



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Luke

Chapter 1

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Introduction

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Prologue/Dedication to Theophilus 1:1-4



- St. Luke begins his prologue by mentioning the reasons of his writing and also mentioning that there are other gospels recording the events of Jesus' life
- Some scholars count as many as 34 different gospels written within the first 2-3 centuries of the Church while others count more
- However, the Church has always maintained, and as Origen, the head of the School of Alexandria, testified, from the very beginning of the Church only four Gospels were acknowledged as Holy Spirit inspired

Prologue/Dedication to Theophilus 1:1-4



- St. Luke's Gospel is not the only Gospel to begin with a prologue, but it is the only Gospel to begin with a formal literary prologue that was common in secular documents of the time
- Luke will not write of things about which Christians may differ from one another, and hesitate within themselves; but the things which are, and ought to be surely believed
- *from the beginning* - From the commencement of these things - that is, from the birth of John, or perhaps from the beginning of the ministry of Jesus

Prologue/Dedication to Theophilus 1:1-4



- *eyewitnesses and ministers of the word*, Those who delivered to the Church the facts of the Savior's life had 'personal knowledge and practical experience,' Acts 1:21-22
- *to write to you an orderly account*, The whole statement may be roughly paraphrased thus: "The narrative of the memorable events which have been accomplished in our midst many have undertaken to compose
- These different narratives are in strict conformity with the apostles' tradition, which men who were themselves eye-witnesses of the great events, and subsequently ministers of the Word, handed down to us

Prologue/Dedication to Theophilus 1:1-4



- Now, I have traced up all these traditions to their very sources, and propose rewriting them in consecutive order, that you, my lord Theophilus, may be fully convinced of the positive certainty of those great truths in which you have been instructed”
- *most excellent Theophilus*, The adjective is the same as that used of Felix by Tertullus, Acts 24:3, and implies at least high social position, if not official rank
- Who was Theophilus?
- Theophilus is a proper name that was commonly in use from the time of the 3rd century BC on

Prologue/Dedication to Theophilus 1:1-4



- There is no reason to assume Theophilus was not the name of someone Luke knew
- Some have suggested he was Luke's patron or sponsor who was funding the publication (handwritten) of his Gospel and later the companion work Acts of Apostles; Acts 1:1
- Others have suggested the name of the benefactor or the man honored by the dedication is substituted by the code name "theophilus", in Greek literally meaning "God-lover" (and sometimes translated "friend of God"), in order to protect his identity

Prologue/Dedication to Theophilus 1:1-4



- Others say that he was most likely, from Luke's connection with Antioch, a noble of that great and wealthy city, and may fairly be taken as a representative of that cultured thoughtful class for whom in a measure St. Luke especially wrote
- Still others have suggested the name "God-lover" in the dedication refers to all believers in Jesus Christ
- *having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first*, More accurately rendered, having followed up (or, investigated) step by step all things from their source

Prologue/Dedication to Theophilus 1:1-4



- St. Luke here sets out his reasons for undertaking a fresh compilation
- His Gospel would differ from the early Gospels by going back much further than they did and gave us early details, a history of the incarnation and the infancy of Jesus Christ
- The purpose the evangelist had in writing this Gospel, and sending it to Theophilus, was, that he might be more strongly assured of and more firmly established in the truths of the Gospel

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- In his Gospel and in the Book of Acts St. Luke begins, as he had promised, with the first facts in the divine order of events and mentions historical events and important people to establish the timeframe of the story
- He opens the Gospel account by setting the time *in the days of Herod, the king of Judea*
- At the time the events of Jesus life took place, Judea was no longer an independent state
- Herod was an able ruler but a cruel and merciless man
- Zechariah's name means God remembers

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- Aaron had four sons, but the two elder Nadab and Abihu were struck dead for using strange fire in the sanctuary, Leviticus 10
- From the two remaining sons Eleazar and Ithamar had sprung in the days of David twenty-four families, sixteen from the descendants of Eleazar, and eight from those of Ithamar
- When the priests became so numerous that they could not at once minister at the altar, David divided them into 24 classes or courses, each one of which officiated for a week, 1 Chronicles 24
- The class or course (shift) of Abia was the "eighth" in order, 1 Chronicles 24:10

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- *daughters of Aaron*, This is added to show the honor of Elisabeth
- Elisabeth was not only of the tribe of Levi, but descended from Aaron, whom God made the noblest family of the Levites
- Both the husband and wife traced their lineage back to the first high priest - a desired distinction in Israel
- *Elizabeth*, Means *the oath*, or *the rod of my God*
- *righteous before God*, Not as the Pharisees, only righteous before men, but in the sight of God, who sees the heart, and whose judgment is according to truth

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- *walking in all the commandments*, This is the evidence of it before men
- *blameless*; not that they were without sin, as none are; and it appears from this chapter that Zacharias was not, Luke 1:20 but they were so in the sight of God
- The scholar Oreganos comments on the word 'blameless' saying "Our Lord Jesus referred to the church that it is (Ephesians 5:27) 'a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish'. This does not mean that the son of the church has never sinned, but that he rather leads a life of repentance."

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- *Ordinances*, These words refer to all the duties of religion which were made known to them
- *But they had no child*, This was regarded as a heavy misfortune because it cut off all hope of the birth of the Messiah in that family
- The providence of God so ordering it, that the birth of John the Baptist might be the more remarkable, and might be of greater attention; *because that Elisabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years*

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- Here, then, was a double obstacle in the way of their having children, both the natural barrenness of Elizabeth, and the old age of them both; and, consequently, a double proof of the supernatural intervention of God in the birth of John, evidently showing him to be a person miraculously sent by God

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- Zechariah was serving his week in due course, and it fell to his lot on a certain day to perform the very special service of burning incense in the holy place
- A great occasion in a priest's life, as it might never come to him but once because there are said to have been some 20,000 priests in the days of Christ, and it could therefore never fall to the lot of the same priest *twice* to offer incense
- The priest entered in white robes with other men who left when they had made everything ready

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- They were employed at the offering of incense—to remove the ashes of the former service; to bring in and place on the golden altar the pan filled with hot burning coals taken from the altar of burnt offering; and to sprinkle the incense on the hot coals
- The people waited outside in the Court of Israel praying in deep silence till the priest who was sacrificing the evening lamb at the great altar of Burnt Offering in the Court gave a signal to his colleague in the shrine, Exodus 30:1-10; Psalm 141:2; Malachi 1:11
- He then threw the incense on the fire of the golden altar, and its fragrant smoke rose with the prayers of the people

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- *an angel of the Lord appeared*, About four hundred years had passed since God had gave to His ancient people any supernatural communication, either by prophecy, the ministry of angels, or in any other extraordinary way
- But as He was now about to send them the Messiah, and establish through Him a new dispensation, He sends an angelic messenger to announce His intentions, and prepare their minds for the reception of so great a blessing
- The angel stood between the altar and the show-bread table

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- On entering the holy place, the officiating priest would have on his right the table with the show-bread, on his left the great candlestick, and before him would be the golden altar, which stood at the end of the holy place, in front of the veil which separated this chamber, silent holy of holies
- Zacharias was alone, in the presence of God
- The appearance of the angel was sudden, unexpected, and therefore fearful

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- It is obvious that God's providence has been at work in the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth
- Without revealing his name, the angel told Zechariah not to be afraid
- *for your prayer is heard*, That is, the prayer for offspring
- This, among the Jews, was an object of intense desire
- Some thinks the words imply a prayer on the part of Zacharias, not that he might have a son (that hope appears to have died out long before), but that the Kingdom of God might come
- And he prayed that the long looked for Messiah would hasten His coming

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- The name John means God is gracious
- *you will have joy and gladness*, This son would be the prophet of the Highest; would go before the Lord, and prepare His ways; give knowledge of salvation to many, and light to them that were in darkness, and guide their feet in the way of peace: all which, and more, Zacharias afterwards expresses in his praise
- *many will rejoice at his birth*, This does not refer so much to the time of his birth as to the subsequent rejoicing
- Such will be his "character," that he will be an honor to the family, and many will rejoice; he will be a blessing to mankind

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- We have a natural ambition to be great
- Hence one man desires riches, another honors and reputation; but the true greatness is to be *great in the sight of the Lord*
- In God's sight John is a great man of whom God makes a great use, especially in turning many souls to Himself
- *shall drink neither wine nor strong drink*, Is meant any drink which ordinarily intoxicates
- This was the law of the Nazarites, Numbers 6:3
- No lovers of wine and strong drink can be great men in the sight of God

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- The angel told Zechariah that the promised child was to be consecrated to God from his mother's womb
- It was fitting that the utmost severity of legal consecration should be seen in Christ's forerunner
- *he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God,*
By repentance
- John was an instrument to turn many of the Israelites, who already verbally owned the true God, but were drenched in errors, and superstitions, and looseness of life, to the Lord their God

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- This made him a great man, for, *They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever*, Daniel 12:3
- Gabriel compared the promised child to the 9th century BC prophet Elijah
- St. John will be explicitly related to the prophet Elijah as one endowed with his spirit just as the prophet Elisha was granted Elijah's spirit, 2 Kings 2:9-16
- When he became an adult, John the Baptist resembled the prophet Elijah in his dress and in his mission, 2 King 1:7-8, Matthew 3:4-6, and Mark 1:4

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- Both John and Elijah wore a camel hair cloak and a leather loincloth and both men were sent by God to call the covenant people to repentance
- John preached with the same integrity, courage, and zeal, and the same power of God attending his word
- The son of Zacharias equaled, if not exceeded, Elijah in zeal for God, in severity of manners, in courage, and in sustaining persecutions
- The angel quoted Malachi 3:23-24, 4:5
- The Jews universally believed (as they do to this day) that Elijah would visibly return to earth as a herald of the Messiah

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- There was something evidently blamable in this hesitation on the part of Zacharias to receive the angel's promise
- The testimony of an "angel," and in such a place, should have been proof enough and ought to have convinced the doubting Zacharias of the truth of the strange message
- The words of the angel, which follow, seem to imply this
- Notice that the angel only answers Zechariah's question "How shall I know this?" by revealing his name, "Gabriel"
- *these glad tidings*, Zechariah received the honor of being the first one to whom the gospel of the Kingdom was preached

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- Zacharias is rebuked because he has a question of disbelief as his response
- The question was answered, the demand for a sign granted, (a sign that he had come from God, and it would not be lifted until the fulfillment of the message) but the demand had implied a want of faith, and therefore the sign took the form of a punishment (a judgment for not giving credit to what was said)
- The meaning of the name Gabriel is "Hero of God" or "Mighty One of God"
- The Church identifies Gabriel as one of the seven Archangels

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- He is the special messenger of good news
- He comes to Daniel, and tells him of the restoration of Jerusalem
- He comes to Zacharias, and announces the birth of his son, and declares what his glorious office would consist in
- And he comes to St. Mary of Nazareth, and foretells the nativity
- Archangel Michael, on the other hand, appears as the warrior of God
- In the Book of Daniel he wars with the enemies of the people of the Lord
- In Jude and in the Revelation of St. John he is the victorious opponent of Satan the enemy of the Eternal

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- While Zechariah was alone in the Holy Place, the other priests had gathered on the Sanctuary steps
- He was supposed to join them in giving the final priestly blessing
- As the congregation and the other chief priests waited for him they have become increasingly concerned
- Men had died in offering up the holy incense "unqualified men and men offering the incense inappropriately, Leviticus 10:1-2; Numbers 16:1-35,40; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21
- The priests and the people were relieved when Zechariah finally appeared at the Sanctuary doors, but it was then that they realized he had lost his power of speech as a result of what had happened to him in the Sanctuary

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- The “days” were, according to the usual order of the Temple, from Sabbath to Sabbath, 2 Kings 11:5
- Though Zacharias was both deaf and dumb, he was still able to burn incense, and perform the other duties of his office
- He therefore continued at the temple till the time of his service was ended
- *he departed to his own house*, Which is generally supposed to have been at Hebron, a city of the priests, about twenty miles from Jerusalem

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- Although deprived of the power of speech, Zechariah could still write, and he must have written down his experience with the angel and shared with Elizabeth the tremendous blessing God was giving them
- *she hid herself five months*, Various reasons have been suggested for this withdrawal
- It seems most probable that, amazed at the angelic announcement, the saintly woman went into perfect isolation for a considerable period that she might have more time to meditate on the wonderful goodness of God toward her and her husband, and might praise Him for it, and rejoice within

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- And to consider how she best could do her part in the training of the expected child, who was to play so mighty a part in the history of her people
- Or, as some think, she kept herself hidden, and avoided seeing company, that she might conceal her pregnancy for a while, lest she should expose herself to ridicule by speaking of it before she knew certainly that it was a reality
- *Thus the Lord*, In this merciful manner; in a very gracious and bountiful manner; in giving her strength to conceive a son in her old age

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias 1:5-25



- Among the Jews, a family of children was counted a signal blessing, an evidence of the favor of God, Psalm 113:9, 128:3; Isaiah 4:1, 44:3-4; Leviticus 26:9; Hosea 9:11
- To be "barren," therefore, was considered a "reproach" or a "disgrace," 1 Samuel 1:6
- *take away my reproach*, So Rachel, when she bare a son, said, "*God has taken away my reproach,*" Genesis 30:23



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- It is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a virgin named Mary
- In Hebrew her name is *Miriam*
- Mary lived in the insignificant village of Nazareth in the lower Galilee
- *city of Galilee named Nazareth*, These explanatory notes make it clear that St. Luke was writing for those who were strangers to Palestine
- Nazareth is located just north of the fertile Jezreel Valley, 15 miles east from the Sea of Galilee, and 20 miles from the Mediterranean Sea to the west



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- St. Joseph and St. Mary lived in it and Jesus Christ spent most of the first thirty years of His life in it, Luke 3:23; Mark 1:9
- He was therefore called 'the Nazarene', Matthew 2:23; Mark 1:24
- When He began His mission, He was rejected twice by its people, Luke 4:28-31; Matthew 4:13, 13:54-58
- The town barely had any importance for it was not mentioned in the Old Testament, neither in any of the documents of the major countries before Christ's coming, nor in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus
- The word 'Nazareth' may mean 'track' or 'branch', and this is why Christ was often called 'the Branch'

The Annunciation 1:26-38



- St. Luke makes a clear statement of Mary's virginity, using the Greek word "virgin," twice in this passage
- It is the same Greek word for "virgin" that is used in the prophecy of the Old Testament Greek Septuagint translation of Isaiah 7:14, a prophecy that designates "the" virgin and not "a" virgin
- Mary is "betrothed" to a descendant of the great King David, a man named Joseph
- The betrothal, which is in the East a ceremony of the deepest importance, usually took place a year before the marriage



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- Why was the angel sent to a betrothed girl?
- St. Ambrose says, “So no one thinks she has committed adultery”
- The scholar Oreganos thinks, according to St. Ignatius, that the presence of Joseph might make Satan doubt and get confused about the newborn regarding the divine Incarnation
- St. Ambrose presented to us the same idea when he said, “there is another reason which cannot be disregarded, which is that the ruler of this world did not discover the virginity of the Virgin Mary because he saw her with her man, he did not suspect the baby born of her



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- We are nowhere told that Mary was of the house of David, for both the genealogies of the Gospels are genealogies of Joseph
- However, Gospel of St. Luke links the priestly family of St. John the Baptist to the family of Mary of Nazareth
- Zechariah's wife is a kinswoman of Mary
- Both Zechariah and Elizabeth are descendants of the first High Priest, Aaron, Exodus 28:1; Luke 1:5
- Therefore, Mary also has a link to the priestly bloodline, 1:36
- The angel's greeting to Mary is quite different from his greeting to Zechariah



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- Notice that Gabriel does not greet Zechariah with the same degree of respect and status as he did by giving Mary a title
- The greeting is also unusual in that he does not begin with the typical Semitic greeting of *peace*, but with "hail" or "rejoice" and by announcing Mary's special status often translated as "full of grace" but the more literal translation is "had been graced"
- Mary's title indicates a state which is beyond filled
- In addressing Mary with this title, the angel is signifying that she possesses, and has always possessed, a plentitude of Divine grace



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- The fact that St. Mary was *deeply disturbed by the angel's greeting* is evidence that someone of her humble status had received a greeting and was addressed by a title that was highly unusual
- She was greatly troubled but different to Zacharias, who evidently doubted in the mission of the angel, and who required some sign before he could believe
- Mary simply wondered at the strangeness of what was about to happen
- Her terror at the sudden appearance of the angel



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- Some compare and ask why the angel punished Zacharias and not Mary when both of them reacted with fear
- Humility is a key difference between Mary's response and Zechariah's response to Gabriel
- Where St. Mary expressed humility Zechariah expressed doubt
- Once Gabriel tells each of them the reason for his appearance, their responses at first glance might seem similar but their hearts behind their responses are totally different
- St. Mary has a legitimate question about this news from Gabriel
- She is an unwed, engaged to be married, virgin

The Annunciation 1:26-38



- Short of a miracle, it's physically impossible for her to become pregnant as a virgin
- Never in the history of mankind had there been a story told of a woman becoming pregnant as a virgin
- Once Gabriel explained to her how it is possible (1:35), St. Mary's response of acceptance (1:38) tells us where her heart is when she says, *"Behold the maidservant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*
- St. Mary is not questioning if Gabriel's proclamation will happen, she wants to know **how it will happen**



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- *Do not be afraid, Mary,* He calls her by her name, signifying that she was well known to him, as the saints are to the ministering angels, who are often sent unto them
- The three verses 31-33 contain the substance of the angel's message to the virgin, to tell her she should be the mother of a **Son**, by what name she should call Him, and what He should be
- In telling her this, who knew herself to be a virgin, one who had not known man, he plainly reminds her that the prophecy, Isaiah 7:14, should be fulfilled in her
- Thus far the angel's word signifies a promise



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- *shall call His name JESUS*, The revelation of the name, with all its mysterious fulness of meaning, was made to Joseph and Mary independently, Matthew 1:21
- The angel told Joseph the significance of the child's name in a dream, “*And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins*”
Matthew 1:21
- *He will be great*, Isaiah had said, “*his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God*” Isaiah 9:6, “*was a Prophet mighty in words and deeds before God and all the people*”, Luke 24:19



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- *will be called the Son of the Highest*, that is, the Son of God, who is often in Scripture made known by this name, Genesis 14:19 Psalm 83:18; 92:1; Mark 5:7
- This phrase so signifies often, Isaiah 1:26; John 1:12; for He shall be known and *declared to be so*, Romans 1:4
- Peter so called Him; so did the centurion who attended His cross
- God Himself called Him so, Psalm 2:7, and that in a sense agreeing to none but Him
- *the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David*, This echoes God's covenant promises to King David in 2 Samuel 7:9-16 that his throne will endure forever, 2 Samuel 23:5



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- St. Luke is intentionally making a link between God's promise to David of an eternal covenant and the inauguration of that covenant promise in Jesus of Nazareth
- Christ was promised *to the fathers*, especially to Abraham, as *the Seed*
- He was promised by Moses, *a prophet*, as *the Prophet*
- He was promised to David, *a king*, as *the King*
- Even the temporal kingdom of Israel belonged to Jesus Christ by hereditary right



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- *the throne of His father David*, The words seem at first to suggest the thought that the Virgin was of the house of David, and that the title to the throne was thus derived through her
- This may have been so, Luke 3:23-38 and the intermarriage which had taken place in olden times between the house of Aaron and that of David, Exodus 6:23; 2 Kings 11:2, show that this might be quite consistent with the relationship to Elizabeth mentioned in Luke 1:36



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- On the other hand, it must be remembered that the genealogies, both in St. Matthew and St. Luke, appear, at first sight, to give the lineage of Joseph only, and therefore that, if this were, as many have believed, the Evangelist's point of view, our Lord, despite the supernatural birth, was thought of as inheriting from him



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- From the Virgin's words, it is clear she was dedicated by a vow to remain a virgin
- If she had wished to be married, she would not have said so
- She would rather have said 'when will this be?' in expectation of the promise to be fulfilled during matrimonial time
- The question of the Virgin is not altogether of the same nature as that of Zacharias in Luke 1:18
- He asks by what sign he shall know that the words were true which told him of a son in his old age



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- Mary is told of a far greater marvel, for her question shows that she understood the angel to speak of the birth as antecedent to her marriage, and she, accepting the words in faith, does not demand a sign, but reverently seeks to know the manner of their accomplishment
- The angel uses the verb *episkiazein* (overshadow) to explain Mary's Divine conception by the power of God the Holy Spirit
- It is the same verb used in the Greek Septuagint translation of Exodus 40:34 when God the Holy Spirit, in the visible form of the Glory Cloud, "overshadowed" the Tabernacle and the glory of God filled the Dwelling



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- It is the same word that is used in the Transfiguration of the Christ, Matthew 17:5 and Luke 9:34 when the voice of God was heard coming from a cloud which cast its shadow over those assembled on the mountain
- Again the angel makes use of the term "*Highest*" when alluding to the eternal Father
- The Word was conceived in the womb of Mary, not after the manner of men, but by the singular, powerful, invisible, immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby a virgin was, beyond the law of nature, enabled to conceive



The Annunciation 1:26-38

- *Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age,*
The angel disclose Elizabeth's pregnancy as a confirmation of the promise which, in fact, was also a deviation from the order of nature
- Scholars of the Bible think that at this moment in which she offered her obedience to God and her submission to Him, she received the Incarnation, for it was not possible to fulfill the incarnation without her will and her acceptance to receive the works, for God sanctifies human freedom
- The Fathers of the Church saw the Virgin Mary as the "new Eve" and Mary's "yes" as the undoing the disobedience brought about by Eve

The Visitation of St. Mary to Elizabeth 1:39-45



- After the angel's visit, St. Mary immediately set out to make the 7-8 day journey from Nazareth in the Galilee to the hill country of Judea and the town of her kinswoman Elizabeth
- *to a city of Judah*, The description is too vague to be identified with any certainty
- The city may have been one of those assigned to the priests within the limits of the tribe of Judah
- *greeted Elizabeth*, the salutations of the saints and those of the ungodly are altogether different

The Visitation of St. Mary to Elizabeth 1:39-45



- This greeting on the part of St. Mary caused the leaping of the babe
- Elizabeth immediately *through the Holy Spirit* recognizes the cause of the leaping
- The motion of the child in the womb of the mother was more than ordinary motion
- Doubtless as this motion was more than ordinary, so it had a more than ordinary cause, being caused from the Holy Spirit of God, and so the best interpreters judge: what is afterward said of Elizabeth, that she *was filled with the Holy Spirit*

The Visitation of St. Mary to Elizabeth 1:39-45



- “Elizabeth was the first to hear St. Mary’s voice, but John was the first to be affected by the blessing. Elizabeth knew of St. Mary’s coming, and John felt the presence of Christ.” St. Ambrose
- “When John was filled with the Holy Spirit, he became sanctified when still in his mother’s womb, so he could baptize the Lord.” St. Cyril El Orshilimy

The Visitation of St. Mary to Elizabeth 1:39-45



- *with a loud voice*, She spoke with great intensity of soul, and strength of affection, being under a very powerful impression of the Spirit of God
- Elizabeth uses the same words to St. Mary which the angel had used for her, Luke 1:28; that is, “*highly favored one, ... blessed are you among women!*”, not only well-known, but one whom God has greatly favored and exceedingly blessed and made happy
- Bible scholars both ancient and modern have seen the similarity of Elizabeth's rhetorical question in Luke 1:43 and King David's rhetorical question in 2 Samuel 6:9 when he said: *How can the Ark of the Lord come to me?* speaking of the Ark of the Covenant

The Visitation of St. Mary to Elizabeth 1:39-45



- They have seen Elizabeth's question as an intentional comparison between Mary and the Ark of the Covenant, the dwelling place of the Lord God
- A deliberate comparison seems to be confirmed by verse 56 where Mary is said to stay in Elizabeth's house in the Judean hill country three months "just as the Ark stayed in the Judean hill country housed of Obed-Edom for three months in 2 Samuel 6:11
- Elizabeth in these words acknowledges both the Incarnation of Christ, and the union of the Divine and human nature in the one person of the Mediator; she acknowledges Christ her Lord, and St. Mary to be His mother

The Visitation of St. Mary to Elizabeth 1:39-45



- *the babe leaped in my womb for joy*, She mentions this, as the signal by which she knew that she was the mother of her Lord; namely, from that unusual and extraordinary motion of the child, she felt within her
- It is by the strength of Elizabeth's statement, prompted by the Holy Spirit, that the Council of Ephesus declared St. Mary not only the "Mother of Jesus" but also the "Mother of God" in 431 AD
- *Blessed is she who believed*, The words are certainly a great confirmation of what the angel had told her

The Visitation of St. Mary to Elizabeth 1:39-45



- Think what must have been the feeling of the two - the one finding herself the chosen out of all the thousands of Israel, after so many centuries of weary waiting, to be the mother of the Messiah
- The other, long after any reasonable hope of any offspring at all had faded away, to be the mother of Messiah's chosen friend, the forerunner of the King of whom the prophets had written!

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- Mary's response to Elizabeth's exclamation of praise for Mary's belief and the honor God has shown her as "the mother of the Lord," is a hymn of praise
- There are some differences between the behavior of the St. Mary and Elizabeth when they met in Elizabeth's house
- Elizabeth was full of a new strange extreme joy and her salutation was full of excitement, because she was filled with the Holy Spirit
- St. Mary, on the other hand, since the hour of the annunciation and her own meek faithful acceptance of the Lord's purpose, she was filled with the Holy Spirit and her hymn breathes a feeling of deep inward repose

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- Her cousin's inspiration seems to have been momentary and transitory while hers was permanent
- Magnifying God is not by making Him great, for He cannot be made greater than He is and He magnifies us, but it is declaring and showing forth His greatness and attributing greatness to Him, praising Him; and also declaring and speaking well of His many and mighty works of power, goodness, grace, and mercy, and giving Him glory
- *My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God,* Soul and spirit are but two words signifying the same thing, and importing that she glorified God heartily, and with her whole soul

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1:46-56



- Mary did, not in lip and word only, but with her whole heart and, soul, and with all the powers and faculties of it; her entire inner person is actively engaged in giving glory to God for what He has done
- She is teaching us that all praising of God with our lips is of no significance, without the conjunction of the heart with the tongue
- *my Savior*, She knew herself to be a sinner who needed a Savior
- He is coming to save people from sin and death
- He had redeemed her soul and given her a title to eternal life; and she rejoiced for that, and especially for His mercy in honoring her by her being made the mother of the Messiah

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1:46-56



- Her humble station is the first reason for Mary's praise
- She declares that because of God's Divine plan for her life and her willingness to submit to that plan all generations will exalt her
- St. Mary utters the prophecy of future generations and her relationship to them prompted by the Holy Spirit
- It is our obligation to honor St. Mary

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- It is observable both in this verse, and in this whole song, how the blessed virgin attributes all to God, and ascribes nothing to herself, or any merits of her own
- In these two verses St. Mary names three attributes of God, His might, holiness and mercy
- *done great things*, Or, miracles, As God fills her with His goodness, she empties herself to Him in praises; and, sinking into her own nothingness, she confesses that God alone is all in all
- When Mary speaks of fear of the Lord in verse 50, something God urges repeatedly in Scripture she is not speaking of submissive fear but reverence toward God in recognizing His sovereignty

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- Having celebrated God for His glory and majesty, she here celebrates Him for His mercy, which extends to all
- Mary's hymn that began in praise for what God has done for her personally has now expanded to what God has done for her people as a whole
- His deep kindness manifests itself in acts of mercy to all those who fear or reverence His name
- It signifies not only the extent of the Divine goodness to all His people, but the continuance of it for ever

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- In these verses the Virgin celebrates both the power and justice of God
- *His arm*, Signified God's mighty power, by which He brings things to pass; Exodus 15:16; Psalm 89:13, 98:1; Isaiah 40:10
- The plagues were wrought by His hand, Exodus 3:20, And the destruction of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea, which was effected by the omnipotence of God, is called the act of His arm, Exodus 15:16
- *has scattered the proud*, The haughty men, who wish to be noticed in partiality to all others God treats them as straw, chaff, and dust and will not be in His sight, as in their own

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- The Jewish scribes and the Pharisees fell from their earthly glory because they haughtily rejected to accept the Lord Jesus
- *in the imagination of their hearts*, While they are forming their proud tasks - laying their plans, and imagining that accomplishment and success are waiting at their right hand, the storm of God's displeasure blows, and they and their plans are scattered and blown together
- *He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly*, As St. Mary spoke prophetically, this saying may allude to the destruction of the kingdom of Satan and his allies, and the final prevalence of the kingdom of Christ

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- The words have both their literal and their spiritual fulfilments
- *rich*, signifies those who are full
- The wealthy who are the "arrogant of mind and heart" are sometimes the enemies of the poor and humble and therefore the enemies of God _Isaiah 2:12-17, 13:11; Wisdom 3:10-11
- St. Mary is speaking of the promise of God's ultimate justice for those who have suffered and for those who have caused the suffering
- She includes a quote from Psalm 107:9, '*For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness*'

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- God blesses the poor, pities the needy, while He neglects those who trust in their earthly riches
- Some apply it to those whom Christ blesses, Matthew 5:3-11, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and expound the rich of those who think they have no need of the righteousness of Christ
- Up to this point the hymn has been one of personal thanks-giving
- Now in verse 54 we find that all the soul of St. Mary is with her people
- Her joy in the “great things “which God has done for her rests on the fact that they are “great things “for Israel also”

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- St. Mary's concluding statement contains echoes of the promises of Isaiah 41:8-9 as well as Psalm 98:3 and Micah 7:20
- St. Mary understands that her condition in bearing the Redeemer-Messiah who is the heir of King David and is a fulfillment of God's promise not to abandon His people
- Her Son will be a fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham
- Not his natural, but his spiritual seed; both among Jews and Gentiles, to the end of the world, Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14

The Virgin's Hymn of Praise

1:46-56



- That blessing will be fulfilled in Christ Jesus, *“and the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’”* Galatian 3:8
- This hymn properly consists of three parts:
- In the first part Mary praises God for what He had done for herself, Luke 1:46-50
- In the second, she praises Him for what He had done, and would do, against the oppressors of His people, Luke 1:51-53
- In the third, she praises Him for what He had done, and would do, for His Church, Luke 1:53-56

The Birth of St. John the Baptist 1:57-58



- The nine months were now complete and St. Mary had stayed about three months with her; but now had left her, to avoid the company which would be at the delivery of her child
- But some think she stayed till that time was over
- St. Luke's pattern of promise and fulfillment continues
- Elizabeth conceiving and giving birth to St. John was the fulfillment of the first part of the angel's promise to Zechariah in 1:13
- The rejoicings of her family were due to the birth of her boy
- Also, they rejoiced because the story of the angel's message and the unusual birth, set men thinking and asking what then would be the destiny of this child

Circumcision of John the Baptist 1:59:66



- Since the time of Abraham, circumcision was the sign of entrance into the covenant with God
- Relatives were invited to be present, as witnesses that the child had been formally incorporated into the covenant
- It was, too, the time when the name will be given to the newly born
- The Jewish tribes and families were kept distinct
- To do this, and to avoid confusion in their genealogical tables, they probably gave only those names which were found among their ancestors

Circumcision of John the Baptist 1:59:66



- The tablets in common use at this time throughout the Roman empire were commonly of wood, covered with a thin coat of wax, on which men wrote with the sharp point
- *they all marveled*, At his giving the same name, not knowing of any communication between them on the subject since Zacharias was deaf
- *his mouth was opened*, He was enabled to speak
- For nine months he had been mute, and it is probable that they supposed that he had been afflicted with a paralytic affection, and that he would not recover

Circumcision of John the Baptist 1:59:66



- With true gratitude Zacharias offered praise to God for the birth of a son, and for his restoration to the blessings of speech
- The word "fear" often denotes 'religious reverence'
- The remarkable circumstances attending the birth of John, and the fact that Zechariah was suddenly restored to speech, convinced them that something great was taking place within the family of Zechariah that could have an impact on the covenant people as a whole
- Their question reflects that they expect more amazing works of God will follow in the future



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- *was filled with the Holy Spirit*, With a spirit of prophecy, as his wife Elisabeth had been before, Luke 1:41
- The song of Zacharias begins to provide an answer to the question asked by his friends and relatives in verse 66: “What kind of child will this be?”
- The song of Zacharias focuses on the Messiah which is to come, the redemption He will bring, and how the son of Zacharias, John, will prepare the way for this Messiah
- This is a song of redemption for Zacharias as well
- Up until this point in the narrative, he has been portrayed in a negative way, as one who doubts the word from God through Gabriel even though he had every reason to believe it



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- He has now had nine months to be alone with his thoughts, and the words almost certainly reflect what he has learned during this period of silence
- *Blessed is the Lord God of Israel*, Zacharias begins with blessing the Lord God of Israel
- It is He who has accomplished the great things Zacharias proclaims
- The primary thing Zacharias praises God for is that *He has visited and redeemed His people*
- Redemption is the grand theme of Scripture, wherein God seeks to buy back for Himself that which has been stolen from Him and sold into slavery and bondage

Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80



- The primary means by which God would accomplish this redemption of Israel was through the Messiah
- Zacharias speaks of the Messiah as a horn of salvation
- In Scripture, horns are frequently a symbol of strength and power, as with the horns of an oxen, Deuteronomy 33:17, and the horns on a helmet, Psalm 75:4-5, 10
- This figure is also used to describe God, 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:2
- Finally, the horn could also be an allusion to the horn that would sprout from David, 1 Samuel 2:1,10; 2 Samuel 22:3



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- God had told them by His prophets, that a mighty salvation should arise to them out of the house of David, by which they should be saved from their enemies
- All these *horn* images fit within the battle-imagery that First Century Israelites would have had for the coming Messiah
- The promises of redemption and deliverance from enemies is a theme found throughout all Scripture, as all the holy prophets testified
- This was the hope and longing since the world began

Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80



- Zacharias returns for a second time in verse 71 to the theme of salvation from our enemies
- This was the great longing of Israel, and the ultimate sign that the Messiah had come
- The Exodus from Egypt was a prototype of kind of deliverance that Israel looked for
- *our enemies*, The Jews understood their temporal enemies, made of flesh and blood, the Romans or Herod
- But Zacharias, speaking by the Spirit of prophecy, it signifies our spiritual enemies



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- All of this was to happen in accordance with the *mercy promised to our fathers*
- This merciful deliverance was promised to all the forefathers of Israel, but Zacharias has a specific promise in mind
- He speaks of the *holy covenant* which he specifies as *the oath which He swore to our father Abraham*
- God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 17:7, 22:16-18, 26:3,24) is primarily about blessing
- The promise of blessing for Abraham, is to give him a land of his own, and to make his name great



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- This was fulfilled in Israelite history, but now that Israel was under Roman occupation, Zacharias and the other Israelites of his day were looking for a renewal of this blessing
- They wanted the land to be restored to them
- But the blessings were not just for Abraham and his descendants in regard to land and honor
- The Abrahamic Covenant goes on to say that Abraham himself (including his descendants) will be a blessing to others
- So much so, that eventually all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham, Genesis 12:3



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- So the Abrahamic Covenant is not just blessings for Abraham and his descendants, but has ramifications for the entire world
- He and his descendants are to be a blessing to every family in history
- All the prophets attest to this as well, as Zacharias stated previously
- Zacharias states that the purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant is not just to be *delivered from the hand of our enemies*, but that, once delivered, the people of Israel *might serve him without fear*
- *Serve, Worship and Obedience*

Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80



- Verse 75 concludes the statements of Zacharias about the Messiah and what He will accomplish
- He will remove enemies, deliver Israel, and bring in a time of peace and prosperity during which Israel will serve *in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life*
- Zacharias is not interested in simple, outward obedience, but obedience which is inner, of the heart, *in holiness and righteousness*
- Such service involves all aspects of life, and becomes a life of worship, Romans 12:1-2



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- John, the *child* of Zacharias, will fulfill Jewish prophecies, and will himself *be called the prophet of the Highest*
- He will become Israel's greatest prophet, Luke 3:1-22, 7:28
- Zechariah's prophetic description of his son is related to the angel's announcement in Luke 1:15-17, when Gabriel also spoke of St. John's role as the Messiah forerunner
- However, Zechariah's prophecy is not only similar of the prophecies of Malachi 3:1 but also of Isaiah 40:3
- In the next few statements, Zacharias reveals two prophetic tasks that his son will accomplish
- First, he will *go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways*



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- The second prophetic task John will accomplish is in giving *knowledge of salvation to His people*
- Zacharias' son was to be Messiah's pioneer in order to give men the true information respecting the Deliverer's work
- Israel was mistaken altogether in its conception of the salvation which they really-needed
- The ministry of the Messiah was preceded by that of another Divine messenger because the very notion of salvation was falsified in Israel, and had to be corrected before salvation could be realized

Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80



- A carnal and malignant loyalty had taken possession of the people and their rulers, and the idea of a political deliverance had been substituted for that of a moral salvation
- There was need, then, of another person, divinely authorized, to remind the people that punishment consisted not in oppression of the Romans, but in Divine condemnation; and that salvation, therefore, was not temporal deliverance, but forgiveness of sins



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- This great deliverance will be based upon *the tender mercy of our God*
- Redemption is a result of God's mercy
- The central point of the hymn was that God was now going to perform the mercy which He promised to the forefathers
- *the Dayspring from on high*, Is God's agent of redemption "the Messiah"
- He will bring the mercy of God when He visits and lights to those who are in the darkness of ignorance and deadly sin
- He will guide those He visits to peace with God



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- Zechariah's last prophecy is an echo of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-6
- *With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us*, Some think that the Greek word answers the Hebrew word, translated the *Branch*, Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 3:8: the seventy interpreters translate it by *anath*, Jeremiah 33:15
- Those texts manifestly relate to Christ, who is called there *the Branch*
- Others think it rather answers the Hebrew word *dwa* we translate it a great *light*
- Others think it should be translated *the East*



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- Be it *the Branch*, or *the Light*, or *Dayspring*, or *the East*, it is certain Christ is meant, who is called *the Sun of righteousness*, Malachi 4:2; Isaiah 60:1-3
- That God might be just in the remission of our sins, He sent Christ to visit us, and in our nature to die for us
- *To guide our feet into the way of peace*, Into that way which will bring us to peace at last, Romans 3:17
- He came to make peace for us, by the blood of His cross; and so by His Spirit and word, lead us into the true way of enjoying spiritual peace here, and eternal peace hereafter



Zacharias' Prophecy 1:67-80

- Verse 80 is a concluding paragraph, indicating the bodily and mental development of the Baptist; and bringing his life up to the period of his public appearance
- His primary place of preparation for ministry was in the desert, a place of solitude
- This was true of many of the great prophets of Israelite history (e.g., Moses), and reminds the reader of the prophets about John that he would be a voice of one crying in the wilderness, Luke 3:4; Isaiah 40:3



Discussion

- To whom did Luke address the book? Where else is this name mentioned?
- How would you define St. John's mission when he reached adulthood? How could the prohibition against drinking strong drink impact his ministry? What unique position does St. John hold in the history of salvation?
- Do you think the angel Gabriel was being a 'bit too strict' when he struck Zacharias dumb for not believing?



Discussion

- List other passages comparing John to Elijah. In what sense was John like Elijah?
- How did St. Mary react to Gabriel? How did Gabriel respond?
- List the evidence that Jesus really was born of a virgin without involvement of a man.
- Describe how Elizabeth greeted St. Mary.



Discussion

- How did the baby John react to St. Mary?
- Explain the contrast in 1:50-53 between the rich and powerful compared to the poor and lowly.
- What name did friends and relatives expect the baby to have? What name did Elizabeth choose? Why?
- What blessing was God about to prove that related to His promise to Abraham?

Discussion



- What role would John have?
- Describe John's early life.
- Summarize evidence from Luke 1 that John would be a special worker for God.