

Luke 1:1~25

Luke opens his letter, by declaring that he feels led to give an account of the events and things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and His coming to earth. His letter is written to a man by the name of *Theophilus*. We are not sure exactly who this man is, but referring to him as “*most excellent*,” usually was a reference to someone in high-ranking authority, such as a governor or ruler.

Luke begins his account of the way things happened, by establishing a timeline...

⁵There was *in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea*... Herod was the name of several Roman rulers during the time of Jesus. The one in question here, is, “*Herod the Great*.” A title referring not so much to his greatness, but more to the fact that he was the eldest son of his father Antipater. Now that is not to say that he didn’t do some good things, for he did. One of his greatest achievements (*in the Jews eyes*) was the rebuilding of the Temple. (*Something he did to help keep peace with the Jews.*) His reign lasted some 33 years, ending shortly after Christ was born. This was this Herod that ordered the slaughter of all babies under two years old in Bethlehem. Which was an effort to dispel the rumors of the birth of a promised Messiah, the future King of Israel.

⁵There was *in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia*: and his wife was *of the daughters of Aaron*, and her name was Elisabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

Luke get right to the heart of his point, this Jewish couple, by the name of Zacharias and Elisabeth. Luke mentions several specific details about this couple, number one that he was a priest, and that both of them were of the priestly line. He establishes that they both were righteous, walking in the ways of the Lord. And he mentions the fact they were “*childless*,” as a result of Elisabeth was “*barren*,” meaning that there was no life in her womb. She was physically unable to have children. Luke adds, that these two were well up in their years... “*well stricken in years*...” Luke emphasizes these things, because both of these factors play an important role in declaring the miraculous birth of this child.

⁸And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest’s office before God in the order of his course,⁹According to the custom of the priest’s office, *his lot* was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

Luke tells us, that his “*lot*” was to burn incense on the altar of the Lord...and that he acquired this task by the “*casting of lots*.” Similar to *drawing straws*, or *flipping a coin*, this principle was a way of making decisions in Bible times. One that God ordained to determine God’s Will in the selection of the offices for the priest...Mentioned some 70 times in the O.T., it was often used in the sense of determining God’s Will. For example, the high priest separated the SCAPEGOAT from the one he sacrificed, by casting lots.

In accordance with God’s divine plan, Zacharias was given the distinct honor to burn incense on the altar of the Lord, which was considered as the highest duty among the priesthood, one of the most highly esteemed, highly desired positions. One time was all a priest could perform this duty, and with the great number of priest, very few received the honor.

(Illustration: Illumnia) The altar of incense, measured 18” x 18” and stood about 3’ tall, had four horns on top, and was overlaid with pure gold. And it stood right in front of the “*Vail of the temple*,” that separated the “*Holy place*” from the “*Holy of Holies*,” the place of the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat, the place where God dwelt. The incense that was offered upon this altar, was a specific mixture of 4 different spices, as given by the Lord himself in Exodus 30. And the purpose of the incense offering was to honor

God. It symbolized and expressed the prayers of the Hebrew people, which were considered a pleasant aroma offered to God. God delights in the prayers of His people. That helps in understanding why the people stood without; praying while Zacharias went into the “*Holy place*.” Zacharias was going before the Lord, on behalf of the people, offering up their prayers to Him.

(This position served as a picture of the work Christ as our great intercessor between God & man)

Luke continues his account, by declaring that while he was performing his duty, an angel appears before him, standing on the right side of the incense alter, resulting in Zacharias being overcome with fear. But the angel very quickly comforts him, by declaring that he comes in blessing. The angel declares that his prayers before God did not go unheard, but that God has heard his prayers, and is going to honor those prayers, by blessing Zacharias and his wife, with a son.

It’s important to clarify, that when the angel declares, “*Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard;*” he is not suggesting that Zacharias was before the altar, praying that God would give him a child. That is apparent by the fact that Luke has already made it clear that Elisabeth was “*barren,*” and add to that, they both were as Luke says, “*well stricken in years.*” To further support this, in verse 18, we find that Zacharias doubted what the angel was saying, for the fact he was so old...

¹⁸And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

It’s apparent by the passage, neither he or Elisabeth even thought about the possibility of having children. Not only that, I don’t think God would honor such a selfish prayer, given that Zacharias position was to go before the Lord *on behalf of the people*. “*The prayer*” that the angel is alluding to here, is the prayer that the priest would offer up to God, on behalf of the people, while carrying out the position of burning the incense, which was a prayer for the coming of the promised Messiah. Zacharias duty here was to enter the “*Holy Place*” on behalf of the people, to petition God to make good on His promise. He was seeking redemption for the nation Israel, from the hands of the Romans, and from the rule of King Herod!

So here we see Zacharias interceding for God’s people, pleading to God to send His promised Messiah... And while he is in the midst of offering this prayer up to God, God sends His answer. Zacharias looks up, and to his surprise, standing beside the alter, is an *angel* of God... Seeing the he is overcome with fear, the angel comforts him, and declares that he is come to bring blessing! The angel declares to Zacharias, that he and his wife would have a son, and that he was to name him John.

Read (Vs 15~18) The angel declares to Zacharias, that this will be a very special child, and how that the Lord’s hand will be on him.

The reference that the he would not drink wine or strong drink alluded to a “*Nazirite Vow.*” A Nazirite vow, was a vow made between a man and the Lord for a certain period of time, along with certain commitments. Some of which included fasting from certain things, not cutting the hair (Samson.) But the point of the vow, was to separate oneself solely for the purpose of service to the Lord. Here, that angel declares that from his mothers womb, **this child will be “set apart” for the purpose of God.**

¹⁶And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. ¹⁷And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

No doubt, given the language, Zacharias was fully aware of “*who*” the angel was referring too. Given that Zacharias was a righteous man, he knew the writings of Malachi very well. All of Israel was looking for this “*Elijah*” that was to precede the coming of the Messiah. Remember the last words of Malachi were?

⁵Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:
⁶And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Testimony: Luke → Malachi → Luke...

Given what the angel says in verse 17, it leaves no doubt that this child that Zacharias and his wife were going to have, *was going to be this forerunner*. They were going to be the ones to bring the promised “*Elijah*” into the world, the one that was to come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

(Vs 18) Zacharias responds to the angel’s claims by questioning as to how this could be, given that both he and his wife were way past the child rearing years... To which the angel responds by rebuking Zacharias, and chastising him for doubting the word of God...

(V19~20) ¹⁹And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. ²⁰And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believe not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

The angel identifies himself as Gabriel...and adds that he is one who stands in the verse presence of God, alluding that what he is saying, *is from the very mouth of God!* The way its written, is as though he rebukes Zacharias for questioning what he is saying, simply for the fact that what he has just said were not his words, but words that proceeded out of the mouth of God...it’s like, *how dare you question what saith the Lord!* And he rebukes him, and chastises him for questioning the Lord, by closing his mouth, making it that he would not be able to speak until the child was born...

Gabriel is one of two angels mentioned by name in the scripture...the other is Michael. Michael is always portrayed as the “*warrior*.” Every where Michael is seen in scripture, its not good, he’s not come to bless someone, but to kill. Gabriel on the other hand, is God’s messenger. Each time he comes on the scene, his purpose is always in connection with the announcement of the coming of the promise Messiah. We see him in Daniel, explaining the events of the end times, here we see him announcing the birth of the forerunner, and later own here in this chapter, we see him coming to Mary, foretelling the birth of Christ. It is almost certain, that he was the one who appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him not to leave Mary, that the child she was carrying was of the Lord.

(Vs 21~22) Luke tells us, that while all of this was going on, the people who waited outside the “*Holy place*” for Zacharias to return and pronounce the “*blessing*” upon them, began to get a little concerned, given that he was in there so long. Finally, after some period of prolonged time, he comes out, unable to speak, beckoning with hands only, and the people knew something had happened...

(Vs 23~25) ²³And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. ²⁴And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, ²⁵Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

Luke concludes by saying that he fulfilled his obligations at the temple for the rest of that week, before he went home. The priest served for one week, twice a year. But he goes home, and true to the angel’s word, Elisabeth becomes pregnant. God had done the impossible, opening the barren womb, making the birth of John the Baptist, *a miraculous birth*.

We are told that Elisabeth hid herself from the public view for five months, and really aren't told as to why, other than what she said...

²⁵Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

“Barrenness” was often seen in biblical days, and a divine punishment... By saying that “*the Lord has taken away my reproach among men,*” it sounds like Elisabeth had been persecuted by some of the people concerning the matter. People would talk...no doubt wondering what the couple were hiding, what it was that had caused God to close her womb. But the reality was, that God had closed it, according to His will. He had closed her womb, that He might open it and bless her womb, by bringing forth from her, what Jesus himself would declare to be, the greatest man ever born among women...

What does all this mean?

- 1) **God is Faithful**... He is true to His word. If he has spoken something, we can have complete confidence that it will come to pass. (Malachi 3:1 & 4:5~6), God made a promise to the nation, and here He makes good on that promise.
- 2) **God's Will...will be done**... Nothing or no one can stop Him from carrying out His desires & wishes.
 - Lord's Prayer: Thy kingdom come...(a plea for God's reign in our lives)
 - Thy will be done.....(a plea for God's desires to be done in our lives)
- 3) **God's purpose in sending John**... To turn the hearts of the people to the Lord...
A work that continues to this day...