

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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LUKE 1:1-80

Ordinarily, I don't like visits to the doctor. It always bugs me when the nurse insists on me taking off my clothes. It seems no matter the ailment, the first words out of a nurse's mouth are, “Disrobe down to your underwear.”

It reminds me of the man who went to see his doctor with a sore throat. As soon as the nursed walked him into the waiting room, she ordered the man to undress. Although he objected, the nurse insisted, “*Its protocol!*”

After undressing the man looked over, and saw another fellow in the room. He was also sitting in his underwear... holding a box in his hands. The disgruntled patient looks at him, and mumbles, “This is so humiliating. All I've got is a soar throat and I have to take off my clothes.” The other guy shook his head, “Stop complaining, buddy, I only came to deliver a package.”

Oh my, the trials and tribulations of going to the doctor!

Yet over the next several months you and I are going to the doctor. We have an appointment with *Doctor Luke*. And we too, will be disrobed – not of our clothes – *don't worry*. But Luke will undress our *misconceptions*, and *false assumptions*, and *prejudices*. He introduces us to *the real-life Jesus*.

Luke was a Macedonian doctor, and a friend of Paul. In Colossians 4:14, Paul refers to him as “the beloved physician”. Many people believe Luke traveled with Paul as his personal physician. Luke's Gospel is full of medical terminology and details about Jesus' humanity that only a doctor would notice.

One author writes, “A pastor sees men at their best, a lawyer at their worst, but a doctor sees men as they are.” Luke focuses on the humanity of Jesus. He dispels any myths we might hold of Jesus not being truly human. Luke assures us Jesus was a *man*. Thus, He understands and can comfort men.

Luke prefaces his gospel in verse 1, “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us...” Luke refers to the other gospels. Authors Matthew and John were among Jesus' original disciples. Mark's gospel was Peter's account. The testimony of Jesus came from eyewitnesses.

But Luke was not only a doctor, he was a historian, thus he adds, “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 you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” Scholars suppose it was during the two years Paul was in prison in Caesarea that Luke researched his Gospel. From Caesarea he traveled to Galilee and Jerusalem - interviewing eyewitnesses and tracking down reports.

Imagine Luke's interviews with Mary, the shepherds, the Roman centurion, the officials in Pilate's court... Imagine a doctor speaking to Lazarus and the lame man who walked... Luke focuses on Jesus' childhood. He highlights the role of women. From Luke we learn the habits of Mary and Martha. Luke is the only Gospel who mentions the short guy, Zacchaeus. Luke's investigation must've been exhaustive. In fact, his Gospel includes over forty different facts that don't appear in any other Gospel. This is why Luke tells us he had a *"perfect understanding of all things from the very first."*

And Luke addresses his gospel to an individual named *"Theophilus."* Legend has it this was an ugly fellow. At his birth, the doctor said, *"This is the-awfulest looking baby I've ever seen."* *The-awfulist* - and the name stuck.

Seriously, Theophilus' title, *"most excellent"* was common among Roman officials. It could be that Luke's Gospel, and its sequel, the book of Acts, were actually written as part of Paul's legal defense before Caesar. That would mean Luke - *the longest Gospel* - was really a *legal brief*.

It's also possible that Theophilus was the rich man who funded Luke's Gospel. Ancient Roman art, and literature, and history were often supported financially by a wealthy benefactor. In return he was mentioned in the work by name. The books of Luke and Acts fit the pattern common at the time.

If this is true, it's interesting that the largest single contribution to the NT was brought to us by a rich Roman who used his money to fund God's work. At enormous personal cost, Theophilus came out of pocket to hire and subsidize a well educated doctor and historian to corroborate and compile an *"orderly account"* of the life of Jesus and the beginnings of the Church.

Who better than a doc to validate the healings? Who better than a historian to piece together a timeline? We owe Theophilus a huge debt of gratitude.

And Theophilus sets an example... Serving the Lord doesn't have to mean quitting your job and becoming a pastor or a missionary. It might mean getting really good at what you do - and becoming successful in the work place - and making lots and lots of money so you too can support God's work in the world. Trust me we could do so much more if we had a few Theophilus's at CC.

Luke too is an example... rather than dropping out of the university and attending Bible College, serving God might mean finishing your secular education... becoming a doctor or a historian - then using your skills for God.

Theophilus was a businessman. Luke was an academic. Both were successful in the secular realm, but they used their gifts for the glory of God.

Verse 5 begins Luke's account, *"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. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."* Zacharias and Elizabeth lived a *happy* and *holy* life. There was just one thing they lacked... verse 7, *"But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years."*

I've got a book by Jeff Foxworthy entitled, *"You're not a Kid anymore..."* The book provides suggestions for identifying when you're getting older... *"You're not a kid anymore*

when... you no longer laugh at Preparation H commercials... the family Christmas party is held at your house... the only reason you're awake at 4 AM is indigestion... you say the words, 'Turn that music down'... you enjoy watching the weather... you write thank-you notes without being told... 8 AM is your idea of sleeping in... you answer a question with, 'Because I said so!'... and you wear black socks with sandals..."

Well, Zacharias knew that he and Elizabeth were *no longer kids*. Zack was in his sixties. Liz was done with menopause. And they'd never had a baby. And understand, in Jewish culture *barrenness was a blight!* A woman without a child was considered cursed by God. She bore an awful stigma.

"So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense." In the first century there were so many Jewish priests they'd been divided up into 24 divisions. Each division served in the Temple for two weeks out of the year.

Some of the priests would tend the fire on the sacrificial altar. Others would prepare the lamb. Still others trimmed the lamp stand, or changed out the showbread. Perhaps the most important job fell to the three priests who attended to the altar of incense. This altar stood closest to the Holy of holies.

One priest cleared off the burnt ashes from the day before. Another priest would light the fire and heat up the coals. Then a third priest sprinkled incense over the coals as a symbol of the people's prayers to God. Most priests lived a lifetime without being chosen for this last, special honor. On this particular day, the lot fell to Zacharias.

Verse 11 "Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense." And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him." Remember angels are an ominous sight. They're not cute little cupids. They're heavenly warriors that strike fear in a man's heart.

"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." In Hebrew its "*Johanan*," which means, "*Yahweh is a gracious giver.*"

"And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink." This was one portion of a three-fold vow John would take for life. The angel tells Zacharias that John is to be a Nazirite. The vow of a Nazirite was a special sign of devotion. Numbers 6 outlines the vow. The Nazirite promised to *drink no wine, never shave, and avoid anything dead.*

He was the antithesis of what makes the world go round. Wine produces *physical pleasure*. Hair relates to *outward beauty*. Life-and-death is about *mortal glory*. The Nazirite's life showed that real pleasure is found in the **spiritual not physical**. Real beauty is **inward not outward**. Real glory is **eternal not temporal**. John's vow pointed men to the life God intended.

The vow of the Nazirite could be taken for a specific period of time, but three men in the Bible were life-long Nazirites – Samson, Samuel, and John.

And notice what else the angel says, "He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." John radiated spiritual power before he was potty trained. Even in

his mother's womb he was energized by the Spirit.

And that means if an unborn fetus can be filled with the Holy Spirit - then it is safe to assume God considers that fetus a legitimate human being. It's sad to think that in our country it's legal to *kill* who God can *fill*.

The angel continues speaking of John in verse 16, "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 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." John was like a basket of breadsticks or cheese fries. He was the appetizer - he set the stage for Jesus. John is often called "the forerunner."

And he carried out his ministry with the same fieriness and fearlessness as did Elijah. John was respected by adults and kids alike. John bridged the generation gap. All ages were attracted to boldness and genuine faith.

In verse 18 Zacharias responds to the angel. "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." Notice, Zach calls himself an "old man," but he doesn't dare call Liz an "old woman." He's more tactful when referring to his wife. He says, she's "well advanced in years." He's an old guy, not a dummy. He's learned a thing or two over the years.

And here's a lesson we can learn. There's *no* statute of limitations on our prayers. Zacharias and Elizabeth gave up praying for a baby, decades ago - but that sure didn't mean God had given up on answering those prayers.

Remember the occasion... Zacharias is in the Temple, in God's presence, by the altar, burning incense that represents the people's prayers - an angel appears to him to inform him that God is going to answer his prayers... yet Zacharias questions him, "How can this be? We're too old to have a baby!"

The angel takes offence! "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." In other words, "Do you have any idea who you're arguing with?" Zacharias has questioned the word of an archangel!

And Gabriel tells him in verse 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." If all Zacharias can do is *spout his doubt*, then God will shut him up. He was mute for 9 months.

Sadly, there're a lot of folks today who *shout their doubt*. It's a shame. If you can't say a positive, encouraging, faith-filled word - then you should mute it. Elizabeth Browning writes, "The one without faith should be silent." It's amazing how faith grows when you're forced to stop talking and just listen. The next words that fall from Zacharias lips will be words of praise.

"And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. 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." After a priest finished his work in the Temple he'd appear to the waiting worshippers and pronounce the

priestly blessing... Imagine Zacharias opening his mouth and nothing came out. Here he is on the Temple steps playing charades with the crowd – “*beckoning to them.*” They finally concluded he’d “*seen a vision.*”

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

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth...” This was the 6th month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. And what a busy year for Gabe - two miracle pregnancies in half-a-year!

Here he’s dispatched to Nazareth, “to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.”

Nazareth was a tiny Hebrew hamlet in the northern region of Galilee. In the first century it had a population of 50-60 people. It was the equivalent of a truck stop on a trade route. Joseph and Mary were rural, country-folk.

Mary was also a young girl – maybe a freshman in HS – and “*a virgin.*” If you question the meaning of the term – don’t. The Greek word “*parthenos*” is adamant. It’s “*a woman who’s never engaged in sexual intercourse.*”

Understand the virgin birth was strategic to God's plan for salvation. In order for Jesus to die as a substitute for our sin, He Himself had to be sinless. And since sin was passed down from our first father, Adam – to avoid Adam's sin Jesus had to be born fatherless. A virgin birth was a necessity.

A miracle occurred in Mary’s womb. The Spirit of God overshadowed the virgin – the seed of God mingled with a human egg. God became a man. His mother Mary made Jesus human. God’s Spirit made Him divine.

Notice too, Luke says Mary and Joseph were “*betrothed.*” In biblical times marriage consisted of three steps – *engagement*, *betrothal*, and *marriage*. A betrothed couple was legally bound to each other, but they lived separate lives domestically. They maintained their virginity until the wedding night.

Verse 28 “And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” Notice, Gabriel doesn't say, “Blessed are you *above* women,” just “*Blessed are you among women.*” Mary was a special woman, but a woman nonetheless. She was not a goddess. She is not someone who can add influence to our prayers. She doesn’t mediate between man and God. She was simply a young girl who found favor in the eyes of God.

One of the reasons I am a *Protestant*, is that I’m *protesting* what official Roman Catholic doctrine has done to Mary. It’s taken this beautiful, simple young girl and weighed her down with all kinds of mythological baggage. Mary was not a perpetual virgin as Catholicism teaches. According to Matthew 13:55 she and Joseph had at least six kids after Jesus was born. She holds no office or clout in heaven. According to 1Timothy 2:5 there is only “*one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*”

Mary was never sinless. She wasn’t immaculately conceived. She didn’t ascend into heaven. We don’t refer to Mary as “*our Lady*” – in contrast to Jesus as “*our Lord.*” She was a

lady, a lovely lady, but she's no "our Lady." "Notre Dame" or "Our Lady" might mean good football, but its bad theology. Roman Catholics have fumbled the ball by elevating Mary in unbiblical ways. I'm sure Mary is embarrassed, and if she was here she'd tell them to *stop it right now!*

In verse 29 Mary responds to the angel. "But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS." The Hebrew word is "Yeshua" or "Joshua." It means "Yahweh is salvation." What a fitting name for the Savior.

And Gabriel discusses Jesus' future, "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. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Gabe identifies Jesus as God's Son and David's Son.

In Hebrew thought the son of a dog *is a dog...* The son of a man *is a man...* That means "*the Son of the Highest*" is God... Jesus was divine.

And as *Son of David*, Jesus inherited all God's promises to David. This means Jesus will sit on Israel's throne and reign forever. The Hebrews called David's future successor "*Anointed One*" or "*Messiah*." In Greek it's "*Christ*."

Today Israel is a democracy. But when Jesus returns He'll reign supreme. From Jerusalem, He'll hold eternal sway over all the nations of the world.

Gabriel's prediction of the Child's future was a mouthful. It spans ages and its implications are global. But Mary was still stuck on the early revelation... She was going to have a baby, and Mary knew what it took to have a baby. "Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

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." Here's genetic engineering of the highest order. How this happened we're not sure, but Luke assures us the paternity test – the DNA evidence – would've pointed to God. It's been said, "*You grasp this miracle not by figuring, but by faith.*"

In verse 36 the angel says to Mary, "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." Elizabeth was probably Mary's cousin. And Liz was a model for Mary. Both women were in the midst of miracle pregnancies.

And both believed verse 37, "*For with God nothing will be impossible.*"

Pastor Chuck says that the two most important verses in the Bible are John 5:30, "*I can of myself do nothing...*" and this verse, "*with God nothing is impossible.*" Always keep these two verses in tandem. Of myself I'm vulnerable, but with God I am invincible. In Christ, all things are possible!

"Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her." To me, Mary's response to the angel may be the greatest expression of devotion in history. Here's a 14 to 15 year old girl - her whole life is turned topsy-turvy. Her marriage plans are interrupted. Her life's trajectory is altered forever. Suddenly, Mary's once secure future is in turmoil... what will Joseph say?

Yet Mary replies with unflinching, unrestrained, unconditional surrender! "*Let it be to me according to your word.*" If God chose to redirect the course of your life – spin you around on a dime - would you be game? Would you be so quick to make *God's word your will*? Mary was totally yielded to God.

Verse 39 tells us "*Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.*" Mary's will was quick to yield, but her mind had a lot to mull over. She decided to travel south and spend some time with Elizabeth.

This also took some pressure off Mary, a young virgin maiden. The more pregnant she showed, the more stares she was getting from the townsfolk.

"*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.*" Here's an example of prenatal revelation. John leaped in Elizabeth's womb when he sensed he was in the presence of the Messiah. Liz got a kick in the ribs.

Apparently, the unborn baby isn't just mentally aware, and emotionally cognizant – but he's also spiritually sensitive. He's human in every sense. It's so sad today. Four month old preemies are saved in one hospital, while the clinic down the street murders eight month old, completely viable babies. Oh, that more parents were filled with the Spirit not their own selfishness.

When the Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth, she prophesied words from God. "*Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."* What an encouragement this was to Mary. Back home in Nazareth no one understood her predicament, or even believed her story. But her cousin not only believed she was living her own miracle. Mary had faith, but it's a great joy when someone affirms your faith.

And it was Elizabeth's affirmation that prompted Mary's song. "*And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord..."* Mary was so elated she explodes in praise! She sings a song. Today it's known as the "*Mary's Magnificat.*"

"*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.*" Note, rather than claim sinless perfection Mary mentions her "*lowly state.*" She was a sinner like the rest of us.

"*For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.*

He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty." In short, God is the God of the underdog! He shakes up the status quo. At times He turns the tables on the *haves* - and chooses to bless the *have-nots*. Mary was the classic example. A girl, barely out of Middle School, is chosen for the honor to mother the Messiah.

And Mary's words are quite controversial. Wherever they're read they upset the apple cart... William Temple was a missionary to India. Despite opposition the locals were coming to Jesus. But Temple was concerned about further angering the authorities, so he asked his fellow missionaries not to read Mary's provocative song. He knew how this song threatened the status quo. Temple knew the revolutionary nature of all true praise!

Mary ends her song with a bang! Verse 54 "He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." Mary and Elizabeth must've searched the Scriptures. She saw the birth of her Son as the fulfillment of God's ancient covenant to Abraham. Jesus was the seed through which salvation would come.

"And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house. Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. 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."

Since God gave new names to Abram and Sarai when He instituted circumcision, the rabbis thought it was appropriate to name their boys at the time of their circumcision. It was a Jewish custom. But it wasn't customary for Jews to name a son after his father. There must've been a special reason why everyone expected Zacharias to do so.

But that's when "His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father - what he would have him called." Recall Zacharias couldn't talk. It could be he couldn't hear. That seems to be the implication. They're communicating with him through signs.

And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John."

So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. 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." The miraculous events surrounding John's birth caused the people to know that God had special plans for this young man! They kept their eye on him!

Verse 67 "Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people..." Remember, what brought on Zacharias' sentence of silence was a *word of doubt*. Nine months later he breaks his silence with a *word of praise*! Apparently, one of the best ways to cure a cynical attitude is to shut-up for awhile and spend some time meditating on God's greatness.

Chapter 1 ends with two hit tunes - Mary's song, "The Magnificat" - and here Zacharias' song. It's called "The Benedictus" or "The Blessing."

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began..." Zacharias has just named his baby, but the focus of his prophecy is Mary's Child. God raised up Jesus as "a horn of salvation."

“That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.”

"And you, child (now he speaks to his own son), will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways... John was Messiah's advance-man. His job was to prepare the nation.

And “to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Here’s one of the most beautiful names for Jesus in all the Scriptures, "*the Dayspring*" or "*sunrise*."

When we started the church 30 years ago we thought about calling it “Dayspring Fellowship.” I love this name for Jesus. He’s the perfect sunrise!

Our world was shrouded in darkness from the first man onward. But Jesus brings the first glimmers of morning light. He dispels the shadows. He warms all He touches. Jesus is *the dawning of a new day* for those who follow Him.

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