

# LUKE

DEREK ROBERTS  
PETER SCAER



GOD'S ABIDING WORD

# Luke

## The Way of Salvation

Derek Roberts

Peter Scaer

Charts by Edward Engelbrecht

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[ed.engelbrecht@cph.org](mailto:ed.engelbrecht@cph.org)

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## Getting Started

The Good Samaritan. The Prodigal Son. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector. These stories from Jesus—recorded exclusively by St. Luke—are some of the most beloved in Holy Scripture. But despite the popularity of these passages, many students of Scripture would find it hard to describe what's unique about Luke's account of Jesus' life. They could not tell you what concerns drove Luke to take up his pen and write.

As you begin this study, recognize that this is not a verse-by-verse commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke. Instead, this study will help you hear Luke's unique voice. It will highlight key passages and emphases that distinguish Luke's account from the writings of the other evangelists. Most important, it will provide you with unique insight for understanding the birth, ministry, and passion of your Savior.

To prepare for "Luke's Book Jacket," read Luke 1:1–4.

## One of Us (The Christ Child, Part 1)

In 1995 singer Joan Osborne reached the top of the pop charts with a song about God. Her song asked the intriguing question, “What if God was one of us?” That is to say, *if* God was one of us, what would He be like? Luke’s Gospel answers that question. Its first chapters describe the miraculous birth of God in human flesh.

The *incarnation*—the teaching that God was born in human flesh—is a profound and treasured reality for the church. Across the ages, artists have also recognized the depth, meaning, and beauty of this teaching. They have composed songs, painted pictures, and dramatized the events of Jesus’ birth. Luke’s well-crafted imagery and expression in song has often served as the source for artists’ inspiration. The story begins with questions on the lips of Zechariah and Mary but ends with songs of praise for this wonder: God is one of us!

1. What human longing does the question in the Joan Osborne song represent? How might your congregation answer this popular question for the people in your community?

Luke’s Gospel beautifully provides the theology of Jesus’ birth. The church has so greatly treasured this theology that it loves to sing it in the Divine Service, especially during Communion, in which God serves us the gift of His Son in the flesh. Luke records the church’s poetry concerning the work of God as it flows from the mouths of angelic and human beings, to whom Jesus has been revealed as God’s Salvation. For example, when Jesus is presented in the temple eight days after His birth, Simeon recognizes the holy Child as the Christ and proclaims to God, “for my eyes have seen Your Salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples” (2:30–31). Even the name *Jesus*, originally taken over from the Hebrew name *Joshua*, means “Yahweh is my salvation,” or “the Lord saves.”

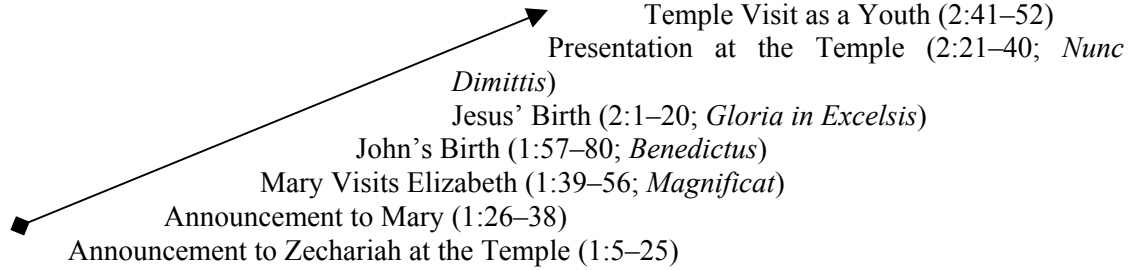
2. Sing or read the words of Simeon from the *Nunc Dimittis* (e.g., *LW*, p. 193). Share examples of how these words describe who the Lord is and how that has affected you personally.

### Life, Lyrics, and the Lord’s First Steps

God’s presence permeates the birth events of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1:5–2:52). Just as God dwelt in the temple and offered mercy through the sacrifices in the Old Testament, so He now dwells as a child in the womb of Mary. This wondrous birth gives both angels and humans a reason to sing. It gives Luke a reason to record the Gospel and the church a reason to live, hope, and repeat the songs again.

The structure of the infancy narratives has been called *step-parallelism*, which can be understood in the following way. First, the birth of John the Baptist is foretold, then the narrative moves to the announcement of Jesus’ birth. John is born and presented in the temple, and then

Jesus is born and presented. Each step of Luke’s literary structure serves a function similar to John the Baptist’s function as a prophet—to prepare the way for Christ.



3. Carefully study the diagram above, outlining the first events in Luke’s Gospel. What emphases or themes do you recognize in these steps?

### Spanning Heaven and Earth

In his book *Christology* (International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research 1989), David Scaer shows that the most important doctrine of the church, upon which all others are laid, is “Christology.” Christology identifies Jesus as both God and man.

Luke’s birth narratives contribute to the church’s understanding that Jesus is the Son of God (1:35) and that He became a man and was born of a virgin, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. The church defends these important realities in her ancient creeds (Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian) and her confessions (e.g., Augsburg Confession III:1–2). The benefits of these realities are also rightly celebrated in the Divine Service, where the two natures of Christ are evident in the Lord’s Supper.

4. How do the birth narratives in Luke reveal Jesus’ divine nature?

5. How do the birth narratives reveal Jesus’ human nature?

### Spanning Old and New

Since Jesus is the Christ, the expected Messiah foretold in the Old Testament, it is no coincidence that Luke’s oracles from God largely parallel Old Testament events. God reveals all things through His Scriptures for the right understanding of His Salvation that was promised from the beginning.

Luke introduces Zechariah and Elizabeth in 1:5, and in doing so turns back the clock and plunges us into Old Testament time. Luke’s language shifts noticeably from the formal Greek of his introduction to *Septuagintal* Greek in the narrative. (The *Septuagint* is a Greek translation of the Old Testament written about 200 years before Christ. See glossary for more information).

6. Read 1:5–7. Summarize the situation of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

7. What two people from the Old Testament are Zechariah and Elizabeth like? See Genesis 16:1a and 17:15–17 to verify your answer.

8. Read the following passages and record other Old Testament parallels to the births of John and Jesus: Genesis 18:1–2, 9–10; Genesis 30:23; Judges 13:3–5; 1 Samuel 1:19–20; 1 Samuel 2:1–10; Ezekiel 3:26–27.

As Jesus' "earthly father," Joseph has an important Old Testament connection: he is "of the house" (in the bloodline) of the greatest Old Testament king—David. The Messiah prophesied of in the Old Testament was to be born from this line. God's favor rested upon King David, and through him God ruled His people on earth. The announcement of Jesus, from the line of David, is an announcement that Jesus is born to be king.

However, Luke will later show us that Jesus is not the kind of king that the world had come to expect. His royalty is not because of His earthly bloodline, wealth, or political power among people. Instead, it is because He is the Son of God, divinely conceived and fully obedient to the will of His Father. Jesus was born in the "city of David, which is called Bethlehem" (2:4) to reveal that God's salvation prophesied of old was fulfilled in this child. (If the location was not significant, perhaps a simple "He was born in Bethlehem," would have sufficed.)

9. Read John 6:35 and Exodus 16:4, 31–35. Reflect on the name *Bethlehem*, which means "house of bread." How is this name significant for the life of Jesus?

Luke hints at the type of king Jesus will be. His entrance into the world was not marked by royal garments but by ordinary swaddling clothes. His parents descended from the great King David but they were not earthly heirs of the throne or citizens of great wealth and status. (Even David started out as a mere shepherd boy, part of the lower class of society).

Jesus as the God-man possesses all things, yet He does not lord it over people. He claimed no earthly throne, wealth, or political power. Rather, He came to accomplish His Father's will and to be a servant to His neighbor. His ultimate accomplishment atones for the sins of every person, to the pleasure of the One who created all people and earthly possessions.

As King of kings, Jesus rules the hearts of all mankind, favoring the low estate of God's servants. His people recognize that it is God who raises them up on earth and ultimately raises them up in the resurrection of the flesh for all eternity. Christ offers exactly what they need to truly live: Himself. Wealth, ancestry, or outward adherence to the Law will not do. The bridge between God and mankind extends to all people who see their sinfulness and whose faith rests in Jesus' blood as the price for their sins.

David was a *type* of Christ (an example foreshadowing a greater fulfillment). He led the people in the region of Israel as their temporary king and shepherd. Jesus is the *antitype*—the fulfillment foretold through examples from the past. He is the everlasting King, the Ruler of all people, and Shepherd for those who believe.

10. To better understand God's use of types to prophesy what Christ would be like, read the following passages and note the types they contain: Genesis 22:7–14; Deuteronomy 18:15–22; and 2 Samuel 7:11c–16.

11. Reflect on Mary's response to the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:38. How does Mary serve as a type of the Christian life?

12. Has this type found fulfillment in you? Why or why not?

### Words to Remember

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David. Luke 1:32

To prepare for "Wonders and Reversals," read Luke 1:39–2:52.

## 2. One of Us

### Law/Gospel Focus

The birth of John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus Christ and the redemption of all creation.

6. Osborne wants to know what God is like, a longing shared by most of humanity. Recognize that the Christmas observances at your congregation are one of the great opportunities for you to address this longing in people. Make your congregation's observance of Christmas something more than cute or sentimental. Recognize that people visit church at Christmastime with this question and longing. Consider how your Christmas celebrations might look different if your advertisements and observances address this key issue: What is God like? The birth narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke provide the historical answer. Jesus Christ, inseparably God and man, was born of a virgin, grew to walk the earth, serve His neighbors, die their eternal death, and be raised triumphant in the flesh forever.

7. Answers will vary. Simeon's words come at the close of the Communion service. In this context they express the truth that you *see* the Lord's salvation in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Through these visible means, Christ gives you His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. You *see* salvation just as surely as Simeon did when he peered into the face of the baby Jesus.

8. Answers will vary but should include the following emphases: announcement/proclamation of God's Word, the centrality of the temple, the important role mothers play in the revelation of salvation, and birth/life as a gift from God.

9. The events are miraculous. Gabriel, an archangel, speaks to Mary (1:26). Mary is a virgin, yet the Son of God is conceived in her womb through her hearing.

10. Jesus is born of a woman in a particular time and place. He is a child with flesh and blood and is held in His mother's arms.

11. Zechariah was a priest. Elizabeth was his wife. They had no children. Elizabeth was barren, and they both were advanced in years. An angel announced the birth of their son, John the Baptist.

12. Abraham and Sarah. They were advanced in years, and Sarah was barren. An angel announced the birth of their son Isaac.

13. Angels also announce the birth of other prominent figures in the Old Testament, such as Isaac and Samson. Elizabeth's reaction to John's conception reminds one of Rachel's words at the birth of Joseph (Genesis 30:23). The Magnificat sung by Mary is strikingly similar to the prayer of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1–10). The simple description of Elizabeth's conception of John recalls the description of Hannah's conception of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:19–20). Zechariah's speechlessness can be paralleled to Ezekiel's speechlessness (Ezekiel 3:26–27). All these parallels point us to the understanding that Jesus is not just a new, prominent figure in the Bible's résumé of great people. He is the actual fulfillment of all that has been revealed prior to His birth. This special kind of prophecy and fulfillment is called "typology." See the glossary for a more detailed explanation of typology.

14. Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:35). Just as manna (bread) came down from heaven to feed the Israelites in the wilderness after the exodus (Exodus 16), so Jesus gives us bread (His body) in the Lord's Supper today.

15. The lamb God promised Abraham for the sacrifice anticipated the greater sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb of God. The faithful service of Moses and the other Old Testament prophets anticipated the greater prophetic ministry of Jesus. God promised David an everlasting succession

of kings, beginning with Solomon. The temporary reigns of Israel's kings anticipated God's everlasting rule through Christ.

16. Mary reverently believed God's Word and obeyed it. In this way she continues to serve as an example of the Christian life.

17. Answers will vary but should express that with the help and comfort of the Holy Spirit, we trust and follow God's Word. Yet our fallen nature and life in a broken world lead us to sin and doubt. Encourage participants by reminding them that Christ dwelt with Mary even though she, too, was a sinner. Even so, Christ abides with us for our comfort and salvation. To express this truth early Christian parents came up with the name *Christopher*, which remains popular today. It means "Christ bearer."

Close with prayer.