

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Outline*

- A. Luke writes to Theophilus (1-4).
  - 1. Why he is writing this story of Jesus (1-3a).
    - a) Many had undertaken to write about the things that had been accomplished among them.
    - b) Those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word had reported these things to Luke.
  - 2. His qualifications to undertake the task (3b).
    - a) He had followed the reports with care.
    - b) He had gone back to the beginning of the story.
  - 3. The nature of the account he is writing (3c-4).
    - a) He planned to write a connected account of these things.
    - b) He did so in order that Theophilus might know about the unshakable evidence that firmly supports the things about which he had been instructed.
- B. He began by telling about the promised birth of John (5-25).
  - 1. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias bringing him this message. (5-12).
    - a) It was in the time of Herod the Great.
    - b) Zacharias was a priest, and his wife whose name was Elizabeth was a daughter of Aaron.
    - c) They were righteous people keeping all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly.
    - d) They were childless elderly people.
    - e) Zacharias was preparing to burn incense in the temple, and the people were outside praying.
    - f) Zacharias became frightened when he saw the angel of the Lord standing by the right side of the altar.
  - 2. The angel told Zacharias about the child (13-17).
    - a) His prayer had been heard; Elizabeth was to bear a son whose name was to be John.
    - b) Rejoicing would occur at his birth, for he was to be dedicated to the Lord from his birth.
    - c) His mission was to turn many to the Lord; he was to go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah.
  - 3. The angel gave Zacharias a sign that this would happen (18-22).
    - a) Zacharias asked how he would know this.

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- b) Gabriel said he would be unable to speak until the child was born.
- c) As he came out of the temple, the people became aware of his having seen a vision.
- 4. Zacharias and Elizabeth returned home to await the coming of the child (23-25).
- C. He told about the angel informing Mary that she was to bear a son and call his name Jesus (26-38).
  - 1. The angel was sent from God to inform Mary (26-29).
    - a) He was sent to Nazareth, a city in Galilee.
    - b) Mary was a virgin betrothed to Joseph of the family of David.
    - c) He told Mary that she was highly favored of the Lord.
    - d) Mary wondered what this might mean.
  - 2. The angel explained to Mary how the Lord would accomplish this.
    - a) Mary had found favor with God and was to conceive and bear a son and call his name JESUS.
    - b) He explained about the child.
      - (1) He was to be great and to be called the Son of the Most High.
      - (2) The Lord God would give him the throne of his father David.
      - (3) He was to reign over the house of Jacob forever; there would be no end to his kingdom.
    - c) He explained how this was to be accomplished.
      - (1) Mary asked how it could be since she did not know a man.
      - (2) The Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High would accomplish it.
      - (3) Because of this miracle of conception, "the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God."
      - (4) Elizabeth also was soon to bear a son for "no word from God shall be void of power."
      - (5) Mary responded: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."
- D. He told about Mary's visit to Elizabeth (39-40).
  - 1. She went in haste to the hill country to a city of Judah and

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- entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth (39-40).
2. Elizabeth responded in inspired words of praise (41-45).
    - a) Her unborn babe leaped, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit (41).
    - b) What she said to Mary (42-45).
      - (1) "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."
      - (2) She asked, "Why is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"
      - (3) She told Mary that her own unborn babe had leaped for joy when Mary greeted her.
      - (4) She praised Mary for believing the promise of the Lord, for He would fulfill it.
  3. Mary's song of praise to God (46-55).
    - a) She praised God for blessing her in her humble estate.
    - b) She spoke of the might and holiness and mercy of God.
    - c) She told how He had put down the proud and exalted the humble.
    - d) She spoke of His help to Israel and His remembrance of His covenant with Abraham.
  4. Mary stayed with Elizabeth three months and then returned to her home (56).
- E. He told about the birth of John the Baptist (57-80).
1. Elizabeth gave birth to a son; her neighbors and relatives rejoiced with her (57-58).
  2. Her child was named at the time of his circumcision (59-63).
    - a) Some wanted him to be called Zacharias after his father, but Elizabeth said, "He shall be called John."
    - b) The relatives protested and appealed to Zacharias. He wrote, "His name is John."
    - c) All marvelled at this, but Zacharias was now able to speak after the period of silence imposed on him by the Lord.
    - d) The people throughout the hill country of Judea heard about the child and said, "What then shall this child be?"
  3. Zacharias prophesied under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (67-79).

- a) What God had done in the house of David (67-75).
  - (1) Redemption, salvation, and mercy had been shown to His people.
  - (2) He had remembered His covenant and promise to Abraham.
- b) What the child—John the Baptist—was to do (76-79).
  - (1) As the prophet of the Most High, he was to go before the face of the Lord to make ready His ways and give knowledge of salvation and remission of sins to the people (76-77).
  - (2) The mercy of God as shown in Christ was to guide those in darkness into the ways of peace (78-79).
- 4. The child grew and became strong in spirit and lived in the deserts until the beginning of his ministry to Israel (80).

*Luke Writes to Theophilus*

*Scripture*

1:1-4 Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, 2 even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, 3 it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed.

*Comments*

*Forasmuch as many.*—Many who had heard the words of Jesus and had seen the things He did had made a written record of them. Others had repeated them orally. In so doing, it is possible that variations in the wording, without change in thought, had taken place. Even the inspired writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—do not always use the same words, but in a very remarkable way they do express the same thoughts. Some of the written accounts were fragmentary. One person told about something he heard Jesus say; another described a miracle he had seen. Perhaps details were lacking in some cases. So we can see why God selected His inspired writers to give an accurate account of the things that Jesus did and taught.

Theophilus had been instructed in them, but Luke wanted him to have the complete and accurate account of these things.

*matters that have been fulfilled among us.*—In the Book of Acts which Luke also wrote to Theophilus, Luke gives his own statement about the content of the first letter. He says he had written about "all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2). He recorded the historical facts after he had carefully researched the whole project.

*they delivered them to us.*—This is not a fictional story. Luke wrote an accurate account of things that were reported to him by those who saw and heard them. Of the four gospel writers, only Matthew and John were apostles who had seen and heard the things they wrote about. Mark could have heard them, but not Luke. That's why he checked every detail of this wonderful story. He wrote it because he was convinced that it was reliable history. More than that, he was certainly inspired by the Holy Spirit, for he had been with the apostle Paul and could easily have received this power through the laying on of the apostle's hands. See Acts 8:14-17; II Tim. 1:6.

*eyewitnesses and ministers.*—Luke rests his case on a solid foundation. The apostles were numbered among the eyewitnesses. See Acts 1:21-22; Heb. 2:3-4; I John 1:1-4. Paul was a witness of the risen Lord, although there is nothing to show that he witnessed the events of Jesus' ministry as the other apostles had done. See I Cor. 9:1. In writing about the resurrection (I Cor. 15:1-58) he did tell about the more than five hundred brethren—most of them were still alive—who had seen the risen Lord.

These eyewitnesses were ministers—servants who rendered faithful obedience to their Lord. See Paul's use of this word in I Cor. 4:1-2. He also calls the apostles stewards of the mysteries of God—that is, His revealed secret in the Word. See also I Tim. 6:20-21; II Tim. 2:1-2.

*from the beginning.*—How far back does this go? If we are to restrict it to the ministry of the apostles, then the beginning may well be the public ministry of Jesus. See Acts 1:21-22. But Luke must have talked with witnesses who had seen and heard the things with which he begins his story—the facts about the birth of John and of Jesus. It is significant that "the beloved physician" wrote the facts

about the birth of Jesus in this reliable record of things that actually happened.

*it seemed good to me also.*—The writer does not give his name. For that matter, neither do the writers of the other three gospels. We are left to external evidence for this information. There is, however, internal evidence that the Gospel According to Luke and The Acts were written by the same person. Both of them are written to Theophilus. See Acts 1:1.

Luke "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14) was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul. References in Acts suggest that he joined Paul at Troas on his second missionary journey and went with him to Philippi. See Acts 16:10. Evidently, he was with Paul on the last part of the third journey which took them to Jerusalem (Acts 20:5 and 21:15). He was with him when he left Caesarea for Rome (Acts 27:1). Two remarkable statements bring the story of Acts to a climax; they also show that the author of the Book was with Paul when he entered Rome. See them in Acts 28:14 and 16.

Luke's association with Paul on these journeys sheds some light on the possible time during which he researched these important matters recorded in his gospel. The time they spent in Jerusalem and the long imprisonment of Paul in Caesarea (Acts 24:27) could have given him time to investigate the sources of the reports recounted by those who had actually seen and heard the things about which he was to write.

We do not know where he was when he wrote the gospel. It could have been at Caesarea or it could have been at Rome while Paul was there in prison. The closing words of Acts suggest that the outcome of Paul's trial was not known when Luke wrote the book. The closing words of the Gospel and the opening words of Acts suggest that Luke wrote them without any great lapse of time between the two. This tends to suggest that both were written at Rome. Luke was faithful to Paul to the last. When others for various reasons left him, Paul wrote to Timothy from Rome saying, "Only Luke is with me" (II Tim. 4:11).

*having traced the course of all things accurately.*—Many had written about some of the things in the life of Jesus. Luke carefully researched all the evidence in connection with the reports of the "eyewitnesses" of these things. What he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is trustworthy.

*from the first.*—King James says, "from the very first," while R. S. V.

says, "for some time past." The Greek term is translated in various ways. It simply marks the starting point from which the action proceeds. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "except one be born anew—or from above—he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). We think of it as the new birth or being born again.

Luke researched this project to the point at which he began the written account, that is, to the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus.

Why didn't Luke begin at the same point from which Matthew presents his account of the life of the Messiah? For one thing, Matthew evidently wrote to the Jews who were proud of their birth records. They kept them with great care and traced their ancestry back to the original twelve tribes of Israel. They were also fond of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Matthew caught the attention of his readers immediately with the genealogical table that shows Jesus' legal right to the throne of David. He traces the royal line of Jesus from David and Abraham through Solomon to Joseph the "husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." He proved his claim that Jesus is Messiah by showing how He fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament.

It is altogether likely that Luke was familiar with Matthew's account of the Gospel of Christ. But Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Gentile. His background was different; he may not have been familiar with these prophecies. Luke evidently thought it best to put the genealogy of Jesus after the account of the birth and baptism of Jesus. He gave Theophilus evidence that Jesus is the Son of God before tracing His line (the blood line) through Nathan the son of David to Adam, the son of God.

But why didn't he go all the way back to the point at which John begins his account of the Word who became flesh and revealed the Father (John 1:1, 18)? John's "in beginning" reached to eternity as man views the past. It helps to understand what he meant when he wrote, "The Word became flesh." This is John's way of presenting the virgin birth of Jesus. Matthew and Luke give the complete details. It was Luke's purpose to write about the things that had been reported by eyewitnesses and which he had carefully examined so that Theophilus could be fully assured that Jesus is Son of God and Son of Man—He really is God and He really is man.

*to write unto thee in order.*—Luke did not give a chronological

account of the life of Jesus or a geographical report of His journeys. He did write a logically connected account of the One whom he calls "Son of God" and "Son of Man." The arrangement of his materials differs in some cases from that of Matthew or Mark. This difference may be traced to the fact that Jesus repeated the things He taught on various occasions. For example, the Sermon on the Mount could have been delivered on many occasions. He could have changed the arrangement of the materials or the wording to suit the occasion. This may account for the differences between the report of Matthew in chapters five, six, and seven of his Gospel and what Luke says in chapter six of his account of the Life of Jesus. Luke's Gospel is an orderly, logically arranged account of the material he selected to give Theophilus something solid on which to base his belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Son of Man.

Luke divides his materials into three sections. The first presents the evidence that shows Jesus to be the Son of God and the Son of Man (1:5-4:13). It begins with the birth narratives and continues through the accounts of Jesus' baptism and temptation. The second and largest section tells about Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing (4:14-21:38). It presents the Galilean ministry (4:14-9:50), the ministry of Jesus on the way to Jerusalem which included the Perea ministry (9:51-19:28), and the closing events of His ministry which occurred in Jerusalem (18:29-21:38). The third section centers around the crucifixion and resurrection (22:1-24:53). It tells about the arrest and trial (22:1-23:32), the crucifixion and burial (23:33-56), and His resurrection, appearances, and ascension (24:1-53).

*most excellent Theophilus.*—Who is Theophilus? His name suggests that he was a Gentile. It means friend of God or one whom God loved. The title "most excellent" suggests official rank; he was a man of some importance in his day. The fact that Luke says that he had been instructed in these matters about which he was writing suggests that he was a Christian, although some are in doubt about this point. When and where Luke first came in contact with him, we have no way of knowing. It is an interesting fact that about one-fourth of the New Testament—The Gospel of Luke and The Acts—was addressed to this man.



## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Promise of the Birth of John*

#### *Scripture*

1:5-25 There was in the days of Herod, king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abijah: and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years.

8 Now it came to pass, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, 9 according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to enter into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the hour of incense. 11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zacharias was troubled when he saw *him*, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: because thy supplication is heard, and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. 14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. 15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God. 17 And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient *to walk* in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared *for him*. 18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. 19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak unto thee, and to bring thee these good tidings. 20 And behold, thou shalt be silent and not able to speake, until the day that these things shall come to pass, because thou believedst not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. 21 And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and they marvelled while he tarried in the temple. 22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: and he continued making signs unto them, and remained dumb. 23 And

it came to pass, when the days of his ministration were fulfilled, he departed unto his house.

24 And after these days Elisabeth his wife conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, 25 Thus hath the Lord done unto me in the days wherein he looked upon *me*, to take away my reproach among men.

### Comments

*in the days of Herod.*—This is Herod the Great, king of Judea. He died shortly after the birth of Jesus. He was an Idumean, that is, a descendant of Esau. Luke also mentions Herod the king in Acts 12:1 without saying that he was the grandson of this one mentioned in Luke 1:5. Theophilus must have been aware of these details and did not need to have them pointed out to him. His full title was Herod Agrippa I. He was the father of King Agrippa before whom Paul made his defense. Another son of Herod the Great was Archelaus who ruled in Judea after the death of his father (Matt. 2:22). Herod the tetrarch, another son of Herod the Great, ruled in Galilee and figured in the trial of Jesus (Lk. 23:7-12). This whole family from the grandfather who slew the babes at the birth of Jesus to the king before whom Paul made his defense seems to be arrayed against Christ and His church.

Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, another son of Herod the Great. She married her uncle, Philip I, but left him to marry another uncle, Herod the tetrarch. John the Baptist was beheaded by this Herod at the request of Salome the daughter of Herodias, because he condemned the marriage.

*the course of Abijah.*—In the days of David the priests were organized into twenty-four groups, the eighth of which was that of Abijah. Each group in turn performed the functions of the priesthood. The arrangement was still in force in the days of Zacharias.

*Zacharias . . . Elizabeth.*—This childless old couple were descendants of Aaron. They were "righteous before God." Luke says that in God's sight they lived a blameless life in accord with all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. He doesn't say that they had never committed a sin, but they were not habitually sinning for they were blameless in the sight of the Lord.

John the Baptist had the good fortune to have parents who set the proper example for him. Every child has the right to have such

a background, but, unfortunately, very few do. Timothy, devoted servant of the Lord that he was, had two generations of faithful ones back of him (II Tim. 1:5). How we should thank the Lord for our godly parents! The return to God's standard for the home is one of the crying needs of this day.

It has been said repeatedly that no one could live up to the requirements of the law, but Luke affirms—and he had researched these reports so that he was sure of his ground—that the parents of John did. God has not required us to do the impossible, and all of us at all times should try to do all things He has told us in His Word to do. See James 1:18-25.

*his lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.*—the altar of incense stood before the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. While the priest was burning the incense, the people were outside praying. Some believe that a priest got to perform this task only once in a lifetime.

*there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord.*—Zacharias was greatly disturbed when he saw the angel standing at the right side of the altar. But the angel spoke reassuringly to him and told him that his prayer had been heard and that Elizabeth would bear a son and that he should name him John.

In the days of the fathers, God spoke on many occasions in many ways as He revealed His will to them. For example, the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon in the days of the Judges (Judges 6:11-12). He does not speak to us in this manner, for at the end of these days of revelation He spoke with finality and completeness and authority in the One who bears the name Son (Heb. 1:1-2). We have that message—a message that is just as up-to-date now as it was when first spoken—in the Bible.

*he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit.*—What is said about John who was to be great in the sight of the Lord and drink no wine or strong drink reminds us of the Nazarite vow. The law of the Nazarite is given in Num. 6:1-8. Samson was a Nazarite; he was to be dedicated to the Lord all the days of his life (Judges 13:7). Hannah promised the Lord that she would give her son, Samuel, to the Lord all the days of his life and that no razor should touch his head (I Sam. 1:11). Apparently, John also conformed to this law, for he dedicated himself to the Lord all the days of his life.

This background sheds light on the meaning of the words about John's being filled with the Holy Spirit from the time of his birth.

Note the difference between this and what is said about Elizabeth's being filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41). She was given power by the Holy Spirit to speak words of praise. The same is true of Zacharias (1:67) and of the apostles and prophets (Acts 2:1-4; II Pet 1:21). But it cannot be said that John was inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak from the time of his birth. His inspiration as a prophet is accounted for in John 3:34. But John was filled with a spirit of dedication and consecration to the Lord from the time of his birth.

Luke says that Barnabas "was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24), but this does not indicate that he was inspired like Elizabeth or Zacharias. This may be the reason he went to Tarsus and found Saul—an inspired apostle—and brought him to Antioch where for a whole year they taught the people. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer, in all probability, implies not miraculous power but consecration to the Lord, for every baptized believer in the Lord is to live a life of dedication from the time of his new birth.

*in the spirit and power of Elijah.*—The prophecy of Elijah's coming is found in Mal. 4:5. When the Jews asked John, "Art thou Elijah?" he said, "I am not" for he was not literally Elijah. See John 1:21. But Jesus indicates that the prophecy of Malachi was fulfilled in John—that is, figuratively, he was Elijah. See Matt. 11:14 and 17:10-13. Luke says that John came in the spirit and power of Elijah and this explains why Jesus said he was Elijah. John was like Elijah in life and mission.

*turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.*—John's mission in preparing a people for the Lord involved turning the interest of the fathers to their children (Deut. 6:6-9) and the children to obey their parents (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-4; Mal. 4:4-6). Many people were turned to the Lord by John's preaching.

*Whereby shall I know this?*—Zacharias is not the only one to ask for evidence on which to base his belief: Gideon did; Thomas did. See Judges 6:36-40 and John 20:24-29. But since Zacharias didn't believe the word of the angel Gabriel, he was given a sign that would not only establish it in his mind but also cause the people to see that something unusual had happened while he was in the temple. John was a man sent from God (John 1:6).

*The Promise of the Birth of Jesus**Scripture*

1:26-38. Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord *is* with thee. 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. 30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. 31 And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33 and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. 34 And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? 35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, Elizabeth thy kinswoman, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that was called barren. 37 For no word from God shall be void of power. 38 And Mary said, Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

*Comments*

*a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph.*—Matthew and Luke clearly indicate that Joseph was not the father of Jesus; he was the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus the Christ (Matt. 1:16). Matthew and Luke present the evidence of the miraculous conception of Our Lord. Matthew, using the words of Isaiah 7:14, says, "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son." But Matthew indicates that after the birth of Jesus, Mary's firstborn son, children were born to Joseph and Mary. See Matt. 1:25. Their names are given in Matt. 13:55-56.

*of the house of David.*—Joseph was the descendant of David and Solomon. The legal right to the throne of David, it seems, belonged to him. As the husband of Mary, these rights would legally belong

to Jesus, Mary's firstborn son. But Mary was also the descendant of David, for Paul says that Jesus "was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3).

*the virgin's name was Mary.*—The purity of Mary is beyond question. The sinlessness of Jesus, however, does not depend on the purity of His mother, but on the fact that He "hath been tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

*thou shalt conceive.*—The conception was a miracle. There is a difference between the birth of John and of Jesus. John was born as a result of a conception that was unusual but not miraculous, for he had a human father as well as a human mother. But the birth of Jesus was the result of the miracle of the Holy Spirit. Both Matthew and Luke explain it and John supports it (John 1:1, 14).

*shalt call his name JESUS.*—Jesus means savior, "for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Immanuel means "God with us." Christ means Anointed and refers to Jesus' office as prophet, priest, and king. Messiah is the Hebrew term for Christ.

*the throne of his father David.*—Israel was constituted a theocracy at Sinai; God was the Supreme Ruler of the holy nation. In the days of Samuel, the people asked to have a king like the nations about them. Samuel assumed that they were rejecting him as their judge, but God told him that actually they were rejecting Him as king. See I Sam. 8:4-8. Later, God told Samuel to anoint David to be king over His people (I Sam. 16:1). Then God promised David that one of his descendants would reign on his throne forever. See Psa. 89:3-4. In the course of events, Solomon succeeded his father. In I Kings 2:12 it is stated that "Solomon sat upon the throne of his father David." But in I Chron. 29:23 which describes the same thing, it is stated that "Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord instead of David his father." David's throne, then, was actually the throne of the Lord. Therefore when the angel said to Mary that the Lord God would give Jesus the throne of His father David, he was referring to the throne of God. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared that God's promise to David had been fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the throne of God. See Acts 2:30-31.

His kingdom is spiritual. He refused to allow the people to make Him king after the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:14-15). He said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

*of his kingdom there shall be no end.*—No other king will succeed Him. Paul says, "Then cometh the end when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God" (I Cor. 15:24). He did not contradict the angel, for he was speaking of the end of the earthly phase of the kingdom. See Peter's reference to "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:11).

*I know not a man.*—Both Luke and Matthew attest the belief in the purity of Mary.

*the power of the Most High.*—The miracle of conception was accomplished by divine power exercised through the Holy Spirit.

The fact that the Holy Spirit is often spoken of as the One through whom God's power is exercised does not suggest that the Spirit is merely the power of God. All the attributes of deity and of personality that are assigned to the Father and to the Son by the Scriptures, are also assigned to the Holy Spirit.

*the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God.*—A clear reference to the deity of Jesus. Before His coming into the world, He is called the Word (John 1:1). Son of God is applied to Him (1) at the time of His birth when He became Son of God; (2) at the time of His baptism and transfiguration when He was acknowledged by the Father as His Son (Lk 3:22; 9:35); and (3) at the time of His resurrection when God had proved conclusively that He is the Son of God (Acts 13:33). See also Rom 1:3-4.

*For no word of God shall be void of power.*—God demonstrated that His word about the birth and resurrection of Jesus was true. This gives us reason to trust His promises about the victory of Christ and His church (II Tim. 1:12; Rev. 11:15).

### *Mary Visited Elizabeth*

#### *Scripture*

1:39-56 And Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah; 40 and entered into the house of Zacharias and saluted Elisabeth. 41 And it came to pass, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit; 42 and she lifted up her voice with a loud cry, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. 43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come unto me? 44 For behold, when the voice of thy salutation came into mine ears, the

babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfilment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord. 46 And Mary said,

- My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
 47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.  
 48 For he hath looked upon the low estate of his handmaid:  
 For behold, from hence forth all generation shall call me  
 blessed.  
 49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;  
 And holy is his name.  
 50 And his mercy is unto generations and generations  
 On them that fear him.  
 51 He hath showed strength with his arm;  
 He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart.  
 52 He hath put down princes from *their* thrones,  
 And hath exalted them of low degree.  
 53 The hungry he hath filled with good things;  
 And the rich he hath sent empty away  
 54 He hath given help to Israel his servant,  
 That he might remember mercy  
 55 (As he spake unto our fathers)  
 Toward Abraham and his seed for ever.  
 56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned  
 unto her house.

#### Comments

*into the hill country with haste.*—The angel had informed Mary that Elizabeth was to give birth to a son. Mary went in haste to visit her relative and remained with her for about three months. The home of Zacharias and Elizabeth was in a city of Judah in the hilly country south of Jerusalem. The name of the city is not given.

Upon her return to Nazareth, Joseph learned that she was "with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18).

*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.*—What she said was not an emotional outpouring of words, but words of truth spoken under the control of the Holy Spirit.

*Blessed art thou among women.*—Elizabeth and Zacharias knew that the child to be born to them would go before the Lord who would give remission of sins to His people. Elizabeth also knew that the child to be born to Mary would fulfill God's promise to redeem



man from the bondage to sin. She could properly call Mary "blessed" because she was to be the mother of Our Lord. In no other way is it suggested that she is to be elevated above other godly women. It is to her credit and that of others also that she was found in the company of believers after the resurrection of the Lord (Acts 1:14). *And Mary said.*—The words of Mary—beautiful poetic words full of meaning to all believers in Christ—are the expression of the humble handmaid of the Lord. They exalt God Our Savior for His mercy and power and His remembrance of His promise to Abraham. There is no hint here that Mary was anything more than the pure, humble servant of the Lord.

*God my Savior.*—A reference to God, not Jesus. See also I Tim, 1:1; 2:3; Titus 3:4 which also refer to God as Savior. But see Titus 2:13 which, in all probability, refers to Jesus Christ as "the great God and Our Savior."

*all generations shall call me blessed.*—We can join with the saints of all the ages to thank God that Mary was able to serve the Lord as she did. And since Christ came, having been "born of woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law" (Gal 4:4), we may also join them who obey Him that they may have the rights of sonship bestowed on them by the heavenly Father.

*Toward Abraham.*—See Paul's explanation of the gospel promise to Abraham which was fulfilled through Christ (Gal. 3:8, 16, 29). Mary's understanding of this promise stands in bold contrast to that of many Jews who felt that being the literal descendants of Abraham was a guarantee of their right to enter the heavenly kingdom. See Matt. 3:9; 8:11-12; and John 8:31-46.

### *Elizabeth Gives Birth to a Son*

#### *Scripture*

1:57-80 Now Elizabeth's time was fulfilled that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. 58 And her neighbors and her kinsfolk heard that the Lord had magnified his mercy towards her; and they rejoiced with her. 59 And it came to pass on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. 60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. 61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called

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by this name. 62 And they made signs to his father, what he would have him called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. 64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue *loosed*, and he spake, blessing God. 65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. 66 And all that heard them laid them up in their heart, saying, What then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him.

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,

- 68 Blessed *be* the Lord, the God of Israel;  
For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people,  
69 And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us  
In the house of his servant David  
70 (As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have  
been from of old),  
71 Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all that  
hate us;  
72 To show mercy towards our fathers,  
And to remember his holy covenant;  
73 The oath which he sware unto Abraham our father,  
74 To grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of  
our enemies  
Should serve him without fear,  
75 In holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
76 Yea and thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most  
High:  
For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to make ready his  
ways;  
77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people  
In the remission of their sins,  
78 Because of the tender mercy of our God,  
Whereby the dayspring from on high shall visit us,  
79 To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of  
death;  
To guide our feet into the way of peace.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

*Comments*

*the Lord had magnified his mercy.*—Zacharias and Elizabeth had been childless for a long time. The Lord showed mercy on them, and Elizabeth brought forth a son as the angel promised Zacharias. These godly parents considered it a privilege to rear a son to serve the Lord. Many parents feel the same way about it today. A revival of that wholesome attitude toward family life is needed in many instances today.

The angel of the Lord had instructed Zacharias to call him John. The name means "the Lord is gracious." It was to remind all who knew the facts about his birth that God's favor was soon to be made known through Christ, the One of whom John was to be the forerunner.

All who heard about these unusual things were filled with a sense of reverence for God. It was only natural that they should ask, "What then shall this child be?"

*prophesied.*—Zacharias was a devout man; but the expression "filled with the Spirit" refers to the fact that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit as he spoke about the mission of John and of Jesus.

He praised God who had provided redemption for His people. Redemption means release, and the New Testament it usually means release from the slavery of sin. Christ redeemed His people by His blood (Eph 1:7). He is also the "horn of our salvation," for it is by His power that salvation is brought to all who believe, whether Jew or Greek (Rom. 1:16). This horn of salvation was raised up in the house of God's servant David. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes this truth: Christ was born of the seed of David. See Psa. 89:3-4; Jer. 23:5; Rom. 1:3-4.

*prophet of the Most High.*—John was the last of the prophets who prophesied before Christ. Jesus, speaking about John, said that he was more than a prophet. He had the privilege of presenting Messiah to Israel. They had been waiting for Him so long (Lk 7:26; I Pet. 1:10-12). His coming was like the dawning of the new day. It brought light and life to those who sat in darkness—the darkness of sin and death.

*the child grew.*—The reference suggests the normal growth and development of the child. Nothing is known about his life or his parents during the period between his birth and his appearance to Israel. It is natural to suppose that the parents who were old when

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he was born had died before he began his ministry. Perhaps his seclusion made his appearance in the wilderness as a prophet all the more startling to Israel.

### *Summary*

Luke was ready to write to Theophilus. His papyrus roll was on his writing table. Before him were the records of his investigation into the thrilling story of Jesus the Son of God and the Son of Man. Perhaps Mark's Gospel and maybe Matthew's too were there before him. He was eager to write the whole story, for he was convinced that it would give Theophilus the confidence he needed in these things in which he had already been instructed.

As he thought of all the things that might be written and looked at the one papyrus roll, he knew that it would never hold all that he wanted to say. He would have to write a second letter to Theophilus, but just now he would tell about all the things that Jesus began both to do and to teach and bring the story to a climax with the account of His crucifixion, the evidence of His resurrection, and the story of His ascension that took place just after He had told His disciples to preach the gospel to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. In the second letter he would tell how the apostles preached the gospel of Christ in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and finally how Paul and his companions of whom Luke was one brought the gospel to Rome.

His first problem was to determine the point at which to begin. He probably knew how Mark had plunged into the story of the ministry of Jesus without telling about the birth of John or the birth and childhood of Jesus. He may have known that Matthew began with the birth record of Jesus Christ the son of David and the son of Abraham. But as he thought of Theophilus, who like himself was a Greek, he decided to begin at the first of the story and tell about the birth of John and the birth of Jesus who, as he had become thoroughly convinced, was the Son of God and the Son of Man.

Theophilus would need to be fully assured that the birth of Jesus was the result of a miraculous conception. He made his point clear with the presentation of the facts about which he had made careful investigation. And to make this even clearer, he told about the birth of John. John's parents were a childless elderly couple, but God showed His mercy toward them and sent the angel to tell

## CHAPTER ONE

Zacharias that Elizabeth was to bear a son and that he was to name him John. But Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. The angel told her that although she knew no man, she would conceive and bear a Son and name Him Jesus. The power of God exercised by the Holy Spirit would accomplish this. For that reason, the child would be called the Son of God.

Luke wanted Theophilus to be able to read the words of praise spoken by Mary, the humble servant of the Lord, as she thought of God's mercy toward her and toward His people. Her words magnified the Lord. He also told about the words spoken by Zacharias the father of John. He praised God for His tender mercy and for the light that was to shine upon those who sat in darkness waiting for the new day.

### *Questions*

1. Why did Luke undertake the task of writing the Life of Christ?
2. How did he prepare for the task?
3. What was his aim in writing?
4. Who was Theophilus?
5. At what point did he begin his record of the Life of Christ?
6. Who was Herod?
7. What did Luke say about Zacharias and Elizabeth?
8. What was Zacharias doing when the angel appeared to him?
9. What did the angel say about the mission of John?
10. What is meant by "the spirit and power of Elijah"?
11. What effect would John's message have on the fathers?
12. What happened to Zacharias as a sign by which he knew that the promise of the angel would be fulfilled?
13. What evidence does Luke present to show his conviction that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary as the result of a miraculous conception?
14. What was Mary's relation, at the time of the angel's announcement, to Joseph?
15. Why, when, and how did Jesus receive the throne of David?
16. What was said about the duration of His kingdom?
17. Why was Jesus called the Son of God?
18. Where did Zacharias and Elizabeth live?
19. What did Luke mean when he said that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit?
20. Why was Mary to be called blessed among women?

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21. What did Luke say about Mary's response to the announcement of the angel?
22. What promise made to Abraham was fulfilled by the coming of Jesus?
23. How does Luke carefully distinguish between the facts about the birth of John and the facts about the birth of Jesus?
24. What did the people say when they learned about the birth of John?
25. How is their question answered by the words spoken by Zacharias as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit?
26. What is known about John from the time of his birth to the time of his appearing as a prophet to Israel?