



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Luke

An Introduction

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Introduction

In this introduction to the Gospel of St. Luke we will discuss:

- Life of the Apostle Luke
- Authorship of the Gospel
- Time and Where the Gospel Was Written
- The Purpose of Writing This Gospel
- Contents and Characteristics of the Gospel



General Introduction

- The Gospel According to St. Luke is written by a man believed to be the only New Testament Gentile writer
- The Holy Spirit inspired St. Luke who carefully researched and recorded the events of Jesus' life and ministry for his target audience of Gentile Christians
- Gospel of St. Luke provides the longest and most complete account of the advent and earthly life of the Messiah, from the divine announcement and birth of His forerunner, St. John the Baptist, to the Annunciation, birth and early childhood of Jesus



General Introduction

- St. Luke presents Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah - the Son of Man who came to bind the power of Satan by conquering sin and death to bring mankind God's gift of redemption and eternal salvation



Authorship

- The Church Fathers unanimously identify the writer as St. Luke, the physician and companion of St. Paul on his missionary journeys
- Some scholars have suggested that St. Luke was a Hellenistic Jew, but most scholars identify him as a Gentile convert
- Some think he is one of the seventy apostles, and also one of the two disciples to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection on their way to Amos, Luke 24:12, and that the apostle has not mentioned his name due to the spirit of humility
- His name means “bearer of light”



Authorship

- The majority, those of modern studies, think that he was not one of the apostles, but that he rather accepted the faith at the hands of St. Paul the apostle
- They pointed primarily to the fact of the lack of historical evidence, and secondly because this idea seems to contradict the gospel introduction in Luke 1:2, "*just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and minsters of the word delivered them to us*"
- In addition to being a physician St. Luke was also a painter
- It is mentioned in the tradition that he has painted the icon of the Virgin St. Mary



Authorship

- He was St. Paul's companion in many of his missionary journeys
- It is said he lived a celibate, and that he worked in Greece
- He was martyred at the age of eighty four, and his remains were transferred to Constantinople in the year 357 AD
- In the year 1177 AD they were transferred to Padua in Italy
- St. Luke is not, as some have thought, Lucius of Cyrene, who is mentioned as prominent among the prophets and teachers at Antioch, Acts 13:1, or the Lucius who is named as a kinsman of St. Paul's, Romans 16:21



Date of the Writing

- Most Scholars believe the date of the writing is around A.D. 58/60
- They believe it was written before Acts which is dated around A.D. 64/65
- Some scholars favor a later date, placing the work after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD
- These scholars claim that Luke 21:20 is an accurate historical description of the Roman siege of the city in 70 AD
- However, Luke's Gospel does not describe the Roman army's destruction of Jerusalem but only gives Jesus' prophecy of the city's siege by a foreign army



Audience & Place of Writing

- The place of origin is not revealed in Luke's Gospel
- Some have suggested that Luke collected his material while he was with Paul during his two-year, Caesarean imprisonment ("We" in Acts 27:1), and then wrote the gospel shortly afterward
- Therefore, some think that it was probably written in Rome, though some others believe it was written in Achacia or in Alexandria
- The destination is unknown except for the named recipient of Luke-Acts known as Theophilus, Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1, who may well have been Luke's literary patron assisting in the publication of Luke-Acts



Audience & Place of Writing

- It is also possible that he was a Gentile (from his name and title, “most excellent” referring to a Roman provincial governor), but this is also uncertain
- The Gospel, though dedicated to Theophilus, was meant for the wider group of people
- Some thinks it was meant to be especially a Gospel for the educated heathen or/and the scholars of Greek philosophy and literature
- It will be seen in what follows, that this view is confirmed by its more prominent characteristics



Purpose

- To write about the life of Christ, 1:1-3
- To write to Theophilus so that he might know the exact truth about the things he had been taught 1:4
- Luke wants to display before Theophilus reliable information which was in accounts which he had already heard
- In view of the “exact truth” Luke may have been writing to deal with a controversy issue which false teachers were proclaiming



The Sources of the Gospel

- St. Luke disclaims the character of an eye-witness, Luke 1:2, and confesses that he is only a compiler, claiming simply the credit of having done his best to verify the facts which he narrates
- Where then was it probable that he found his materials?
- Luke's inspiration and information for his Gospel and Acts came from his close association with Paul and his companions as he explains in his introduction to the Gospel, 1:1-3
- It is obvious that coming, as he did, into the field of inquiry some thirty, or at least twenty years or so after the events, many of the facts and sayings would reach him in a comparatively isolated form



The Sources of the Gospel

- So, there is an obvious and earnest endeavor to relate these events, as he says, *“that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed”*, 1:4
- In the prologue to the Gospel he indicates that he got the information from those who were themselves eyewitnesses
- So, for example, he probably would have gotten the additional details, which other Gospels do not record about Jesus' infancy from St. Mary



The Gospel's Symbol

- The Church relates the four Gospels to the four living creatures that Ezekiel saw in his revelation, Ezekiel 1:5, 10:1-22; and Revelation 4:6-9, 5:6
- These living creatures with the four faces were symbols to the four Gospels
- The second living creature that is like a calf or an ox symbolizes the Gospel according to Saint Luke
- St. Luke presented to us Christ as an offering and a sacrifice



The Gospel's Symbol

- More than any other evangelist, St. Luke conveys to us the image of the redeemer Christ, who came to save sinners
- He was both the sacrificial Lamb and the offering Priest who offer the sacrifice
- He opens the Gospel with references to priesthood and sacrifices

Contents and Characteristics of the Gospel



- The Gospel of Luke is considered one of the Synoptic Gospels
- The word "synoptic" is from the Greek and means "at a glance"
- This term is used for the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke because they follow the same general plan and reflect similarities in the events related to the account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ
- However, about half of St. Luke's information about the life of Jesus is exclusively his own
- St. Luke contains information about the announcement and the birth of St. John the Baptist that is not in the other Gospels

Contents and Characteristics of the Gospel



- There is also detailed information about the Annunciation and birth of Jesus and His presentation at the Temple that is not found in the other Gospels
- In addition, St. Luke records in detail Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, 9:51-19:27, which contains many parables not found in the other Gospels
- Its focus is “Jesus is the Son of God who came to bring salvation to all mankind”
- The Gospel of Luke emphasizes Jesus' humanity and compassion

Contents and Characteristics of the Gospel



- He is the "Son of Man" who fulfills the ideal of human perfection and who identifies with the sorrow and suffering of a sinful humanity
- Luke relates that Jesus, the perfected Son of Man who is Divine the Son of God, willingly took humanity's suffering upon Himself to accomplish His work of salvation
- St. Luke places special emphasis on the universality of Jesus' Gospel message of salvation
- He is the Messiah prophesied by the prophets, Luke 24:27, 44-45 who came to save and to minister to people of all nations through the power of God the Holy Spirit

Contents and Characteristics of the Gospel



- Jesus of Nazareth is not just the promised Redeemer-Messiah of the Jews; He is the Savior of the whole world, Luke 2:32, 24:47
- The Gospel of Luke is the longest, including many stories and parables unique to his record
- The Gospel of Luke has universal appeal because it is the only one written by a Gentile to Gentiles
- The Jesus he describes in his writings is one who meets universal human needs for love, validation and healing
- Luke presents the fullest picture of Jesus as the compassionate God

Contents and Characteristics of the Gospel



- Luke's gospel begins with the appearances of the Archangel Gabriel to Zechariah and to Mary
- Gabriel foretells two miraculous births: the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and Elizabeth, *they were both well advanced in years*; and the virginal conception of Jesus in the womb of St. Mary
- Next the gospel traces Jesus' genealogy back to Adam in order to show the universality of the salvation which he brings

Contents and Characteristics of the Gospel



- Luke's Gospel emphasizes Jesus' love and care for those whom the Jewish leaders never even noticed
- Jesus showed concern and respect for women, the poor, the despised Samaritans, the sick, children, etc.
- Luke's Jesus is a hero, but one who, remarkably, can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, Hebrews 4:15
- To Luke, as well as to Jesus, there were no unimportant people

Contents and Characteristics of the Gospel



- There was special stress upon the prayers of Christ
- It is from Luke we learn that it was as Jesus was “praying” at His baptism that the heavens were opened, Luke 3:21
- That it was while He was praying that the fashion of His countenance was altered, and there came on Him the glory of the Transfiguration, Luke 9:29
- That He was “praying” when the disciples came and asked Him to teach them to pray, Luke 11:1
- That He had prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail, Luke 22:32



Outline of the Gospel

- The Opening, Luke 1:1-4
- Birth and Infancy Stories, Luke 1:5-2:52
 1. Zechariah and Elizabeth receive an angelic announcement that she will bear a child who will be the forerunner of the Messiah, 1:5-25
 2. Mary receives news that she will give birth to Christ, 1:26-38
 3. Mary visits Elizabeth, 1:39-56
 4. The account of John's birth is given, 1:57-80



Outline of the Gospel

5. The glorious birth of Jesus is described, 2:1-20
6. Later the child is circumcised, 2:21 and presented at the temple, 2:22-39
7. During his twelfth year, Jesus stays behind at the temple, 2:40-50
8. The remainder of his growth to manhood is summarized in two verses, 2:51-52



Outline of the Gospel

- Preparation for Ministry, Luke 3:1-4:13
 1. John prepares the way, 3:1-20
 2. Jesus is baptized by John, 3:21-22
 3. Luke gives Jesus' genealogy on Mary's side, 3:23-28
 4. Jesus is tempted by Satan, 4:1-13
- The Galilean Ministry, Luke 4:14-9:50
 1. Many events are recorded that also appear in other gospels with additions of:
 - a. The miraculous catch of fish, 5:1-11
 - b. The raising of the widow's son at Nain, 7:11-17
 - c. The story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet at Simon's house, 7:36-50



Outline of the Gospel

- 2. Unique among Jesus' teachings during this period was the parable of the two debtors, 7:41
- On the Way to Jerusalem, Luke 9:51-19:27
 - 1. During this period, Jesus particularly emphasizes concern for the Samaritans
 - a. He demonstrates patience when they reject Him, 9:51-56
 - b. Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, 10:25-42
 - c. When Jesus cleansed ten lepers, the only one who returned to thank Him was a Samaritan, 17:11-19



Outline of the Gospel

2. Other events unique to Luke's record during this period include:
 - a. The healing of a woman who *had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years*, 13:10-17
 - b. The healing of a man with dropsy, 14:1-4
 - c. Jesus visiting Zacchaeus, 19:1-10
3. Parables or teachings unique to Luke during this period include:
 - a. The Good Samaritan, 10:25-42
 - b. The friend at midnight, 11:5-10



Outline of the Gospel

- c. The rich fool, 12:13-21
- d. The watching servants, 12:35-48
- e. The barren fig tree, 13:6-9
- f. The parable of the great banquet, 14:15-24
- g. The unfinished tower or the unwaged war, 14:28-33
- h. The "lost" parables-sheep, coin, son, 15:1-32
- i. The wise steward, 16:1-15
- j. The rich man and Lazarus, 16:19-31
- k. The unprofitable servants, 17:7-10



Outline of the Gospel

- l. The persistent widow, 18:1-8
- m. The Pharisee and the publican, 18:9-14
- n. The ten minas, 19:11-27
- o. The Jerusalem Ministry, Luke 19:28-24:53
- 1. After a triumphal entry, 19:28-44, Jesus encounters increased conflict with the Pharisees, scribes, and chief priests, 19:45
- 2. Judas agrees to betray Jesus, 22:1-6
- 3. Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, 22:7-20



Outline of the Gospel

4. After his prayer in Gethsemane, 22:39-46, Jesus is arrested, 22:47-53
5. Peter denies Jesus three times, 22:54-62
6. Jesus is tried by both the Jews, 22:63-71 and the Romans 23:1-25
7. Delivered up to death, 23:26-32, Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem, 23:33-49
8. He is buried, 23:50-56
9. Finally, Luke closes with the glorious account of Jesus' resurrection, 24:1-49 and ascension, 24:50-53



Discussion

- Luke has been called the “Gospel of Women”, why?
- What in Luke’s background might have contributed to this?
- For whom was this Gospel written, Romans? Greeks? Jews? Egyptians? Gentiles?
- What makes Luke different from all three other Gospel authors?



Discussion

- Why has this Gospel been referred to as the “Gospel of Prayer?”
- Two of the Gospels, John and Luke, the authors tell us why they were written. John says he wrote his Gospel “that you might believe.” Why did Luke write his Gospel?
- Who was Theophilus at the beginning of Luke and Acts?