
The Gospel According to Luke

Part One

Luke 1:1–11:54

Michael F. Patella
with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



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Dear Friends,

The Bible is a gift of God to the church, the people gathered around the world throughout the ages in the name of Christ. God uses this sacred writing to continue to speak to us in all times and places.

I encourage you to make it your own by dedicated prayer and study with others and on your own. Little Rock Scripture Study is a ministry of the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock. It provides the tools you need to faithfully understand what you are reading, to appreciate its meaning for you and for our world, and to guide you in a way that will deepen your own ability to respond to God's call.

It is my hope that the Word of God will empower you as Christians to live a life worthy of your call as a child of God.

Sincerely in Christ,

✠ Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock



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Wrap-up lectures are available for each lesson at no charge. The link to these free lectures is LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/LukePartOne.

Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

The Gospel of Luke, Part One

Luke 1:1–11:54

The resource you hold in your hands is divided into six lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book *and* the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet six times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and allow all to participate as they wish.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- The text of the Gospel of Luke, chapters 1:1–11:54, using the New American Bible, Revised Edition as the translation.

- Commentary by Michael F. Patella (which has also been published separately as part of the New Collegeville Bible Commentary series).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting elements of the chapters of Luke being studied. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the audio or video lectures online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is: LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/LukePartOne. Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

Prepare in advance

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.
- Read the assigned material in the printed book for Lesson One (pages 12–18) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session. You may do this assignment by reading a portion over a period of several days (effective and manageable) or by preparing all at once (more challenging).
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 19–21.
- Use the closing prayer when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

Meet with your small group

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer found on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the closing prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It's important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. This lecture provides a common focus for the group and reinforces insights from each lesson. You may view the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

Above all, be aware that the Holy Spirit is moving within and among you.

The Gospel According to Luke

Part One

LESSON ONE

Introduction and Luke 1

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

Prayer

O God of Joy, send your Spirit with a freshness that will help me hear familiar words with open ears and heart. Guide me as I pray and study the Gospel of Luke.

Read the introduction to Luke on pages 12–13 and the Bible text of Luke 1 found in the outside columns of pages 14–18, highlighting what stands out to you.

Read the accompanying commentary to add to your understanding.

Respond to the questions on pages 19–21, Exploring Lesson One.

The closing prayer on page 21 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Luke, the third Gospel in the New Testament canon, has a remarkable place in the study of Sacred Scripture, and this unique position does not stem solely from the fact that it is the only Gospel to have a second volume associated with it, namely, the Acts of the Apostles. Luke engenders a great deal of discussion on the level of New Testament formation, sensitivity to historical data, literary technique, and theological development. This commentary deals with these areas to a greater or lesser degree.

The Gospel message

Each Gospel relates a particular evangelist's theological interpretation of the kerygma, that is, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To do this, the Gospel writer takes events from Jesus' life as passed down from traditions and sources and composes a Gospel account. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, an evangelist uses his composition to present his particular theology of redemption mediated through Christ's life. Details may or may not be accurate, but the truth of the Gospel goes beyond details. The central focus of this study, therefore, is the theological picture that Luke's Gospel paints of Jesus, his earthly ministry, and the early church.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Anyone reading the Gospels notices that there are stories within them that overlap, parallel, and seemingly copy each other. The reason for, and explanation of, this problem have been part of the church since the beginning. Scholars such as Origen and Augustine were among the first to develop theories on the formation of the Gospels. In the modern era, new theories have arisen that have continued the dialogue and discussion on the development of the New Testament.

The brevity of this commentary prevents any lengthy discussion of the sources Luke used in writing his Gospel; this question has an involved and complicated history. For sim-

plicity's sake, our commentary notes the names of commonly held sources as well as the familiar vocabulary of biblical scholarship. Knowing the following terms will be most helpful:

- *Canon*: the official collection of books comprising the Bible.
- *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*: two of the most dependable, extant New Testament manuscripts.
- *Eschaton*: the final times bringing God's eternal plan to fulfillment. The study and interpretation of the eschaton is called eschatology.
- *Evangelist*: the name given to the four Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- *Kerygma*: the proclamation of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ that also describes how salvation comes through participation in the same passion, death, and resurrection.
- *Parallel*: a term used to describe a passage in one Gospel that has a like passage in another Gospel.
- *Q*: a hypothetical, oral source that contains material common to Matthew and Luke but not Mark.
- *Synoptics*: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so named because they share so much of the same narrative line as well as the same material.
- *Textual witness*: early written documents containing all or part of the biblical canon.

Luke the evangelist

Not much is known about the evangelist Luke. The tradition says that he was both a physician and an artist from Syria who completed his Gospel between A.D. 80 and 90. Using Acts 20–28 as a guide, along with Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 1:24, many feel that he may have known Paul. Although it is impossible to prove these claims, the texts that Luke wrote indicate that he was a highly educated person, influential in the early church,

aware of geography (outside Palestine anyway) and history, and very much attuned to the dynamic, direction, and development of Christianity.

Sensitivity to historical data

In addition to being considered a doctor and an artist, many have thought of Luke as a historian, because he gives greater attention to historical details than any other evangelist. For example, passages describing the birth of Jesus and the ministry of John the Baptist contain information on emperors, governors, and kings, and a good deal of it is close to accurate. Much of our information about Pontius Pilate comes from Luke. In large part, his information about the Herodian dynasty matches well with the writings of the ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.

Literary technique

Luke is an economical writer. This evangelist avoids repetitions and superfluous information. He tells a story well, with attention given to rising action, climax, and denouement. His use of Greek is among the finest in the New Testament, and he is well-versed in Greco-Roman literary style. His prose has a nobility that has made this Gospel a favorite of many.

Theological development

Luke views the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ as the great salvific act that has affected the whole cosmos. The evangelist

expresses this theology by presenting Jesus' earthly ministry as a battle between Christ and Satan. Christ's victory over evil comes with his death and resurrection. In Lukan theology, the death on the cross is actually a transfiguration into glory. Furthermore, by virtue of that death, the same transformative glory is promised to humanity, a concept that came to be known as *theosis*.

In this presentation, Luke relies on literary motifs to relay these key concepts. First, there is the motif of the diabolical force. Every good story needs an antagonist, and Luke elevates Satan to this position. Consequently, Christ's miracles and cures are more than kind deeds; they are attacks against the Evil One and his diabolical force. In other words, Christ is in a relentless pursuit of redeeming the world from Satan's clutches.

Second is the idea of the great reversal, a term used to describe the turn in fortune that will befall all between now and the eschaton, that is, the end times: the hungry now will have a banquet, while the rich go hungry; the humble will be exalted, and the exalted will be humbled.

Next, there is the schism motif. Christ will come to all, but some will heed his call to discipleship while others will not.

Finally, there is joy. The word appears more times in the third Gospel than in any other New Testament work. In Lukan theology, for a world redeemed and transfigured by the blood of Christ, there can be no other Christian response than joy.

I: The Prologue

CHAPTER 1

¹Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, ³I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

continue



THE PROLOGUE

Luke 1:1-4

1:1-4 Address to Theophilus

The Gospel opens with a short prologue of a single periodic sentence, a style typical of ancient literature that often sets the tone and purpose of biographies and histories. Josephus and Polybius, for example, show similar introductions. Luke’s use of this style often raises the question of whether he sees himself as writing a biography or a history. Opinions favoring one or the other abound. Perhaps the most we can say is that Luke is simply following the literary convention of the day as he writes his two-volume work. The Gospel, neither a biography nor a history, is an evangelical proclamation. A Gentile audience would expect such a prologue, and Luke is simply supplying it.

The identity of Theophilus is unknown. Possibilities range from his being a benefactor of the community, a church leader, or even a civil authority. Perhaps Theophilus is all three. On the other hand, using the name Theophilus (literally, “Beloved of God”) universalizes the identity and allows every reader to be the addressee.

The prologue provides hints at the formation of the New Testament as well as the development of the early Christian community.

What are the “events that have been fulfilled”? Who are the “eyewitnesses” and “ministers of the word”? Luke describes some of these events and personages within his two-volume work, particularly in the Acts of the Apostles, but how much of it is recoverable is difficult to answer. Of fascinating interest for source critics is Luke’s explanation that he has investigated “everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence.” How many and varied were the initial documents before they saw their final editing at Luke’s hand? Extant papyri, lectionaries, and targums certainly bespeak a Christian movement very much in ferment and development. Luke’s project replaced the diverse gospel fragments floating around the Greco-Roman world. That this Gospel eventually became part of the New Testament canon attests to its nearly universal use over the course of the first two centuries.

THE INFANCY NARRATIVE

Luke 1:5–2:52

Only Matthew and Luke feature stories of the birth of Christ, although from two different perspectives. Luke centers his account on Mary, while Matthew focuses on Joseph. It is obvious that Matthew and Luke were not copying each other in forming their respective

infancy narratives. Nonetheless, they do share some details. Both have an angel relaying the divine plan to the human participants—Joseph in Matthew, Mary in Luke. Both state that this child will be born of the house of David in Bethlehem, that his name will be Jesus, and that these events will occur while Herod the Great is king of Judea (37 B.C.–4 B.C.). Most importantly, despite the many variations in the two different accounts, the two agree on the essential point that Mary is pregnant, and there is no human father.

Luke’s purpose for including the infancy narratives is to situate the whole Gospel within the story of God’s divine plan. Luke also uses references and allusions to the Old Testament, especially prophetic figures. Furthermore, he has passages dealing with John the Baptist precede those of Jesus. This structure prepares the reader for an account that aims to show Jesus as the one long-promised to deliver humankind from sin and death. Luke’s infancy narratives grab the attention of his Gentile audience, catechize them, and graft them to the community of Israel by setting the many references to political events and leaders of the day within the context of the Old Testament. As Simeon proclaims in his canticle (2:29-32), Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, / and glory for [the] people Israel” (2:32). Furthermore, this glory will not come easily, for even Jesus’ mother, Mary, will be pierced by a sword. Thus, the infancy narratives serve as an abbreviated version of the Gospel and Acts. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke recounts how Peter, Paul, and the Gentiles receive the light of revelation, but only after hardship and pain. On the final page of Acts, Paul is living, preaching, and teaching in that most Gentile of cities, Rome.

1:5-25 Announcement of the birth of John the Baptist

Luke provides a broad context for Jesus’ birth, employing both Old Testament prophecies and typologies. Zechariah and Elizabeth are described as being “advanced in years,” and thus past the age of childbearing. The an-

II: The Infancy Narrative

Announcement of the Birth of John

⁵In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years. ⁸Once when he was serving as priest in his division’s turn before God, ⁹according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. ¹⁰Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, ¹¹the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. ¹²Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. ¹³But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. ¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of [the] Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb, ¹⁶and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord.” ¹⁸Then Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹And the angel said to him in reply, “I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. ²⁰But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.”

continue

²¹Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. ²²But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute. ²³Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home. ²⁴After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, ²⁵“So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others.”

Announcement of the Birth of Jesus

²⁶In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And coming to her, he said, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, ³³and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” ³⁵And the angel said to her in reply, “The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. ³⁶And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; ³⁷for nothing will be impossible for God.” ³⁸Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

continue

nouncement of the Baptist’s birth, therefore, is similar to the miraculous birth genre found with Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18:1-15), Manoah and his wife (Judg 13:2-25), and Elkanah and Hannah (1 Sam 1:1-23). In addition, both Zechariah and Elizabeth are of priestly stock, which means that their son John would one day be serving in the temple at Jerusalem. None of the evangelists, however, imply that John the Baptist ever took on this role.

As a priest, Zechariah would take his turn serving in the temple twice a year for a week at a time. This detail no doubt led to the tradition, dating from at least the sixth century, that Ein Karem, with its close proximity to Jerusalem, is the village of John’s birth.

Angels are God’s messengers and agents, and Luke mentions them twenty-five times in the Gospel. More than half of these occurrences fall within the first two chapters. The presence of an angel at the altar of incense (v. 11) underscores God’s role in the events to follow. While in Matthew’s Gospel the angel who appears to Joseph (1:20) remains unnamed, Luke specifies the identity of the heavenly messenger who comes to both Zechariah and Mary. The name Gabriel itself is a combination of two Hebrew terms, *Gabur* (“strong man,” “warrior”), and *El* (“God”), therefore “Warrior of God.” Gabriel has a role in the Old Testament. In the book of Daniel, this angel explains a vision to Daniel (8:17-26) while simultaneously giving Daniel understanding (9:22).

1:26-45 Announcement of the birth of Jesus and Mary’s pregnancy

In Luke’s chronology, Gabriel’s announcement to Zechariah (1:8-20) precedes the one to Mary (1:26-38). Luke is setting the proper sequence of salvation history. If John is the precursor of Jesus in the ministry, he must also come first in the order of birth. In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Gabriel comes to Nazareth to deliver the news to Mary. Of course, Mary is extremely puzzled by this information, and when she expresses her doubt (v. 29), Gabriel encourages her. When

Zechariah doubts, however, he is made mute (vv. 18, 20).

Whatever point Luke is trying to make by this comparison of the two personages, it is not too clear. Perhaps it is another way to indicate the Baptist's subservience to Christ, a point reiterated by the baby's leaping in Elizabeth's womb upon hearing Mary's greeting. Or since the recovery of Zechariah's voice excites wonder in the people (vv. 60-64), Zechariah's muteness reflects Luke's attention to the details of storytelling; it advances the theme and the plot.



The angel **Gabriel** is an Old Testament figure (Deut 8:16; 9:21-27) who is one of the heavenly messengers God uses to reveal special messages to human beings. In Daniel, his presence evokes terror; in this passage his message to Mary is likely interpreted as unsettling, although she accepts it with grace.

1:46-55 The Canticle of Mary

Traditionally called the *Magnificat* in the Western church where it is sung at Evening Prayer, the canticle has all the markings of an early hymn. There are four hymns in these opening narratives, of which this is the first. Grounded in a reference to Abraham and referencing other forebears, this song has a decidedly Jewish-Christian cast. The piece contains the reversal theme found in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, but it is modified. Those who oppress now will be overthrown, and the lowly will be exalted; those who are hungry now will have their fill, but those who are satiated now will be sent away.



The church uses the **Canticle of Mary** at Evening Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. It expresses a perfect model of surrender to God's will for every Christian, an attitude of surrender as the day begins to draw to a close.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, ⁴²cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

The Canticle of Mary

⁴⁶And Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;

⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

⁴⁸For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;

behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

⁴⁹The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.

⁵¹He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.

⁵²He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.

⁵³The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.

⁵⁴He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy,

⁵⁵according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

⁵⁶Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

continue

The Birth of John

⁵⁷When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰but his mother said in reply, “No. He will be called John.” ⁶¹But they answered her, “There is no one among your relatives who has this name.” ⁶²So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. ⁶³He asked for a tablet and wrote, “John is his name,” and all were amazed. ⁶⁴Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. ⁶⁵Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, “What, then, will this child be?” For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.

The Canticle of Zechariah

⁶⁷Then Zechariah his father, filled with the holy Spirit, prophesied, saying:

⁶⁸“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
for he has visited and brought redemption
to his people.

⁶⁹He has raised up a horn for our salvation
within the house of David his servant,
⁷⁰even as he promised through the mouth of
his holy prophets from of old:

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

⁷²to show mercy to our fathers
and to be mindful of his holy covenant

⁷³and of the oath he swore to Abraham our
father,

and to grant us that,

⁷⁴rescued from the hand of enemies,
without fear we might worship him

⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.

continue

⁷⁶And you, child, will be called prophet of
the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare
his ways,

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

⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God
by which the daybreak from on high will
visit us

⁷⁹to shine on those who sit in darkness and
death’s shadow,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

⁸⁰The child grew and became strong in spirit, and
he was in the desert until the day of his manifesta-
tion to Israel.

1:57-80 The birth of John and the Canticle of Zechariah

Zechariah regains his speech upon acknowledging the divinely given name of his son. The hymn Zechariah sings, also known by its Latin name, the *Benedictus*, the Morning Prayer canticle in the Roman Office, clarifies John the Baptist’s role in the sweep of salvation history. He is to “go before the Lord to prepare his ways” (v. 76). The beautiful, poetic images “daybreak from on high will visit us” (v. 78) and “to shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow” (v. 79) have their foundation in Isaiah 8:23–9:2. Luke concludes this section on John the Baptist with a brief note placing John in the desert, where the reader will encounter him again at the beginning of chapter 3. The evangelist now moves on to the birth of Christ.



The church uses the **Canticle of Zechariah** at Morning Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. It expresses God’s awesome power to save all through Jesus Christ and is appropriate to beginning the day.

EXPLORING LESSON ONE

1. What are the four major motifs, or themes, found in the Gospel of Luke, as described in the Introduction to the commentary?

2. How and why did Luke go about writing his Gospel (1:1-4)? How might you be called to spread the Good News?

3. Who might Theophilus have been (1:3)? What are some of the possibilities?

4. According to the angel, what will be John the Baptist's mission to Israel (1:15-17)?

Lesson One

5. Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38 both have annunciation narratives. How do they differ from each other? What do they have in common?

6. When has learning of someone's pregnancy made your heart leap with joy (1:39-45)?

7. In the Canticle of Mary (1:46-55), in what verses do you see the theme identified as the great reversal?

8. a) Why did Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives object to having her son named John (1:57-61)?

b) What triggers Zechariah's renewed ability to speak (1:62-64)?

9. a) In the Canticle of Zechariah (1:67-79), what wonderful things does he foresee occurring through the one who will be “a horn for our salvation” (1:71-75)?

b) What does Zechariah say will be John’s role in God’s plan of salvation (1:76-79)?

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer

“And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

(Luke 1:43)

Where are you present, Lord, in the world where we live? How will we recognize and acknowledge your coming? Teach us to open our eyes and look for you. Give us the wisdom to be in awe of your presence. We pray for the ministries in our parish that help to make your presence known, especially . . .

