



“Blessed Art Thou Among Women”

Luke 1-4:13

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Adult Religion Class

New Testament, Lesson 11

20 November 2017

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Introduction

Author and Date

Luke is the longest of the four gospels, and the book called Luke is only the first half of his work—Acts is the second half. We break them apart because of how the New Testament was put together but Luke surely intended them to be read together.

The final version of Luke should be dated after Mark wrote his work, but internal evidence suggests it may have been at least started while he and Paul were at Caesarea in 57-58 (Acts 23-26) and continued when they were in Rome together (Acts 28). Of course, we don't know from the writing itself who wrote it—like the other gospels, this gospel is written anonymously. However, the evidence for Luke himself writing it is perhaps the strongest of any of the four gospels because of the tie to Acts and the first-person accounts there.

Luke the NT character was a physician (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:11; and Muratorian Canon) and Paul's missionary companion, which is indicated during the “we” chapters in Acts where the pronouns in the story change from third to first person (Acts 16, 20-21, 27-28). Unlike modern society, being a physician was considered a lowly position in New Testament society; most physicians were slaves or former slaves. It is possible that Luke was thus a former slave, probably freed at thirty years of age following the Roman custom, and someone of good heart whom Paul would have been comfortable making his friend and companion. Luke's services may have also been valuable to Paul as he traveled and labored under the difficulties of the road and his many persecutions and challenging circumstances.

Luke was a gifted storyteller. His Greek is excellent, using literary dictions and rhetorical conventions. He quotes the Torah, tells striking vignettes and parables, and provides a complex and sophisticated account. His characters speak profoundly and poetically, almost like a great Greek stage performance. Because he drew heavily on Mark and another unknown source (called “Q” by scholars), there are almost a dozen doublets in Luke, where he offers the same information twice. This demonstrates his concern to be true to his sources and not cut our parts that might have been redundant.

One special type of doublet in Luke are pairs of stories where one features a man and the other a woman:

1:5-20	1:26-38	11:32	11:31
1:46-55	1:67-79	13:18-19	13:20-21
2:25-35	2:36-38	14:1-6	13:10-17
4:27	4:25-26	15:3-7	15:8-10
4:33-37	4:38-39	17:34	17:35
7:1-10	7:11-16	18:9-14	18:2-8
5:29-32	7:36-50	22:58-59	22:56-57
6:12-16	8:1-3	23:26	23:27
8:41-42, 49-56	8:43-48	23:53	23:55
11:5-8	18:1-8	24:12	24:1-11 ¹

Audience

Luke wrote to a Gentile audience, as demonstrated by many aspects of his work. For example, his genealogy goes back to Adam (not just Abraham as Matthew did); he excluded Jewish traditions and names/titles that are found in

¹ List from Smith, *Search, Ponder, and Pray*, 45, with one correction (18:2-8 is listed as 18:-8 in hers).

Mark in the same stories; and he used “Judea” for the larger area of Palestine, not just the area around Jerusalem as a Jew would do.

Specifically, Luke addressed his writings to a person named Theophilus, which means ‘friend of God’ in Greek (1:1-4; Acts 1:1; JST Luke 3:13). Some have supposed, based on the name, that it was a title for some of Jesus’ followers, but he seems to be a real person, based on the language Luke uses.

Themes

The temple plays an important role in Luke. The record starts in the temple with Zacharias (1:5-22); Jesus’ life starts in the temple with his dedication and the blessings of witnesses there (2:22-38). Jesus comes to the temple at twelve to teach and enlighten (2:42-48). At the conclusion of the temptations, Jesus ends up at the temple (4:9-12), whereas in Matthew he ends on a high mountain (4:8-10). And Luke ends his first book in the temple, with the disciples daily worshipping there (24:53), and essentially begins the second book (Acts) there with the Day of Pentecost account.

Related to that, Jerusalem is at the heart of Luke’s story. The Transfiguration prepares them for the final trip to Jerusalem, where it is announced that he “set his face” to go there (9:51). The journey takes several chapters, but Luke consistently reminds us of that destination (13:22, 33-34; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28). Unlike Matthew, the resurrection appearances in Luke 24 are in Jerusalem, and the disciples are instructed to stay there (24:49). (The movement in Acts is the opposite—away from Jerusalem and toward Rome, though each of Paul’s journeys circle back to Jerusalem at the end.)

For Luke, Jesus is the universal Savior. In fact, except for John 4:42, only Luke uses the term “Savior” in all four gospels. Luke also uniquely refers to Jesus as “Lord” before his resurrection. In Luke’s story, Jesus is concerned for the poor and outcast. He sends for the Seventy (10:1-12), representative of all nations (compare Genesis 10 which has seventy nations coming from Noah and his sons) and takes the gospel to the whole world (Acts 1:8).

It is the Spirit that demonstrates God’s will in Luke’s writings; the early characters are especially filled with the Holy Ghost—John the Baptist (1:15,35); Elizabeth (1:41); Zacharias (1:67); Simeon (2:25-27); Jesus (3:16, 22).

More than the other three, Luke tells the stories of women—Mary (1:26-38), Elizabeth (1:39-45), Anna (2:36-38), and faithful female disciples who supported Jesus (8:1-3). Mary, sister of Martha is praised in Luke (10:42), and faithful women stayed with him while he hung on the cross (23:49) and were the first to see the resurrected Jesus (23:55-56; 24:1-10).

Outline of Luke

An overall outline for the book of Luke is as follows:

- **Prologue (1:1-4)**
- **Infancy and Boyhood of Jesus (1:5 – 2:52)**
- **Preparation for Public Ministry (3:1 – 4:13)**
- Ministry in Galilee (4:14 – 9:50)
- Journey to Jerusalem (9:51 – 19:27)
- Ministry in Jerusalem (19:28 – 21:38)
- Last Supper, Passion, Death, and Burial (22:1 – 23:56)
- Resurrection Appearances (24:1-53)

This lesson covers the first three sections entirely.

Note: In each lesson on the gospels, where there are overlapping or parallel texts, those will be noted in the heading. References in bold are the preferred reading(s) and will be the principal section of analysis, though some unique points in the current gospel will be noted, as well as helpful JST changes.²

Prologue (1:1-4)

By examining clues in the two books, we can conclude that Luke likely wrote his gospel during Paul's Caesarean imprisonment (58-60 A.D.), or at least gathered intelligence and personal insight. During this time, he was in Palestine and thus able to travel about and interview many who were "witnesses, and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2). When he wrote, he probably also had Mark's and perhaps Matthew's works to examine, as in many passages he carefully follows their texts, though with his goal in mind to add to the existing witnesses.

Luke's prologue demonstrates his goal to be a classical Greek history writer. He takes the accounts of others, thoroughly researches all the issues, and sets forth a new account that he has carefully arranged and prepared. His account will tell the story from the very beginning and will be as comprehensive as possible. His written testimony is to support and supplement the many oral testimonies being born of Jesus in the words of his supporters.³

1:1 *JST*

Luke 1:1 KJV	JST
Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,	As I am a messenger of Jesus Christ, and knowing that many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

In the JST, it is clear that Luke, too, is an ordained minister of Jesus Christ. He is not just Paul's companion, but a priesthood-commissioned bearer of the good news.

1:1 **many have taken in hand.** We don't know which previous accounts Luke is referring to but it could have included Mark and Matthew as well as other accounts that may not be extant today (such a "Q" or oral remembrances). It has been noted that Luke's first two chapters differ in style and tone from the rest of the book and Acts. Given that all the material is unique, it is possible that Luke was copying from a source unknown today but which included experiences by Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Mary.⁴ He could also have used such a source and restructured according to Greek rhetorical patterns, such as the speeches of many of the early characters.

1:1 **to set forth in order a declaration.** This does not mean that Luke's priority is chronology, though he seems to try and do that more than Matthew. Rather, he is intending to put together and arrange (the meaning of *anatassomai*, translated "set forth in order") a narration (Greek *diēgēsis*, translated "declaration") of the events that are "surely believed among us" of Jesus' life.

1:2 **which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word.** Luke refers to "they" at the beginning of the verse and "us" after that, then this phrase. Reading the KJV, one might wonder which group are the eyewitnesses, but from the context and the Greek, it is the "they" group. "just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (NRSV).

1:3 **having had perfect understanding of all things.** Not that Luke was an eyewitness, but that he has been a careful investigator and researcher. "... because I have examined everything carefully."⁵

² Not all JST changes are noted, only those of textual or doctrinal interest. Interested readers are encouraged to see Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* or the manuscripts themselves on the Joseph Smith Papers website (josephsmithpapers.org).

³ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 92.

⁴ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 86-87.

⁵ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 91.

1:3 **write unto thee in order**. Though the English word is the same as v. 1, the Greek is not. Here it is *kathexēs*, meaning one after the other. “...write it down in an orderly sequence for you” (NIV). As mentioned, Luke doesn’t present a strictly chronological story but does present it in an orderly sequence, designed to clearly tell Jesus’ story and message.

1:3 **Theophilus**. Luke addressed both this book and Acts to Theophilus (meaning, “friend of God”). This was probably a real person as that was a fairly common name in the period, and Luke calls him “most excellent,” a title applied to Roman equestrians (‘knights’). It seems likely that he was either a recent convert or an investigator, as Luke wanted to assure him of the truthfulness of the things he had been taught.⁶

1:4 **those things**. The Greek word translated “things” is *logōs*, meaning ‘words.’ Luke is writing to Theophilus to confirm the words (see 1:2) that he had been taught about Jesus.

Infancy and Boyhood (1:5 – 2:52)

Everything in the first two chapters of Luke is unique. He recounts seven episodes related to Jesus’ birth that perfectly capture the early life and preparation of Jesus. He must have learned this from Mary personally as the story speaks intimately of her experience, while Matthew’s work is more from the perspective of Joseph.

The seven episodes are:

- Two angelic visitations with pronouncements of births (John and Jesus);
- The visit of Mary to Elisabeth (and pronouncements);
- Two birth narratives (John and Jesus);
- Presentation in the temple (and pronouncements);
- Jesus in the temple at age twelve.

Within these chapters also are several hymns, with four major ones named according to the Catholic (Latin) tradition:

- The Magnificat (Mary; 1:46-55)
- The Benedictus (Zacharias; 1:68-79)
- The Gloria in Excelsis (angels; 2:14)
- The Nunc Dimittis (Simeon; 2:29-32)

It is unlikely that the characters in the events actually said these words: the speeches are very formulaic and created to meet a specific need. I liken it to when characters break out in song in a modern musical—people don’t typically start singing spontaneously, and certainly don’t have orchestral accompaniment at the ready. But in the musical, the song fills multiple needs—to move the story along, to summarize or focus on certain events, to convey emotions or activities in a fun, engaging way, and more. So in Luke’s gospel, these four songs (and other elements) serve multiple purposes, such as representing types and models from the OT, putting words of high praise in character’s mouths, and showing the influence of the divine in all that is happening to them. Luke may not have even written them: they may have been known songs in Christian circles when he composed his gospel, and he simply worked them into the infancy narrative.⁷

Gabriel visits Zacharias in the Temple – Luke 1:5-25

The Lord is coming to commence his work in those days by calling everyone to repentance—but through the quiet birth of a small baby to an unknown and unexpected couple. We see many OT parallels to the story of Zacharias

⁶ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 91.

⁷ So Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 346-355.

and Elisabeth: Abraham and Sarah, Elkanah and Hannah, and Jacob and Rachel. The similarities are quite intentional on Luke's part—he draws our attention to these other stories by using their words.

1:5 **a certain priest named Zacharias.** Zacharias' introduction parallels the story of Elkanah and Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1), who cannot have a baby though they sought for it and have a messenger (Eli) come tell them that Hannah will have a son (1 Samuel 1:3, 17).

1:5 **the course of Abia.** Zacharias was of the course of Abia (or Abijah, as it is known in the Old Testament; 1 Chronicles 24:10), the eighth of twenty-four priestly courses. His family was put into that course after the return from the Babylonian captivity; most of the members of the courses were lost in the conquests of Assyria and Babylon, so leaders took who was left of the tribe of Levi and divided them up into the various courses, essentially reconstituting them. Because he was in the eighth course, it was Zacharias' turn to officiate in the temple during the first weeks of spring and fall; this event was probably in early fall (October?), the year 7 or 6 B.C.

1:6 **they were both righteous . . . blameless.** One of the first things someone from the ancient world would have thought about a couple who could never have children was that the Lord had somehow cursed them for wickedness. Luke wants to be clear up front that these two people were not cursed by God but blessed by Him for their righteousness—the blessing just took some patience!

1:7 **Elisabeth was barren.** This normally means she could not have children but could also mean that she had no sons (she may have had daughters and still been 'barren'). There is a strong parallel with Sarah, Abraham's wife, who was both barren and past the years of child-bearing (Genesis 17:17; 18:11). Because of God's promises of fruitfulness (Genesis 17:6; Psalm 127:3; Leviticus 26:9), being barren was seen as a disgrace, which Elisabeth had felt all her life and now could not change, since she was past the time of having children.

1:8 **while he executed the priest's office.** Twice a year Zacharias and others of his course (or "**priesthood**" as the JST calls it in this verse) went up to Jerusalem and took their turn ministering in the temple. Some have mistakenly thought that Zacharias was the high priest and that this event might be associated with the Day of Atonement where the high priest enters the Holy of Holies, but that is not the case. Zacharias is a priest, a descendent of Aaron, doing his duty as he had been doing for decades.

1:9 **his lot was to burn incense.** Zacharias' experience in the temple is described in wonderful, first-person detail. The daily service at the temple consisted of a morning and afternoon/evening sacrifice (Exodus 30:7-9); this was the afternoon service because the people were all praying outside (v. 10).⁸ The service started well before sunrise each day in the Chamber of Hewn (or Polished) Stones (the same place where the Sanhedrin met) with all the priests, having just immersed themselves to be ritually clean, assembling to receive their assignments. Lots were cast to determine who would participate in the four divisions of labor. The method of casting lots was that all priests stood in a circle, then held up one, two, or more fingers. Then the person in charge that day would announce a random number, such as 56 or 70, then start at a certain priest, removing his hat to mark the beginning, and counting the fingers as he went. When he got to the announced number, that priest was chosen, or was the first of those chosen (if it was a group task). This repeated until all roles were selected, as described below:

- The first lot was several priests to cleanse the altar in the courtyard and prepare it for the burnt offering.
- The second fell on one priest and twelve next to him, to begin the sacrifice on the altar, and to prepare the lampstand and the altar of incense inside the Holy Place. When the temple gates were opened, they slew the lamb and sprinkled the blood on the altar. At the same time, they cleaned the lampstand and incense altar in the Holy Place, stocked the needed supplies, and relit the lamps.
- The third lot determined who would enter the Holy Place to light the incense. A person could only receive this honor once in a lifetime. He chose two other priests who entered ahead of him and lay the incense and hot coals on the altar, but the chosen priest was then alone in the temple. Facing the veil leading into the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies), the lampstand was on his left, the showbread table on his right, and the incense altar

⁸ Kent Brown argues that it was perhaps the afternoon service on Friday, just before the start of the Sabbath, which accounts for the crowds; see S. Kent Brown, "Zacharias and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary," in Holzapfel and Wayment, *The Life and Teachings*, 1:94-95.

before him just in front of the veil. Outside the priests and Levites (and others in the courtyard) were praying with upraised hands and bowed eyes. He lit the incense on the altar, analogous to the prayers outside. When the priest came out from the temple, he would offer a blessing upon the crowd.

- The priest who received the fourth lot stepped to the altar and burned the parts of the lamb prepared earlier by those of the second lot.
- Finally, all priests involved that day would stand in a semicircle on the steps leading into the temple and pray, one being voice and the others repeating his words. This was followed by temple music with trumpet blasts, cymbals, and a choir of Levites and young priests' sons singing psalms, accompanied by musical instruments.

Zacharias received the third lot this day, his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to worship before the Most Holy Place. As he was thus engaged, Gabriel appeared and delivered his message. When he came out (which took much longer than usual, v. 21), he could not speak and finish his assignment (v. 22). We should not be too hard on Zacharias asking for a sign, since it was done by several in the Old Testament; but his affliction was not only a sign to him, but to all who interacted with him during the next year or so.

1:11 ***an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar.*** The right side is the place of honor. The angel stood on the right side of the altar of incense, which faced the veil before the Holy of Holies, meaning he was on Zacharias' left, but God's right hand (from the perspective of within the veil). That position connoted good news as the angel stood between the light of the lampstand and the smoke of the incense altar, symbols of the presence and blessing of God.⁹

1:13 ***Zacharias . . . Elisabeth . . . John.*** Names often have special meaning in the scriptures. Zacharias (Zechariah) means 'Jehovah remembers.' Elisabeth's name is the same as Aaron's wife, Elisheba (see Exodus 6:23), meaning 'my God is an oath' or 'my God is good fortune'. John (Yohanan) means 'Yahweh has been gracious/given grace,' a name that would have meaning to Zacharias and Elisabeth (see Luke 1:25), as well as prophetic meaning to John's future mission.¹⁰

1:13 ***thy prayer is heard.*** It is unlikely that Zacharias and Elisabeth are still praying for a son, given their ages and circumstances. Rather, the angel is responding to the prayer that Zacharias' work that day represents and which he would have given when he exited the temple, had Gabriel's visit not intervened—that Israel might be redeemed by the blessing of God.¹¹

1:14 ***thou shalt have joy and gladness.*** Because of the son, the parents would experience great joy in his birth.

1:15 ***shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.*** Some see in this a parallel to Samson or others taking a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6), but the other required components of that vow are not mentioned. Perhaps he was just expected to live without wine or strong drink (meaning alcoholic beverages made with something other than grapes)¹² to set him apart from others and show his dedication to God.

1:15 ***filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*** D&C 84:27-28 reiterates this, explaining that John was "raised up" by God, baptized while yet a child, and ordained by an angel when he was eight days old (when he was circumcised).

1:16 ***shall he turn to the Lord.*** In the OT, especially in the prophets, to 'turn' (*shoov*) is to repent; it also means 'return.' John's cry was repentance as he sought to bring people back to God and to prepare them for God on earth.

1:17 ***And he shall go before him.*** The two pronouns can be confusing here but refer to the previous verse. The first, "he," is John. The second, "him," is "the Lord their God" in v. 16.

⁹ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 98.

¹⁰ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 88; Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 272.

¹¹ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 99.

¹² Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 261.

1:17 **in the spirit and power of Elias.** “Elias” is the Greek form of the name Elijah. This invokes Malachi 4:5-6, which explains that role of Elijah as a preparer of the way.

1:18 **Whereby shall I know this?** “How can I be sure of this?” (NIV, CJB). Zacharias evokes the words of Abraham, “whereby shall I know that I shall . . .” (Genesis 15:8). He also brought up the issue of their age, further tying his and Elisabeth’s story to the patriarch and his wife, Sarah.¹³

1:19 **I am Gabriel.** Gabriel means ‘mighty man of God’ or ‘man sent from God,’ both of which reflect his next words describing his own mission: “that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee.” In other words, his very presence and message should be enough to make Zacharias “know this.”

1:20 **behold, thou shall be dumb.** Zacharias’ question or challenge in v. 18 required a response—he was essentially asking for a sign, which is just what Gabriel gave him. But like Korihor in Alma 30, Zacharias was probably quite surprised by the sign he received in response to his request. He was not only unable to speak but unable to hear as well, as evidenced by later events (vv. 62-63).

1:21 **marvelled that he tarried so long.** The people waiting and praying outside the temple were surprised at how long Zacharias was taking. All he had to do was get the incense on the altar lit and then come out and offer the prayer. No one outside knew of the interview he was having with Gabriel, of course, just that he was taking significantly longer than anyone doing the same task usually did. It is interesting to note that one of the people waiting for him could have been his wife, Elisabeth, who surely came to Jerusalem with him for the week.¹⁴

1:22 **they perceived that he had seen a vision.** If Zacharias couldn’t speak at all, how would the crowd know this? Yes, the text says that “he beckoned unto them,” but how does that help? It’s very difficult to say, ‘I just saw an angel and am struck dumb’ using hand gestures.

1:22 **remained speechless.** The second part of Zacharias’ task that day was to invoke a priestly blessing on the assembled crowd. In his post-angelic visit state, he could not do that. However, this is another instance of Luke writing with great symmetry: at the end of his book, Jesus himself offers the blessing that Zacharias could not, raising his arms as Zacharias would have, and pronouncing a blessing (24:50-52). We don’t know Jesus’ words in that latter instance but we do know what Zacharias was supposed to say: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).¹⁵

1:23 **he departed to his own house.** It was a sign of Zacharias’ commitment to his office that even though he was now deaf and mute, he stayed until the end of his temple commitment before going home.

1:24 **after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived.** Compare vv. 23-24 to 1 Samuel 1:19-20: “where Elkanah and Hannah return home, and after “the Lord remembered her,” she “had conceived, that she bare a son.”¹⁶

1:24 **his herself five months.** It could be that Elisabeth fears letting others know of her condition, in case something goes wrong. But it is more likely that she stays home to care for her husband and build up her own spiritual condition, to prepare for the birth of this amazing son she carries.¹⁷ Raymond Brown also notes that it is a Lukan device to hide her away for that time so that when Gabriel come to Mary to tell her that Elisabeth is pregnant, that it is truly something no one but the happy couple knew at that point, emphasizing the divinity of the message to Mary (see v. 36).¹⁸

¹³ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 280.

¹⁴ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 102.

¹⁵ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 263; Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 102.

¹⁶ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 281.

¹⁷ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 103.

¹⁸ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 282.

1:25 **to take away my reproach among men.** Compare to Rachel's exclamation when she is finally found with child after many years of barrenness: "And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach" (Genesis 30:23).¹⁹

Gabriel visits Mary – Luke 1:26-38

1:26 **in the sixth month.** Meaning, the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy. It seems evident from the record that she did not get pregnant right away, so it is something more than six months since Gabriel appeared to Zacharias in the temple.

1:26 **Gabriel was sent from God.** Compare this to Zacharias' experience (which is clearly what Luke wants us to do): both see the same angel; both are told they will have a son under miraculous circumstances; both are given the son's name that reflects their future lives—John ('Jehovah has shown favor') and Jesus ('Jehovah saves'); both question the angel's words; both receive a sign or confirmation of the message delivered. In fact, the flow of the two stories is so similar, that laying them out side-by-side reflects a near mirror-image.²⁰

1:27 **espoused to a man.** Marriage customs at the time of Christ differ from today. It was done in two stages. Luke says Mary was "espoused," better translated 'betrothed' or 'engaged.' This is the first stage. When a young man (typically about 17 years old) decided to get married (or, more likely, it was decided for him by his father), he would enter the house of his desired bride (often 12-13 years old) and literally build a small booth or hut in their living room. When it was done, he would come with his father and two witnesses and give a contract to the father and a present to the bride (usually coins, the price to 'buy' the young girl) with the words, "By this, thou art set apart for me according to the laws of Moses and of Israel." The two were then married legally ('betrothed') but not physically. They continued to live apart and had specific tasks before the wedding. He had to build their future home (the small booth represents his readiness to take on this task). She had to prepare her wedding clothing as well as furniture, cooking utensils, and other necessities for their house.²¹

On the day of the wedding, the bride would adorn herself with the best clothing available to her, including a headband that had the coins her husband had given her and any other precious stones her family possessed. The groom also dressed his best. They were king and queen for the day. Weddings were almost always on Wednesdays since it allowed adequate preparation time after the Sabbath, and because it was the day God pronounced "good" twice in Genesis. The procession started at dusk (what we would call Tuesday evening) from the groom's home. As he walked through town, people would announce his coming and everyone would come out with their lamps. He walked to the bride's home where he found her wearing a veil. Presenting the wedding contract to her father, the veil was removed and laid on his left shoulder—"the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isaiah 9:6). Then they went to the couple's new home with friends lighting the way to welcome them. Now the veil was moved to the groom's right shoulder, indicating the couple was married. This was followed by a feast with the bride and groom seated under a canopy. There was much eating, drinking of wine, music, and dancing. The celebration could last up to a week (interrupted by the Sabbath, of course).

At this point in the story, Joseph and Mary were betrothed. Joseph was busy building the house and Mary and her family making their preparations.

1:28 **blessed art thou among women.** While this is in some ancient manuscripts, it is not in all, and since it also appears in v. 42 in nearly all, scholars agree that this is probably a late addition and duplicate.

1:30 **Fear not, Mary.** After offering her words of praise and blessing, the angel tells her not to fear. That is was not the first words he spoke, as with Zacharias, says something about the circumstance—she did not react in fear, but only was "troubled" (v. 29) when she heard his words.

1:31 **thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son.** Mary was espoused to Joseph, so the fact that she was going to get pregnant and have a baby would not have been a big surprise. The verb tense of all verbs here is

¹⁹ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 281.

²⁰ See Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 297.

²¹ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 107-108; Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 41-42; Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 123-124.

future, so this is not an announcement of something already under way. This makes Mary's question curious (v. 34).

1:32 **the Son of the Highest . . . the throne of his father David.** Though this is a surprising piece of news, the language can be seen as ambiguous. That is, Psalm 2:7 declares that the Lord said, "Thou art my Son; for this day have I begotten thee." This psalm was used in enthronement activities—the king because the adopted "son of the Highest" when he took the throne of David. In other words, Mary could have completely understood the angel to be saying that she would have son who would one day become the king.

1:34 **How shall this be.** Like Zacharias, Mary questions how the angel's words will be fulfilled. She, too, seeks a sign, to know that it is true.

1:34 **seeing I know not a man.** Mary is clear that she and Joseph have not yet come together as a married couple, even though they are betrothed. The response displays a short-term mentality: she will 'know a man' once their marriage is finalized, but on this date, she remains a virgin. Raymond Brown postulates that it is not so much that Mary is confused about how she will later have a son once fully married to Joseph, but rather that Luke needs her to raise an objection that the angel and God can answer with a divine manifestation, attesting to the miraculous nature of her conception, part of the pattern of OT annunciation that Luke follows for both Zacharias and Mary.²²

1:35 **that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.** Perhaps with the angel's reply, Mary began to understand: Jesus was not just going to be the king of Israel and God's adopted son, but the actual Son of God by the power of the Holy Ghost.

1:35 **JST**

Luke 1:35 KJV	JST
And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.	And the angel answered and said unto her, Of the Holy Ghost, and the power of the Highest: therefore also that holy child that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Deleting the lengthier explanation of KJV Luke, the JST simply says that Mary's pregnancy is enabled by the Holy Ghost and the power of God. Those two things combined are what make the child she will be the "Son of God."

1:36 **thy cousin Elisabeth.** The word translated "cousin" is a generic Greek word for 'relative' (*sungenēs*); we do not know the nature of their relationship.

1:36 **she hath also conceived.** Mary's sign is Elisabeth's pregnancy. This is why there is an urgency to Mary visiting Elisabeth, so see for herself what has happened.

1:36 **a son in her old age.** We are reminded of Sarah's pregnancy in Genesis 18:14.

1:37 **For with God nothing shall be impossible.** "For no word from God will ever fail" (NIV). In other words, the angel is assuring Mary that what he has spoken is from God and it will happen exactly as stated, though it sounds amazing or even impossible.

1:38 **behold the handmaid of the Lord.** "Handmaid" is *doulē*, meaning female slave. Hannah referred to herself by a similar title, 'amah in Hebrew, meaning maid-servant, female slave, or concubine, reflecting the normal status of women as slaves of men (see 1 Samuel 1:11). Then Hannah offered a prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10) that has many parallels to Mary's song in the next section.

²² Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 307-308.

Mary visits Elisabeth – Luke 1:39-56

Women generally say few words in scripture. This section is the longest recorded conversation between two women in all of scripture.

1:39 **went into the hill country with haste.** Mary would not have traveled the five-day, 130 or so mile journey from Nazareth to near Jerusalem alone, but would have gone with at least some male relatives or friends. It was not safe or acceptable for her to be on the roads alone, especially is she is twelve or thirteen years old. The term “hill country” may refer to the Hebron (Joshua 21:11).

1:40 **saluted Elisabeth.** Mary’s words are not recorded but the salutation would surely be full of excitement and anticipation, since Elisabeth was her sign and Mary had been waiting many days to have her message confirmed.

1:41 **the babe leaped in her womb.** The coinciding timing of the baby’s movement and Mary’s arrival is a manifestation of God’s support for Mary, which is exactly how Elisabeth interprets it.

1:41 **Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.** This gift from God is what allows Elisabeth to speak profound truths and details she did not yet know about from any conversation with Mary. Her words are short and don’t receive a formal name like Mary’s and others later, but they are inspired for this occasion. Now both women have receive divine information about the other.²³

1:42 **Blessed art thou among women.** Elisabeth showed both her charitable nature and deference to Mary’s role (or more properly, her future son’s role) by not mentioning her own pregnancy in her greeting, except that the babe stirred within her at Mary’s coming.

1:45 **blessed is she that believed.** “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (NRSV). The end of Elisabeth’s speech is about Mary, of course, who believed what the Lord told her through his messenger.

1:45 **JST**

Luke 1:45 KJV	JST
And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.	And blessed art thou who believed: for there those things which were told of the angel of the Lord shall be fulfilled.

While simplifying the language of the KJV, the JST also clarifies that the messenger/angel is who conveyed the message that “shall be fulfilled.”

The Magnificat – Luke 1:46-55

1:46 **My soul doth magnify the Lord.** Mary’s reply—a song that goes to verse 55, often called ‘Mary’s Song of Praise’ or *The Magnificat* or from the first word in Latin (*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*)—shows her humility and love of the Lord. It has many parallels to Hannah’s song (1 Samuel 2:1-10, below) and launches a couple themes of Luke’s—the reversal of fortunes between the poor and the rich and the coming of God’s salvation.

Luke 1:46-55	1 Samuel 2:1-10
<p>⁴⁶And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, ⁴⁷And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. ⁴⁸For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. ⁴⁹For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy <i>is</i> his name.</p>	<p>¹And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. ²<i>There is none</i> holy as the LORD: for <i>there is none</i> beside thee: neither <i>is there</i> any rock like our God.</p>

²³ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 341.

⁵⁰And his mercy *is* on them that fear him from generation to generation.
⁵¹He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
⁵²He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree.
⁵³He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.
⁵⁴He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy;
⁵⁵As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

³Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let *not* arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD *is* a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.
⁴The bows of the mighty men *are* broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.
⁵*They that were* full have hired out themselves for bread; and *they that were* hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.
⁶The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.
⁷The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.
⁸He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set *them* among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth *are* the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.
⁹He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.
¹⁰The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

1:56 **three months.** A strictly ordered reading of Luke would indicate that Mary left just before Elisabeth delivered John (because Mary's departure is mentioned before the birth), but Luke tells us that she stayed three months, which would be close to Elisabeth's full term. It seems unlikely that she would have left just before that event but would have stayed to help care for Elisabeth in her labor and recovery. Mary could have stayed for the naming and witnessed Zacharias' miraculous and immediate recovery and then returned with her family to Nazareth, giving Luke a witness of these events that he could interview later in life.

When she returned to Nazareth, it wasn't long before her pregnancy was obvious. Since he knew he was not the father, Joseph could divorce her for what was an obvious case of adultery, either publicly (to shame her) or privately. According to Matthew, he chose the latter, but the dream/vision Joseph had convinced him to change that course and go through with the wedding. The text is clear that they did not consummate their marriage before Jesus was born (probably after her purification forty days later), though they likely finalized the wedding ceremony before leaving for Bethlehem.

The birth of John the Baptist – Luke 1:57-80

1:57 **she brought forth a son.** Luke uses similar language for both Elisabeth and Mary (2:7).

1:59 **they came to circumcise the child.** Circumcision and naming took place on the eighth day, even if it was a Sabbath, so the child could experience the Sabbath as his first covenant. Circumcision was thus the second covenant (see Genesis 17:12; 21:4).

1:59 **they called him Zacharias.** It would be the most natural thing in the world to name the new son after the father. None of the neighbors and family members attending had been told of the divinely mandated name.

1:60 **he shall be called John.** Elisabeth was bold in doing this. Zacharias had somehow conveyed to her the name given by the angel, and she stopped the men performing the circumcision and naming ceremony to correct them,

something that was inappropriate for her to do, in that society. How the couple communicated during this time is a mystery since she was likely illiterate.²⁴

1:62 **they made signs to his father.** This is how we know Zacharias is also deaf—they cannot communicate with him just by talking.

1:63 **writing table.** This was a wooden board with a wax surface, inscribed with a sharp object.

1:63 **His name is John.** Zacharias' surprising answer completely confirmed Elisabeth's declaration of his name, though he had not heard her make it.

1:64 **his mouth was opened immediately.** As the angel had promised, Zacharias would only be mute until the day that the events presented by the angel happened. John's naming was the final part of the messenger's words that waited to be fulfilled. One Zacharias assured that outcome, he regained his ability to speak and hear.

1:66 **What manner of child shall this be!** Seeing Zacharias' amazing recovery after writing his son's name, the people there marveled about the future of the young child and recognized the hand of the Lord in his birth.

1:67 **filled with the Holy Ghost.** Like Elisabeth when Mary arrived, Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy concerning his young son and the movement that he would start.

The Benedictus – Luke 1:68-79

1:68 **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.** Zacharias' speech at John's circumcision is traditionally known as the Benedictus, after the first word in Latin. It goes to verse 79. It is in two parts: verses 68-75 are addressed to the coming Messiah, not yet born; verses 76-79 are addressed to the infant John, whom Zacharias holds in his arms.

1:69 **an horn of salvation.** From Psalm 18:2, "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

1:76 **thou, child, shalt be called.** This passage draws on both Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, as do many texts about John's mission.

1:77 **JST** "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by **baptism for** the remission of sins." This change foreshadows a major theme of John's great mission and the authority he had to perform baptisms.

1:78 **dayspring.** Meaning 'rising sun'; 'dawn'; but also 'shoot' or 'new branch'; the concepts of light (Isaiah 9:1-7; 49:6) and new life (Isaiah 11:1) both apply to Jesus.

1:80 **was in the deserts.** The apocryphal story of Zacharias giving his life next to the altar at the temple because he wouldn't disclose the location of Elisabeth and John is often considered true by Latter-day Saints because of an editorial in the Times and Seasons during Joseph Smith's lifetime (that ended up in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 261). It is also based on Jesus' words in Luke 11:51, mentioning a 'Zacharias.' But close investigation has shown that: 1) The editorial is based on the reading of this apocryphal text (*Protoevangelium of James*); 2) that Joseph Smith did not author the editorial; 3) that W. W. Phelps was the most likely author. The best way of reading Luke 11:51 has it refer to the Zachariah slain in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22, which was considered the 'last' book of scripture at the time of Jesus (and still is in Hebrew Bibles). Thus Abel was the first martyr killed, and Zachariah the last.

The birth of Jesus – Luke 2:1-7 (Matt 1:18-25)

Luke tells the story from Mary's perspective. He possibly met and interviewed her. She was also the probable source for the great details of Zacharias' and Elisabeth's story, as discussed above.

2:1 **a decree from Caesar Augustus.** This is Octavian, who united with Mark Anthony at first after Julius Caesar's murder in 44 BC but then became the sole ruler of the Roman empire. "Augustus" was a title given him by the

²⁴ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 124.

Senate, meaning ‘venerable.’ Though some have tried to tie this edict to an actual event, there is no record in Roman imperial archives of such a decree at this time. Luke could well be the sole source of information relative to this event, but most scholars believe he invented the census as a reason for Mary and Joseph to be in Bethlehem.²⁵

2:1 all the world should be taxed. Greek *apographomai*, meaning ‘to register’ though typically for the purpose of being taxed.²⁶

2:2 when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Syria is the province just north of Palestine and Galilee. The governor is better known by his Roman name, Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, and he did conduct such a census. However, this cannot be correct as he was governor of Syria from AD 6 to 7, much too late for Jesus’ birth.²⁷ The governor at that time was Quintilius Varus. It could be that Varus started the census and Quirinius finished it.

2:4 unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. There are two ‘cities of David.’ The most common one is the part of Jerusalem south of the temple (1 Samuel 16:1). Bethlehem merits that name because it was the birthplace of David.

2:6 while they were there, the days were accomplished. Luke’s story doesn’t support the urgency we often see in films, where Joseph and Mary arrive in a crowded town, desperately looking for a place to stay because Mary is about to give birth. Luke’s language is that Mary was pregnant when they arrived and that sometime after they were settled in, Mary went into labor.

2:7 wrapped him in swaddling clothes. Because they believed that straight bodies were ideal, mothers at that time would take strips of linen (a fabric made from a plant) and tightly wrap their bodies with arms and legs out straight. This is ‘swaddling clothes.’

2:7 laid him in a manger. The Greek *phatnē*, translated “manger” here, is a cattle trough, though it can also have the sense of stall where animals sleep.²⁸

2:7 no room for them in the inn. They probably arrived late in Bethlehem, so the innkeepers refused to open the door after dark, shouting, “No room in the inn!” Or they simply saw that the ‘space available’ veils had all been taken down from the doors. They likely stayed in one of the caves in the Bethlehem area used by animals.

Visit of the shepherds – Luke 2:8-20

2:8 shepherds abiding in the field. This indicates what time of year Jesus was born. Most of the year, the shepherds’ sons were in the fields, watching the flocks. But during lambing season, the shepherds themselves needed to be there to assist with the births. That was typically in late March to early April. Some believe that these sheep were designated for the temple, so that not only were they helping with the births, but they were marking those which were firstborn to be used at Passover. In that case, these shepherds may have even been priests. If so, many would probably even know the story of their fellow priest, Zacharias, his son, and the promise of the Messiah and his forerunner.

2:9 the angel of the Lord came upon them. Luke does not give the angel’s name; we presume it was Gabriel again, but can’t be certain.

2:10 good tidings. In Greek, *euangelizō*, to announce good news, the gospel. When Augustus was born, an inscription was made saying that a ‘savior’ was born and that his birth ‘signaled the beginning of good news for the world.’ The angel here used almost the same words, perhaps by deliberate comparison, and thereby put us all on notice that the *true* Savior had come, which was the best ‘good news’ of all.

²⁵ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 412-418.

²⁶ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 134.

²⁷ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 135.

²⁸ Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, 138.

2:10 **All people.** ‘All the people of your tribe,’ meaning the Jews. His birth was only known among his own people at the beginning.

2:11 **Christ the Lord.** Meaning, the Messiah, the Anointed One, your God.

2:12 **lying in a manger.** The angel’s directions were frankly not much help as all babies wore swaddling clothes and there had to be many mangers (feeding troughs/stables) around, but it put the shepherds in search mode and turned them into witnesses. It could also have had the effect of getting the attention of many as they went from place to place asking, “Was a baby born here last night? Because we saw an angel who told us . . .”

Gloria in Excelsis – Luke 2:14

2:14 **Glory to God in the highest.** Called Gloria in Excelsis (again, for the Latin words), the angels’ words are recited in prayers in the eastern and western churches and in many songs and hymns.

2:14 **In the highest.** Meaning, ‘in the heavens.’

2:14 **on earth peace, good will toward men.** In some New Testament manuscripts, this is better phrased, ‘on earth peace toward men of good will’ or as one translation expresses it, “on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (NIV).

2:16 **they came with haste.** The angel’s words instilled a sense of urgency in the shepherds, who likely had their sons stay with the sheep while they went searching for the baby.

2:17 **they made known abroad.** ‘You won’t believe what happened to me’ was perhaps the conversation starter for these men for a long time.

2:19 **Mary kept all these things.** The word translated “kept” is ‘to preserve’ or ‘to treasure.’ All of these events are precious to Mary, where she continues to treasure certain elements of this time in vv. 35 and 51.

Presentation in the temple; Simeon and Anna – Luke 2:21-39

2:21 **his name was called Jesus.** Jesus was named and circumcised on the eighth day, like John, but we have no details of the event.

2:22 **the days of her purification.** The Law of Moses required a forty-day purification period for a mother of a son (eighty days for a girl), after which she was to present herself and her child at the temple (Leviticus 12:2-8). They could either offer a lamb or two doves or pigeons at this time. However, because carrying around animals could be a challenge, women were also able to put in receptacle #3 in the Treasury (in the Court of the Women) the equivalent donation.

The Law also called for a five-shekel donation to ‘redeem’ a firstborn son (Numbers 18:15-16). Since no mention is made of such a donation for Jesus, some have speculated that Joseph and Mary instead dedicated him to God’s service, as Hannah did for Samuel.

2:23 **As it is written.** The quote is from Exodus 13:2.

2:25 **Simeon.** Simeon (or Simon) was a very common name at the time. That he found them at all in the vast temple complex is indicative of his being led by the Spirit. His prophetic words came from Isaiah and reflected the mission of the Savior and the pain his mother would feel at how he will later be treated.

Nunc Dimittis – Luke 2:29-32

2:29 **Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart.** These words are known as *Nunc Dimittis* (‘now dismiss’ in this verse), the words of Simeon to God and to Mary. They are the traditional evening prayer among Anglicans and are part of the liturgy among Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. Lutherans recite it after the Eucharist (sacrament). Simeon alludes to Isaiah 25:1-7; 8:14-15; and 11:10-12 in his speech.

2:34 **Simeon blessed them.** After blessing the baby with prophetic words, Simeon turned to specifically to Mary, giving her some sobering words.

2:34 **set for the fall and rise again of many.** Jesus' teachings and actions will cause the downfall of many but also the raising up (perhaps alluding to the resurrection) of many.

2:34 **for a sign which shall be spoken against.** Jesus himself is a sign unto the people, a sign that will be opposed by many.

2:35 **JST**

Luke 2:35 KJV {Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,} that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.	JST Yea, a spear shall pierce through him to the wounding of thing own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.
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This change better reflects what would happen to Jesus on the cross but also the pain that Mary would feel.

2:36 **Anna, a prophetess.** Anna (Hannah in Hebrew) was of the tribe of Asher where women were known for their beauty. High priests often sought to marry women of this tribe for that very reason. In the apocryphal book of Judith, we encounter a similar woman, a widow who is "virtuous and chaste," fasting all her days and serving God with great devotion. Such women were greatly respected in the Jewish culture.

2:37 **a widow of about fourscore and four years.** She was either 84 or near 100; the Greek text is not clear if the number is her age or the time since her husband died, though the JST indicates that she "**lived** a widow" 84 years, so was possibly close to or even over 100.

2:39 **they returned unto Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.** Luke portrays Mary and Joseph as perfectly obedient to the law, and after accomplishing that, they returned home, probably to Joseph's parents' home, since their accelerated marriage had not allowed time for Joseph to finish their own home.

Jesus at the temple, age Twelve – Luke 2:40-52

2:40 **the child grew, and waxed strong.** These words are like bookends, marking the beginning and ending of the story (see also verse 52). The similar wording alerts us to Jesus' progression.

2:42 **they went up to Jerusalem.** When a boy was twelve, he became a "son of the Law" – a *bar mitzvah*. It was the first year he would go to the temple to join with the adults to celebrate the Passover. He now had rights under Jewish law: he was a citizen; could worship in the synagogue; hold positions of leadership; could not be sold as a slave by his father; and had the right to sit down with Abraham at the heavenly feast.

2:43 **Joseph and his mother knew not.** They would have traveled with a large group from Nazareth or even other parts of Galilee for safety. By now, the couple had other younger children to keep track of, and perhaps trusted Jesus as a son of the law to journey with others in the group. They likely spent much of the first day's journey looking for him, likely casually at first then with increasing urgency as he could not be located.

2:46 **Three days.** One day to journey away from Jerusalem; one day to journey back; one day to search for him in the city.

2:46 **in the midst of the doctors.** There was a place in the northeast corner of the Court of the Women where the 'doctors' or scribes and lawyers would sit and discuss the Law, so chosen because it was the traditional site where the Ark of the Covenant was buried, and they thought it would make them smarter. This was probably where Joseph and Mary found Jesus.

2:46 **JST**

Luke 2:46 KJV	JST
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And it came to pass, ~~that~~ after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, ~~both~~ hearing ~~them~~, and asking ~~them~~ questions.

And it came to pass, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, **and they were hearing him**, and asking **him** questions.

Rabbis taught by asking questions and praising or correcting the students' answers. Jesus' answers amazed them (v. 47)—just twelve years old and so much understanding!

2:48 ***I have sought thee sorrowing***. Mary's anxiety comes through, as any parent can appreciate.

2:49 ***he said unto them***. Here we have Jesus' first spoken words. The Greek makes no mention of "business" but says literally 'Don't you know that I must be with my Father?' He says to his mother, in essence, 'Why are you looking for me? Am I not now a Son of the Law? Didn't you realize that you would find me here in my Father's house?'

2:51 ***subject unto them***. Here we have the last mention of Joseph in scripture. We do not know what happened to him, but it appears later that Mary was alone with her children. Certainly the carpenter taught Jesus his trade—building houses. A carpenter in that day was as much a stone worker as a wood worker, working with stones for walls and large beams for roofs, etc.

Jesus showed his obedience to his parents by returning with them to Nazareth and being "subject unto them." He would have had all the typical experiences of childhood in a Jewish home—touching the *mezuzah* going in and out of the house; attending school to learn Hebrew; learning a trade; studying the Law under Joseph and hearing his mother sing from the Psalms.

2:52 ***Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man***. Jesus became wiser, taller, stronger, and got along with both God and others around him.

Preparation for Ministry (3:1 – 4:13)

John's preaching – Luke 3:1-18 (Mark 1:1-8)

3:1-2 Luke gives us six things by which to date the beginning of John's ministry (below). The only one that really helps set the date is the fifteenth year of Tiberius, who became emperor in A.D. 14 but became co-regent with his father, Augustus, in A.D. 11. So the most likely date for this chapter is A.D. 26. John likely started preaching at his 30th birthday, as was the custom, so he would have been crying repentance in the fall of that year. Jesus probably came to be baptized the next spring, and John was put into prison either late A.D. 27 or early A.D. 28.

Luke's six points of dating are:

- Pontius Pilate was governor (or procurator) from 26-36.
- Herod Antipas was tetrarch ('ruler of ¼' = a small kingdom) from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39.
- Philip, his brother, was tetrarch from 4 B.C. to A.D. 34. This is NOT the Philip whose wife Antipas took; that Philip lived in Rome (Herod had two sons by that name).
- We don't know who Lysanias was, though Josephus mentions someone by that name in roughly this time.
- Annas and Caiaphas, father and son-in-law, were high priests from 6-15 and 18-37, respectively. Both are mentioned because Annas, though not the appointed high priest, still had much power behind the scenes.

3:3 ***the baptism of repentance***. "Baptism" is the Greek *baptizō*, meaning to dip or immerse. John's baptism was complete immersion.

3:4 ***the words of Esaias***. "Esaias" is the Greek form of Isaiah.

3:4 ***JST***

Luke 3:4 KJV

JST

As it is written in the book of the ~~words of~~ Esaias the ~~prophet~~, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

As it is written in the book of the **prophet** Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, **and** make his paths straight. **For behold and lo, he shall come as it is written in the book of the prophets, to take away the sins of the world, and to bring salvation unto the heathen nations; to gather together those who are lost, which are of the sheepfold of Israel; yea, even her dispersed and afflicted; and also to prepare the way and make possible the preaching of the gospel unto the Gentiles. And to be a light unto all who sit in darkness, unto the uttermost parts of the earth; to bring to pass the resurrection from the dead, and to ascend up on high, to dwell on the right hand of the Father, until the fulness of time, and the law and the testimony shall be sealed, and the keys of the kingdom shall be delivered up again unto the Father; to administer justice unto all; to come down in judgment upon all, and to convince all the ungodly of their ungodly deeds, which they have committed; and all this in the day that he shall come, for it is a day of power.**

Not only does the JST version add some great text in Luke, but indirectly we're actually seeing an expansion of Isaiah 40:3-5 (which has no change in the JST in Isaiah). The difference between the KJV New Testament text and Isaiah's in the KJV is because Luke is quoting the Septuagint, the Greek version of the OT in general use in his day.

3:8 **God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.** This is a play on words; in Aramaic (John's spoken language), 'stones' is *abnayyam*; 'children' is *bebnayyam*.

3:13 **JST**

Luke 3:13 KJV	JST
And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.	And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed unto you. For it is well known unto you, Theophilus, that after the manner of the Jews and according to the custom of their law, in receiving money in the treasury, that out of the abundance which was received was appointed unto the poor, every man his portion; and after this manner did the publicans also, wherefore John said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

Luke addresses Theophilus two others times in Luke and Acts; here the JST adds a third instance, as he explains a Jewish custom to the Greek reader of his text.

3:16 **whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.** In the Gentile world, it was a slave's job to untie his master's sandals. But in the Jewish world, the Rabbis taught that that job was even too low for a slave, and so didn't allow it. John is saying that the prophesied Messiah is so great that he, John, cannot even do what is forbidden of a slave.

3:16 **Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor.** This expression refers to the wheat harvest. The 'fan' is the winnow, a fork-like shovel used to toss grain into the air. The heavier grain would fall back, while the light chaff would blow away. Thus the farmer purges his floor of all but the precious kernels of wheat, which he gathers into his granary, while the chaff blows into the field which is burned to prepare for the next season's crop.

John the Baptist arrested – Luke 3:19-20 (Matt 4:12a; Mark 1:14a;)

3:19 **Herod the tetrarch.** Luke calls Herod by his proper Roman title, not “king” as Mark does.

3:20 **shut up John in prison.** John was obviously not put in prison before Jesus was baptized, though that is the order Luke presents it. Rather, he is letting us know that the result of John’s preaching was Herod’s anger and John’s imprisonment.

Jesus’ baptism – Luke 3:21-22 (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11)

See Matthew. In Luke, John’s presence is implied by the previous verses but not mentioned in the baptismal scene, perhaps to minimize John and bring Jesus to the forefront alone. Luke’s record of the words spoken by the voice of heaven are different from Matthew, Mark, and John: in Luke, they are in the second person addressed directly to Jesus: “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (v. 22).

The genealogy of Jesus – Luke 3:23-38 (Matt 1:1-17)

Luke starts his genealogy at Jesus and goes backward to Adam. This shows Jesus and all men (including Gentiles) have a common ancestor and all eventually go back to God, emphasizing the universal appeal of Jesus’ mission. Luke provides this family tree after the baptism but before the ministry, likely because Moses’ genealogy was also given at the start of his formal ministry (Exodus 6:14-26).

Like Matthew, Luke uses Greek forms of names that might not be familiar if you only knew the Old Testament (Hebrew) form. See the Chronology section of the Bible dictionary for a list of the king’s names and compare that to these lists.

3:23 **Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age.** The Greek word *hōsei*, translated “about,” can also mean ‘as though’ or ‘like as.’ In other words, Luke’s language is intentionally imprecise.

3:23 JST

Luke 3:23 KJV	JST
And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being {as was supposed} the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,	And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, having lived with his father , being as was supposed of the world , the son of Joseph, who was from the loins of Heli,

The JST indicates that Jesus referred to Joseph as his father, even if he knew that wasn’t actually the case, just like adopted children often call the parents who raise them father and mother.

3:24 JST

Luke 3:24 KJV	JST
Which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph,	Who was from the loins of Matthat, who was the son of Levi, who was a descendent of Melchi, and of Janna, and of Joseph,

Though not doctrinally significant, JS’ edits in Luke 3:23-38 serve to greatly shorten the number of words, making the genealogy read faster and be more concise. Most of the entries just read “and of . . .” followed by the next name, and so on, as we see at the end of v. 24. Curiously, only twice the word “descendent” is used, in both cases before the name Melchi (vv. 24 and 28), which name means ‘my king.’

3:38 JST

Luke 3:38 KJV	JST
Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.	And of Enos, and of Seth, and of Adam, who was formed of God, and the first man upon the earth.

The JST puts Adam in a fuller Jewish and Christian image, not just as a son of God but as the only man directly “formed of God, and the first man upon the earth.”

[Temptations in the wilderness – Luke 4:1-13 – \(Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13\)](#)

See Matthew, with the note that in Luke’s account of the temptations, the order is different than Matthew and Mark, ending in the temple (the second and third temptations are reversed in order). This matches one of Luke’s themes of the importance of the temple in the early church. It is also noticeable that there were no angels that came to help Jesus in Luke, as we see in Mark and Matthew. Instead in Luke, Satan came back in chapter 22 at the critical time (22:3, 31, 53), and *then* an angel strengthened him (22:43). Also, like Matthew, the JST account in Luke changes it so the purpose of the wilderness sojourn is not to be tempted—that happens at the end of the forty days—and the Spirit moves Jesus from place to place, not Satan.

4:2 **he did eat nothing**. During his time in the wilderness, Luke is explicit that Jesus did not eat. Like many who fast today, that does not mean that he didn’t drink something. Fasting often means going without food but not water.

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- CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
- NASB – New American Standard Bible
- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

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