

Luke 1 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

During a court case, one of the most crucial pieces of evidence an attorney looks for is eyewitnesses.

It's the testimony of witnesses that brings such compelling force to someone's position.

When researching history, historians look for records of eyewitnesses to establish what really took place at a given time and place.

Much of what we *know* about history today is based on the testimony of a *single* person; a Herodotus, Tacitus, Josephus, or a Pliny.

That there are 4 records of the life of Christ, Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John is simply amazing.

Matthew & John were disciples, men who actually followed Jesus for the 3 years of His public ministry.

Their accounts are direct eyewitness records of the things Jesus said and did.

Mark & Luke drew their accounts *from* the eyewitnesses.

Mark's story of Jesus comes from Peter.

Luke's comes from his careful interviews with several of those who'd been closest to Jesus; the disciples, Jesus' mother, and some of the other women who'd followed Him.

There's a good chance that as the Apostle Paul's traveling companion, Luke had also had a chance to interview Jesus' brother James, who was the head of the church in Jerusalem. (Acts 16:10; 20:5; 21:1; 27:1)

Luke's gospel is especially interesting because as a *physician* who was a Greek (Col. 4:10–11, 14), he wrote with careful attention to the factual details.

His is a story which seeks to present Jesus as the perfect man, who attains this perfection because He is also God.

Jesus is the ultimate realization of all that Greek culture & philosophy aspired to for humanity.

But while in Greek thinking the perfect man was someone who was lofty & detached from the affairs of the common man, Luke presents Jesus as someone who is intimately concerned with the hurts & needs of the lowly & downcast.

I. Dedication Preface 1:1-4

¹ Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

In Col 4:14, Paul refers to Luke as the beloved physician.

Doctors were very different in the ancient world from what we have today.

Generally, doctors weren't in private practice; they were servants who were part of some wealthy person's estate.

Many were slaves who'd been given special training to serve as the physician to a rich family.

The owner would lend his physician slave out to others from time to time when they had a need.

In all likelihood, this is what Luke was; a physician-slave who'd been loaned to Paul to attend him during his travels to take care of him.

It was during this time that Luke had then had access to the apostles and other eyewitnesses to Jesus.

Since his first duty was to his master Theophilus, he compiled a careful record of the life of Jesus.

The name "Theophilus" means "Lover of God" & most likely was a new name he took when he was converted to Christianity.

Many Greeks & Romans were named after pagan deities & when they converted to Christianity took new names at their baptism to symbolize their being new creatures in Christ.

Many of the converts in India today do the same.

Luke says here in v. 1 that there were many records of the life of Jesus floating around at that time.

He says these accounts were drawn from the apostles & other followers of Jesus.

But Luke knew the manner in which *he* was recording the story of Jesus was more systematic & accurate than much of what he'd read in these other accounts.

In fact, in v. 3 he says –

³ it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus,

That phrase “from the very first” is an interesting one.

In Greek it’s “anothen” & is translated as “from above” 5 times in the NT.

While Luke may have simply been saying that his record starts at the beginning of Jesus’ story,

Some scholars understand him to be saying that he sensed the inspiration of the Spirit as he investigated the story of Christ & committed it to record; that his record, while drawn from the eyewitnesses of Christ, was really “from above.”

In any case, Theophilus was Luke’s master whom Luke was concerned to send this account of the life of Christ so he would be well grounded in the Faith.

II. Birth Announcements 1:5-2:38

A. John the Baptist’s Announcement 1:5-25

⁵ There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

Every descendant of Aaron’s was automatically a priest.

This meant by Jesus’ day there were far too many priests to serve in the temple so they were divided into 24 divisions.

Each division served for 1 week, twice a year.

And of course, they all served for the high holy days of Passover, Pentecost & Tabernacles.

Each division had about a thousand priests, which was still too many to attend to the daily sacrifices & offerings, so

assignments were passed out by lot. ^[1]

Zacharias was a priest who was part of the Abijah division.

A priest was supposed to marry a woman of absolutely pure Jewish lineage.

It was considered extra special if he married a woman who was *also* from the line of Aaron. Elizabeth, Zacharias’ wife, was.

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.
7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

To be childless in Israel was to bear the stigma of the judgment of God.

Having children was seen as not only important, but as a *duty* one owed to God & the nation of Israel.

God had said Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars.

The Jews came to regard this promise as a *mandate* that they were to have as many children as possible.

So to be childless was considered bad – a sign that God had overlooked you & that you weren't worthy to be a part of the covenant people.

The Rabbis taught there were 7 kinds of people who were excommunicated from the covenant.

The list begins with, "A Jew who has no wife, or a Jew who has a wife and who has no child."

Childlessness was valid grounds for divorce. [2]

But with Zacharias & Elizabeth, this theology was confronted with a huge problem.

Zacharias was a priest & Elizabeth was a daughter of Aaron,
Both of them were known to be especially righteous people.
Their bareness just didn't square with the Jewish idea of God's justice.

Luke remarks that in addition to their lack of ability to have children, they have now gone past the age of child-bearing.

8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

Incense was offered in both the morning & the evening.

The priest went into the holy place before the veil that served as the door to the holy of holies and offered a pinch of incense on the golden altar.

With so many priests, and their tasks assigned by lot, MOST priests

never had a chance to perform this special duty of entering the holy place and performing this service.

When a priest was selected to perform this service, it was the greatest day of his life!

10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

The word “troubled” would be better translated as “terrified.”

This is the typical response of human beings when they see an angel.

It had been over 400 years, since the days of Malachi the prophet, that anyone had heard a message from God and Zacharias was overcome with the awareness that he was the one chosen to receive this august revelation.

13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

The angel spoke a word of courage & comfort to Zacharias, telling him his prayer for a child had been heard.

Question: What prayer was the angel referring to?

Was Zacharias praying that moment as he served in the temple?

Or was this a prayer he’d prayed many, many times before but had now given up on because he & Beth were too old?

Based on Zacharias’ response, it seems the later is the way to understand this.

They’d spent years praying for a child, but as none came, and now they are too old, they had likely given up.

But the angel tells them their prayer had been heard & would now be fulfilled.

The child’s name was to be “Favor of Yahweh” = John.

John is the shortened form of Jehohanan.

The angel has more to say about this special child . . .

14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will

also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

The child has a special destiny which is to be marked by his being dedicated as a life-long *Nazarite*.

You'll remember in our study of the Law of Moses how God gave the people of Israel a special way to mark a time of extra devotion to Him.

Known as *the vow of the Nazarite*, a person would show their special period of total dedication to God by not cutting their hair, refraining from all fruit of the vine, & touching anything dead.

But the vow was only temporary, lasting at most a month or two.

There are only two men in Scripture who were called to live a life-long Nazarite vow – John the Baptist & Who? Samson.

The angel told Zacharias that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from even before birth.

This is remarkable.

Under the New Covenant of Christ, believers are filled with the Holy Spirit the moment we're born again, & the Spirit abides with us from then on.

Under the old covenant, the Holy Spirit only filled people to accomplish a specific task or office, such as priest, prophet, or king.

If the person sinned badly, abusing their office and grieving the Spirit, then the Spirit would depart and so strip them of the anointing of their office or task.

- Samson
- Saul
- David prayed – Psalm 51:11 “Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” after his sin with Bathsheba & murder of her husband.

Here the angel tells Zacharias that his son will enjoy an anointing of the Spirit *from the womb*.

John's *whole life* will be a mission & ministry to the nation.

16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit

and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

The angel’s reference to Elijah is important.

In fact, the angel quotes the words of the prophet Malachi, ch. 4:5-6 about Elijah.

These were the last words God had spoken 400 years before.

By quoting this, the angel was saying that the work & word of God had been renewed & would begin with Zacharias, his wife, & their son, John.

Elijah’s ministry had been to come at a time of wide scale religious indifference to God.

As the first of the prophets, he’d set the pattern of calling the nation to radical repentance. This is what John would do.

18 And Zacharias said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.”

What’s not brought across in the translation to English is the *tone of resistance* in Zacharias’ words.

In effect, he says to the angel – “Yeah? Prove it! Your word isn’t enough. Give me something I can lay my hands on & know for sure.”

19 And the angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. 20 But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.”

Gabriel’s response shows us that Zacharias had lost faith.

Not his faith in God – but his *hope* in having a son.

He’d come to the place where he wouldn’t let himself believe any longer that God would bless him.

For this lack of faith, Gabriel tells him he will remain mute until the birth of his son.

There’s a great lesson in this for us – but since it’s our subject for this Sunday’s message – we’ll wait till then to find out what it is.

21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that

he lingered so long in the temple.

Once the priest had offered the incense at the golden altar, he was supposed to come forth from the holy place and put a blessing on the people.

As they waited and waited, Zacharias failed to make his appearance and they wondered what was going on.

22 But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

It was obvious something *supernatural* had happened to Zacharias but because he couldn't communicate with them they weren't sure what it was.

23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. 24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Zacharias went home after his week's duty in the temple was complete.

And in the course of time, Beth got pregnant & sequestered herself.

After all the years of barrenness, she wanted to make sure the pregnancy *took* & she didn't miscarry – an all too common occurrence in that time.

The eventual birth of her child would finally remove the stigma of barrenness that had plagued her & Zach for decades.

B. Jesus' Announcement 1:26-38

26 Now in the sixth month

That is, the 6th month of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

These are just location names to us, and for those who've visited Israel, Galilee conjures up pictures of lush greenery and fertile farmlands.

But the words "Galilee" & "Nazareth" carried a very different connotation for the people of that time.

Galilee *was* farmland, & for that very reason, compared to the urbane & sophisticated culture of Jerusalem, it was deemed backwards & illiterate.

The people of southern Israel considered Galilee to be ‘Hicksville.’

And Nazareth was the Oxnard of Galilee – the city with the worst reputation.

Nazareth wasn’t even really a formal city.

It was little more than a work camp for the major building project of the city of Sepphoris a few miles north.

Joseph & Mary lived there because that’s where the work was for a craftsman like Joseph.

God sent Gabriel to Nazareth with *another* birth announcement – this one even more important than John’s.

27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

There are 3 phases to a Jewish marriage.

- 1) **Engagement**, when the parents arrange for the marriage of their children.
- 2) **Betrothal**, when the two exchange formal vows to be wed in about a year’s time.
- 3) The **Wedding** when the groom comes for the bride and their union is sealed & consummated.

Joseph & Mary were betrothed, but they were not yet married.

The only way the union could be broken at this point was through a divorce.

28 And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” 29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

Mary’s reaction was not at all unexpected.

She was hearing words of the highest honor & praise from an angel whose glory is so great it had *struck terror* in a supremely holy man like Zacharias!!!

You see, according to the culture of that time, women were not esteemed as carrying *any* value.

Men certainly did not consider them worthy of the attention of God.

Yet here is Gabriel speaking words of the greatest regard for a young Jewish maiden.

Mary's reaction to Gabriel's greeting is a sign of the humility that marked this young woman.

30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.

Y'shua = Jehovah Saves.

32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

All of these were terms descriptive of that special One the Jews called *Messiah*.

34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

Mary's question was purely mechanical.

There was never any doubt with her that what Gabriel said would come to pass; the only issue was *how*.

35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

Gabriel makes it clear the conception will not take place through human agency; it will be a divine miracle of life kindled in her womb.

She will be the Mother, but God will be the Father.

36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible."

Gabriel then told Mary that her once barren cousin Elizabeth had also conceived.

Elizabeth's pregnancy was a kind of sign verifying for Mary that

her pregnancy was a sure thing.

38 Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Mary willingly submitted to God’s plan for her, even though doing so would mean difficulty & hardship at the hands of those around her who would think she’d cheated on Joseph.

And what about Joseph? How would her fiancé take the news of her pregnancy?

All of this was part of the cost of accepting God’s will.

Mary made her decision to embrace God’s plan, because she looked at life from the *eternal* rather than the *secular* perspective.

If all she cared about was the present, the here & now, she would have rejected the angel’s offer.

But she deferred her *present* pleasure & joy in favor of an eternity of it.

This is a perspective every Christian ought to adopt.

It is wiser to sacrifice the *moment for eternity* than to sacrifice *eternity for the moment*.

C. The Mothers Meet 1:39-56

39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

Mary hurried to Zach & Beth’s house to share with them the good news of Beth’s pregnancy.

41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said,

What Elizabeth says now is inspired by the Spirit and so, *prophetic*.

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things

which were told her from the Lord.”

Elizabeth became immediately aware that the child already growing in Mary was none other than the Lord.

Her son’s mission would be to act as His forerunner – preparing the way for Him.

46 And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. 49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. 50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones, And exalted *the* lowly. 53 He has filled *the* hungry with good things, And *the* rich He has sent away empty. 54 He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of *His* mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.”

As soon as Elizabeth ended her inspired greeting, Mary broke out in her own.

She was moved by the Spirit to speak about how God will bring justice & equity to Earth.

This was something both John & Jesus, were deeply concerned with – social justice & equity among men.

The women could see that their sons, the two greatest men in all Jewish history, were not announced & given to the rulers, to those who were considered the *somebodies* of that day.

They were announced & carried by an old barren woman & a young virgin; two of the *most* overlooked & underprivileged.

There’s a wonderful lesson in that for us.

We tend to look for the great things of God to come from those deemed the greatest among men.

We look to a Billy Graham or a Charles Colson, to a Ravi Zacharias or a Luis Palau to bring forth the next great move of God’s Spirit.

These men have had their day.

They've been used by God & continue to be a blessing as they follow the Lord.

But the hopes people place on them for some grand new move of God goes by without fulfillment.

I suspect the reason why is precisely because we're looking to **THEM**.

They're the Mark McQuires & Barry Bonds of the Christian world; the guys we *expect* to hit one over the right field fence.

So God brings His work through some *new* vessel, some unexpected & unlikely source.

It's not that God casts the former greats off – He still uses them. Just not in the same way He did when they began & made such bold advances in the Kingdom of God.

Think about it – from the Jewish perspective – could there have been any less likely candidates for the route through which the two greatest men of their history would come than Elizabeth and Mary?

Elizabeth was elderly & barren and bore the stigma of being childless.

Mary was a young, inexperienced woman who lived in Podunk in Hicksville County.

God chose them precisely *because* they were the kind of people the world does not esteem & overlooks when it comes to greatness.

Do you feel ill-equipped & disqualified to be used mightily by God?

That is the very quality God is looking for, for greatness!

Those who think themselves gifted & qualified are too full of themselves to be filled with the Spirit.

God does not ask for your ability – only your availability.

When He spoke to Mary – she simply accepted, & the rest is history.

The same is true for you & I today.

Listen to what Paul says to the Corinthians. (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the

world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence. ³⁰ But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—³¹ that, as it is written, “*He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*”

Whenever I hear about some well-known person coming to faith in Christ, I have mixed emotions.

On one hand I’m happy that they now have the promise of eternal life.

But on the other hand, I grow concerned at the large numbers of Christians who jump to the conclusion the celebrity’s conversion is going to have a great impact for good for the Kingdom. It *rarely* works that way.

Think about how many celebrities you’ve heard have come to Christ over the last 10 years – who’s really done anything remarkable for the Lord?

What we *do* hear about are the *unlikely men & women* God empowers with a new vision & uses them to bless thousands, even millions.

These people are almost always normal Christians who were just going about their lives when God anointed them & gave them extraordinary fruit.

In listening to the testimonies of these folk, for all of them, they simply came to a point at which they said in effect, “Why not give God my all. It’s not much to give but what I have, it’s all His.”

Mary’s song of praise in vs. 46-55 has over a dozen references to the OT.

Really, the entire thing is a lifting of various passages and weaving them into a new song of rejoicing in what God has done.

This means that though still young, probably no more than 14 or

15, she was a woman of the Scriptures.

It was this thorough equipping of the Word that had shaped her to become the vessel through which the Word Incarnate would come.

56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth till the end of her pregnancy – and what would be about 3 months into her own.

D. John's Birth 1:57-80

57 Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. 58 When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. 59 So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias.

Sons weren't named until the 8th day when the child was circumcised & officially welcomed into the covenant of Abraham.

Names were usually picked as descriptive labels for a child.

Parents might pick some event that took place near the child's birth to commemorate that event.

One child was named *Ichabod* which means "The glory has departed" because he was born when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines.

Or they might pick a name descriptive of some trait or feature of the child.

Laban means "blond."

The child might also be given a name that captured the parents hopes for the child – as when Elijah's parents named him.

Elijah means "Yahweh is God." He was born at a time when more and more people were turning to the worship of Baal, and his parents put their hopes in their son to mark a return to the God of Israel.

But if parents didn't use one of these other means to name their child, the kid would usually just adopt the father's or mother's name.

The people who'd come to celebrate John's birth thought for sure the parents would follow this practice and name his after his father.

60 His mother answered and said, “No; he shall be called John.” 61 But they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name.”

The crowd that had gathered round took exception to Elizabeth’s choice of monikers.

They did so because it wasn’t her job to pick the name; it was the father’s, and by so doing, formally accepting the child into his family.

Since Zacharias was mute, they all *assumed* Elizabeth & he had already worked this all out and that the boy would take Zacharias’ name.

When Elizabeth picked a different name, they were sure this was against the father’s wishes.

62 So 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.” So they all marveled.

The reason the people marveled is because in their thinking, it was Zacharias & Elizabeth who were special, not the son.

They knew this couple to be righteous, good people whom God had seen fit to bless after a long ordeal of barrenness.

But now that stigma has been taken away with a miracle birth – and to their thinking, it was Zacharias & Elizabeth who were the ones to be honored.

What better way to honor them than to give the kid his father’s name – and so commemorate his Father’s life and faith.

But Zacharias knew the truth – his son was destined to be far greater than he ever dreamed of being.

John was the forerunner of the Messiah – and if anything Zacharias’ faith had *faltered* when God spoke to him about the son to come.

Zacharias made it clear that the boy’s name was “John” and as soon as he did, the period of silence was over.

64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. 65 Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea.

What was talked about was all that Zacharias told them had transpired

in the temple on that fateful day a little over 9 months before when Gabriel appeared to him.

The word was out – the long awaited forerunner of the Messiah had been born.

That meant the Messiah had to be close behind.

66 And all those who heard *them* kept *them* in their hearts, saying, “What kind of child will this be?” And the hand of the Lord was with him.

All eyes were on John from the time he was an infant.

And as people watched him grow over the years, they were aware of the obvious fact that there was a special mission he would one day perform.

67 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: ⁶⁸ “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, ⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, ⁷⁰ As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who *have been* since the world began, ⁷¹ That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, ⁷² To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, ⁷³ The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴ To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, ⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. ⁷⁶ “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, ⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, ⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; ⁷⁹ To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

In a glorious peal of praise, Zacharias gathered several of the prophetic threads which had forecast the Mission of the Messiah & weaved them into a beautiful tapestry.

What's often missed here is how in v. 69 Zacharias, of the tribe of Levi & the house of Aaron, says that the Messiah will be from the house of David, of the tribe of Judah.

He knew his son was *not* the Messiah – only the one who went before the Messiah who will fulfill all the promises made to Abraham & his descendants.

80 So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Bible students & scholars have long wondered why John went to the desert.

The answer to that question was given a huge boost in the 50's when the site of *Qumran* was excavated by deVaux.

The *Dead Seas Scrolls* are associated with this community & present the picture of a group of people known as the *Essenes* who had forsaken the comfortable life of the city to make an austere communal life in the wilderness in preparation for the Messiah.

While some liberal scholars want to make John the Baptist an Essene, what we know about the beliefs of the Essenes would have made John a *heretic* among them.

What the Essenes at Qumran & other wilderness communal sites teach us is that there was a no small sense of *expectancy* on the part of the people that the Messiah was coming.

Hundreds believed it enough to forsake a comfortable life in the cities of Judea to live a simple & rigorous life in the desert.

John no doubt visited the Essene communities and his message of radical repentance in preparation for the Messiah would have been welcomed there.

But the Essenes were also given to some pretty wild spiritualization of the scriptures & they had a rule book for communal life that was quite extreme.

John's work wasn't to make a new structure or community like the Essenes.

His mission was merely *preparatory* – making things ready for the One who would come & usher in a *new* covenant & community.

[8 pictures of Qumran]

[1]

The Gospel of Luke. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

[2]

The Gospel of Luke. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.