

Luke 1 (Part 1)

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Title: Dealing with the miraculous!

As I start on Luke, I realize the first chapter is 80 verses. By the time I'll get through all my big picture comments, I figured two lessons are better. The text here covers two famous miracles: Jesus' birth and the birth of John the Baptist. Most of us know these stories well. I'd like us to consider miracles first: I realize few of us have seen miracles. My question is how should we handle them? The first generation of Israelites to come out of Egypt got to see the parting of the Red Sea but they turned from God in the wilderness. Miracles by themselves are rarely enough to change people's lives as we should develop a strong faith in what God wants to accomplish through our lives. The parents of John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph all believed strongly in God and the miracles they received stuck, in that they used them as God commanded! My point is to remind us that God works through those willing to do His will for making a difference for Him, despite our faults and regardless of any miracle we may have seen!

Before I get more into that let me discuss Luke himself. He was not one of the 12 apostles. Most likely he was converted by Paul (also not one of the original 12). He wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts. He never mentions himself in either book. Both were addressed to the same Roman official in the opening sentence. Given where the book of Acts ends, most likely Luke was in Rome when Paul waited for his trial before Caesar. I suspect that's when Luke organized his notes for his two books. Acts Chapter 15, Luke switches pronouns from "he and them" to "us". That is a clue when he entered the picture! Of the four gospel accounts, Luke is considered the best in research to accurately give history. His focus is on Jesus' humanity. He didn't give many Old Testament quotes. Of the four gospels, realize Matthew and John were two of Jesus' disciples. Mark was friends with Peter and that was his source. Luke probably interviewed those who interacted with Jesus and John the Baptist when Paul was locked up waiting for his trial in Israel before going to Rome! Again, while the Gospel of Luke nor Acts ever mention Luke by name, early church history and Paul's writings makes it obvious that he was the writer of both!

With all that out of my system, time to discuss the text itself. Most of us know the basic story: John the Baptist had parents who were too old to be parents (probably in their 60's) when John the Baptist came into the world. In Jewish society, it was looked down upon when one doesn't have children. The womb of his mother was closed so a miracle could happen of a baby born after menopause, (Remember in the book of Genesis Isaac was born when his parents were approaching 100!) John's father was a priest and did not have anything special about his background. He was on duty that week to work the temple. All the priests were required to work there two weeks a year and holidays. John's father was Zechariah. He was on duty and he got picked to burn incense. From what I studied the odds of getting picked is about 1 in 750!) Anyway here is this older priest: He goes into the temple by himself to do his duty when all a sudden, an angel is standing next to him! Like any person he was scared and didn't know what to say!

The father of John the Baptist (again Zechariah) was scared to death when he saw the angel. He let him speak his peace. In summary, the angel said, that God had heard his prayers to have a child, (my guess is he prayed for that for decades) and that son would be famous for leading people to the Messiah. The last book (chronologically) of the Old Testament in the final chapter mentions how Elijah will show up before the Messiah does. John denied that he was Elijah but it's pretty obvious he was sent in the power of Elijah with a similar mission. The fact John preached about the Messiah in the "middle of nowhere"

(desert area) that Jesus is coming soon (even though John probably didn't know Jesus was the Messiah until the baptism)! John grew in popularity at that time, and it is proof he was called to that mission!

I have to admit, my favorite part of the story is when Zechariah asked how do I know this will happen? After all, he was speaking to an angel who appeared out of nowhere! I picture the angel saying, isn't it obvious what I'm saying will happen? The angel said in effect, I am Gabriel (one of only two angels to be mentioned by name not counting Satan in the bible). Gabriel told Zechariah in effect you just blew it big time for not believing this is true! For that failure, Zechariah was told he'll be mute (and possibly deaf) for a while! I picture him outside of the temple after that event, frantically waving his arms trying to explain what happened. I can just see him going home after his service time was over and explaining to his wife, "Time for us to get "at it", as God said we're going to have a son!"

One of the fascinating things is you don't see Luke embellish the facts. He states information as if it is true and we should accept it as truth. Pretty much every detail of Jesus life and even John the Baptist's life is either stated bluntly or hinted at in the Old Testament. My point is the Bible's trustworthy and if one studies the evidence one can see that. Of course, I realize the Holy Spirit must open people's hearts or all the evidence in the world won't convince them!

As I state regularly, I know I'm preaching to devout Christians. You can read this lesson as a reminder that miracles do occur. I've known of people miraculously cured of cancer and other strong Christians who suffered horrible deaths. I can't explain why God does the things He does. Our job is to just pray for guidance and then make the best decisions we can with the information in hand! I don't ask God to do grand miracles for me! I ask God to keep His word to give us our daily bread (provide for me), and help me to forgive others, and protect me from evil. What He does over and above that is His business.

Speaking of God's business, it is time to talk about Jesus' birth. If you think about it, Jesus could have just magically appeared, said "I'm God, deal with it!" Why did God pick a Jewish "nobody" who was probably 14-15 years old to give birth to Jesus? I pondered is how is it possible for Mary to be related to Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist) since the text says Elizabeth was part of the tribe of Levi, and Mary and Joseph were both from the tribe of Judah? (For those who don't know, Israel was divided in 12 tribes, and I'm positive there was some mingling.) Most likely Mary's mother or grandmother was a Levite, and Mary's father was from the tribe of Judah. Bottom line, God picked who He picked. Isaiah 7:14 stated how the Messiah will be born to a virgin. The Hebrew word for virgin can also be used for a young maiden, but the Greek word (that is in the Greek Old Testament translation that was used for a few hundred years before Jesus) clearly means only virgin! The Gospels state how Jesus had a total of five half brothers and sisters, so Joseph and Mary had a regular family after His miracle birth!

One of the things I'm fascinated by is not all the things the angel told Mary came true. The angel stated He (Jesus) would rule from David's throne in Jerusalem. The text also states Elizabeth (John's mother) was six months pregnant at that time. The angel speaking to Mary stated that and I suspect Luke talked to people firsthand to get that information. It makes us get why Mary wanted to visit Elizabeth as soon as possible as she was the only other person who received a vision besides here. I'll discuss the visit in the next lesson. Remember there was probably a 40-plus year age difference between the two! Since the angel said Jesus would rule from Jerusalem it refers to His Second Coming!

OK time to stop "preaching to the choir" again, as I assume my readers already believe all that. What's the lesson here for us veterans besides the basic facts of the miraculous birth of both children? First, it is that we must accept that God works in our world and we must accept that. We don't know why He's allowing all the horrible tragedies to occur, but trust in God means trusting Him through the tough and

good parts of life! Reading these stories reminds us that He does interfere in our lives and if He did all that back then, it also means He wants to guide us through all that we are dealing with at this moment!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on the link for the detailed study. It's still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for everyone who reads this.