that, as it were, the sacrifices went up to God wrapped in the sweet incense of prayer.

[R. Kent Hughes, *Luke, Volume One*, pages 21-22]

Zacharias was not ready for what happened next (v. 11-12). Typically, when an angel appeared to human beings, their response is gripping fear. Don't picture these angels as little Tinker Bell fairies flying around

scattering pixie dust! They were awe inspiring! This was not a vision or an apparition! This was a real, live, awe inspiring created spiritual being. Zachariah's focus on the altar of incense was changed to the focus on this awe inspiring magnificent spiritual being. The word translated "troubled" in verse 12 literally means "shaken." I imagine he was shaken and shaking.

### **B. The Stirring Prophecy of the Angel (v. 13-17)**

As I shared earlier, prayers are not necessarily rejected because they are delayed. Their desired son would be the forerunner, the one who prepares the way for the Messiah. The child's name would be John, which means "God is gracious." In verse 14 the angel said that many would rejoice in John, and the reason they will rejoice is as verse 16 says, "he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God." When people turn back to God, there is always rejoicing.

John would not exactly fit the stereotype of a charismatic leader who would influence a whole nation. There is no evidence that he ever had a formal education. Instead of rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous, he lived in the desert. His clothes were not from Hart, Schaffner, and Marx. They were more from Clyde the Camel – "camel hair garments." His food consisted of locusts and wild honey. Instead of starting his own cult following, he pointed others to Jesus and when compared to Jesus, he said, "He must increase and I must decrease."

By all the world's standards, John just plain missed the mark. But what was God's plan for him? In verse 15 we see that his greatness was in the sight of the Lord. Are you willing to seek greatness in the eyes of the Lord, even if others reject you? John was. The things described in verse 15 are identified with the Nazirite vow that could be for a lifetime or a set period of time. It seems likely that this was for John's life, but his life was fairly short. From verse 15 we see that the defining qualities of John's life would be a passion to please God and not men, personal holiness, and spiritual power that comes from the filling (control) of the Holy Spirit. His filling started while still in his mother's womb. As a side note, this should squash all the rubbish that the Bible has nothing to say about the aborting of a child in the Mother's womb. A mass of cells is not filled with the Holy Spirit; a person is!

When we look at the Gospels, we see the fulfillment of verse 16. The people flocked to hear John and saw him as a true prophet of God. Over and over he deflected the focus from himself to Jesus. That is what a "forerunner" does. John 1:15; "John testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" This was a fulfillment of prophecy given in the last book of the Old Testament – Malachi 4:5-6 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." John was not (as some have suggested) a reincarnation of Elijah. He came as verse 17a says, "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah..." John's preaching truly prepared the way for Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

I really don't think that John the Baptist gets enough exposure from the pulpits and classrooms of the church today. This man was given a task that was greater than any assignment ever given to any human being. He was given the task of preparing for the coming Messiah. He did His job and he did it well.

