

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## LUKE 1:1-80

Ever go to the doctor, and the nurse takes you into the exam room, and tells you to undress? I mean, you go in for a sore throat and you're asked to disrobe down to your underwear... *It's office protocol!*

Well, once a man was taking off his clothes, when he looked over and noticed another fellow sitting there in his underwear - holding a cardboard box in his hands.

The guy who was undressing mumbles, "This is so humiliating. All I've got is a sore throat and I have to take off my clothes." The other man shook his head, "Stop complaining, buddy, I only came in to deliver a package..." *Oh my, the travails of visiting the doctor.*

Yet over the next few months we'll be visiting the doctor. We have an appointment with Doctor Luke. And we too will be disrobed, not of our clothes (*don't worry*), but of misconceptions and false assumptions. The good Dr. Luke will introduce us to *the real-life Jesus*.

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

One author wrote, "A pastor sees men at their best, a lawyer at their worst, but a doctor sees men as they are." Dr. Luke focused on the humanity of Jesus.

His Gospel dispels any myths we might have of Jesus not being truly human. He assures us Jesus was a *man*, and thus can understand and comfort all 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 knew he was not the only gospel writer. John and Matthew were among Jesus’ original disciples. Mark’s gospel was Peter’s account. Luke’s record was just one of several eyewitness testimonies of Jesus.

But it was a reliable one. Luke was not only a doctor, but a first-rate historian. 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.”

It was probably during the two years Paul spent in prison in Caesarea that Luke researched his Gospel. From Caesarea he traveled to Galilee and Jerusalem, interviewing eyewitnesses and tracking down stories.

Imagine Luke interviewing **Mary** over a cup of coffee, or by a campfire talking with the **shepherds**, or questioning **Nicodemus**, or examining the **Roman centurion**, and **officials** who served in Pilate’s court...

Dr. Luke spoke to **Lazarus** who Jesus raised from the dead - and **the lame man** He caused to walk...

Luke focuses on Jesus' childhood. He highlights the role of women in Jesus' ministry. It's from Luke that we learn of the habits of Mary and Martha. Luke is the only Gospel author who mentions *the wee one*, Zacchaeus.

Luke's investigative reporting was exhaustive. His Gospel includes forty different facts that don't appear in the other Gospels. This is why Luke said he had "*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...*" and the name stuck!

Seriously, Theophilus' title, "*most excellent*" was common among Roman officials. Which has led some to believe Luke's Gospel, and its sequel, the book of Acts, were part of Paul's legal defense. That means Luke, *the longest Gospel*, was actually 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 paid for by wealthy contributors. In return they were mentioned in the work by name. The books of Luke and Acts fit the pattern.

If this is true; then the largest single book in the NT was brought to us by a rich Roman who funded God's work. At enormous cost, out of his own pocket, Theophilus hired and subsidized a well educated doctor and historian named Luke to corroborate and compile an "*orderly account*" of the life and

teachings of Jesus, and the beginnings of the Christian Church.

*Who better than a doctor to validate a healing? Who better than a historian to piece together a timeline?*

We owe Theophilus a huge debt of gratitude.

*And Theophilus sets an example...* Serving God doesn't have to mean quitting your job and becoming a full-time minister. It might mean becoming successful and using your resources to advance God's work.

*Luke* is also an example here... rather than dropping out of the university to pursue his religious zeal, he finished his education and became both a doctor and a historian - and thus was able to use his skills for God.

**Theophilus** was a businessman. **Luke** was an academic. Both men were successful in the secular realm, and put their gifts to work 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." This priestly couple lived a *happy* and *holy* life. There was just one thing they lacked...

"But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years."

According to comedian Jeff Foxworthy, 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 channel... you write thank-you notes without being told... waking up at 8 AM is sleeping in... and when you answer a question, *'Because I said so!'*...

Well, Zach and Liz were no longer kids. He was in his sixties. She was past menopause. **And they'd never had a baby!** Which in Jewish culture was a terrible blight! Barrenness was considered a curse from God Himself. Elizabeth had to bear 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 Temple priests they were divided up into 24 divisions. Each group served for two weeks per year.

Some of the priests tended the fire on the sacrificial altar. Other men prepared the lambs. Still other priests trimmed the lamp stand, or changed the sacred bread.

Perhaps the most important job fell to the three priests who attended to **the altar of incense** - the altar that stood closest to the Holy of holies... One priest cleared off the ashes from the day before. The second priest lit the flame and heated the coals. While 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.” Recall an angel is an ominous sight. Angels aren’t cute little cupids. They are heavenly warriors that strike fear in the hearts of men.

“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...**” Here’s an important lesson. **There is no statute of limitations on our prayers.** For many years this couple had prayed for a child. *For decades perhaps!* I’m sure there were times when they gave up praying, but God had never given up on answering.

“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.”

Zacharias is to name his son, “*John.*” In Hebrew “**Johanan**” means “**Yahweh is a gracious giver.**”

And the fact he was not to drink alcohol was one part of a three-fold vow John would take for life. He was to be a Nazirite. This was a special vow of devotion outlined in Numbers 6. The Nazirite promised to *drink no wine, to never shave, and to avoid anything dead.*

Which was the antithesis of what this world values. Wine is about *physical pleasure...* Well-groomed hair is about *outward beauty...* Death is about *fading glory.*

The Nazirite showed that real pleasure is found in the **spiritual not physical...** Real beauty is **inward not outward...** And real glory is **eternal not temporal.** John's vow pointed society to the life God intended!

The vow of the Nazirite was usually taken for a specific duration 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 Elizabeth's womb he was energized by the Spirit of the living God...

And if an unborn fetus can be filled with the Holy Spirit; then I'm certain we can assume that God considers that fetus a legitimate human being. It's sad 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.**"

The angel makes several statements about John...

**First**, he'll be like a basket of breadsticks or cheese fries. He comes before the main course. John was the appetizer for Jesus! He's often called "**the forerunner.**"

**Second**, he carried out this ministry with the same fieriness and fearlessness as the OT Prophet Elijah.

And **third**, John was respected by adults and kids alike. He bridged the generation gap... Hey, people of all ages are 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, Zacharias calls himself an "old man," but he's no dummy. He doesn't dare call Elizabeth an "old woman." He's more tactful with his wife's age. She's "well advanced in years."

Now remember the occasion, Zacharias is in the Temple, burning incense that represents Israel's prayers - when an angel informs him that God is going to answer his prayers... yet Zacharias questions God, "How can this be? We're too old to have a baby!"

And God's messenger takes offense! "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 is questioning the word of God's 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'll be mute for nine months.



And sadly, I know people who are also good at *spouting their doubt*. Hey, if you can't say a positive, encouraging, faith-filled word - then put it on mute. It's been said, "[The one without faith should be silent.](#)"

And it's amazing how faith grows when you're forced to stop talking and listen. Interestingly, 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 the Temple priest had finished his work he would appear to the waiting worshippers and pronounce the priestly blessing. Imagine though, when Zacharias opened his mouth, nothing came out. He's on the Temple steps playing charades - ["\*beckoning to them.\*"](#) They finally concluded he has ["\*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 sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Gabriel is called on to oversee two miracle pregnancies!

This time he's dispatched to Nazareth, a tiny Hebrew village, in the northern region of Galilee, "to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary."

Mary was a young girl - think of a freshman in High School - maybe 14-15 years old. She was "a virgin."

And there's no question as to the meaning of the term. The Greek word "parthenos" clearly means "a woman who has never engaged in sexual relations."

The virgin birth of Jesus was strategic in God's plan for salvation. In order to die as a substitute for our sin, the Savior 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 without a human father.

Thus, a virgin birth was a theological necessity.

A miracle occurred in Mary's womb. God's Spirit overshadowed the virgin - the seed of God mingled with a human egg. God became 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; then marriage.

The betrothal was a time to prepare for married life.

A betrothed couple would be legally bound to each other, while living 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!” Note, 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.

Mary was not divine. Or even a human who can add influence to our prayers. She doesn't mediate between us and God. She was simply a girl who found favor in God's eyes, and was called to a very special purpose.

One of the reasons I'm a *Protestant* is that I'm *protesting* what Roman Catholicism has done to Mary. It's taken a beautiful, simple young lady and weighed her down with all kinds of mythological baggage...

Mary was not a **perpetual virgin**. Matthew 13:55 tells us she had at least six children after Jesus... She holds no office or **clout in heaven**. 1 Timothy 2:5 there is only “**one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...**” She wasn't **sinless...** or **immaculately conceived...** nor did she **ascend into heaven**.

And we don't refer to Mary as “**our Lady**” in contrast to Jesus as “**our Lord**.” Mary was a *lady*, a *lovely lady*, but she was no “*our Lady*.” “**Notre Dame**” which means “**Our Lady**” makes good football, but it's bad theology.

Roman Catholicism elevates Mary in unbiblical ways. And I'm sure she's in heaven today embarrassed over what's happened. Mary would tell us to focus on Jesus.

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.” It’s “Yeshua” in Hebrew. And it means “Yahweh is salvation.” What a fitting name for a 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.” Jesus is identified as **son of God** and **son of David**.

And understand this from a Jewish mindset... In Hebrew thought the son of a dog *is a dog*... While the son of a man *is a man*... Which means “*the Son of the Highest (or God)*” is God. Mary’s son was divine.

As the Son of God, Jesus was God Himself.

And as *Son of David* Jesus inherited all God’s promises to David. He’ll sit on Israel’s throne and reign forever... The Hebrews called David’s future successor “*The Anointed One*” or “*Messiah*.” In Greek it’s “*Christ*.”

Today Israel is a democracy. But when Jesus returns He will reign supreme. From His throne in Jerusalem, He’ll hold eternal sway over all nations for all time.

Gabriel’s prediction of this Child’s future was a mouthful. It spanned ages and had global implications. *But Mary was still stuck on the earliest 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 is beyond our ability to comprehend, but that it did is without question. Luke assures us the paternity test - the DNA evidence - would point to God.

It's been said, "You grasp this miracle not by figuring, but by faith." Faith goes where understanding ends.

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 likely Mary's cousin.

And she was a model for Mary. Both women were in the midst of miracle pregnancies. Now both believed verse 37, "For with God nothing will be impossible."

I've heard it said 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 those two verses in tandem. Of myself I'm vulnerable, but with God I become invincible.

"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. Imagine, a young girl - *she hasn't even been to the prom* - and now her whole life flips topsy-turvy.

Her marriage plans are interrupted. She's to have a child. Her life's trajectory is forever altered. Overnight her secure future is in turmoil... *what will Joseph say?*

Yet she replies with unflinching, unconditional surrender!  
***"Let it be to me according to your word."***

If God chose to suddenly redirect the course of your life - to spin you around on a dime - would you be as willing as Mary? Would you be this quick to make *God's word your will*? Mary was totally yielded to God.

Verse 39, ***"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. And this took some pressure off. The more pregnant Mary showed, the more stares she'd get and the more questions she'd be asked.

***"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."*** 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, an unborn baby isn't just *mentally aware*, and *emotionally cognizant*, and *physically viable*, but most important he or she is spiritually sensitive.

An unborn child is human in every sense.

It's sad that today four month old premies are saved in the hospital, while a neighboring clinic murders eight month old, fully viable babies. Oh, that all parents were filled with the Spirit, not with despair or selfishness.

And when God's Spirit came upon Elizabeth, "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." Wow, what an encouragement these words had to be to Mary...

Back home in Nazareth no one believed her story or understood her plight. But her cousin not only believes, she's living out her own miracle... Mary had faith, but it's a great joy when another believer affirms your faith.

And it's Elizabeth's affirmation that prompts Mary's song. "And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord..."

Mary is so elated she explodes in praise! She sings a song. Today it's known as "Mary's Magnificat." It's the longest set of words spoken by a woman in the NT.

"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." God favored Mary not because of some sinless

perfection, but in spite of her *“lowly state.”* **His blessing was a result of grace.**

*“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. He turns the tables on the *haves* - and blesses the *have-nots*.

And Mary was the classic example. A girl, barely out of Middle School, is chosen to mother the Messiah.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who stood up to the Nazis and was eventually executed. He called Mary's Magnificat *“the most passionate, the wildest... the most revolutionary hymn ever sung.”*

In her song Mary doesn't just sing God's praise, but like Bonhoeffer she calls out exploitive systems and corrupt politicians. She takes aim at the rich and proud.

Interestingly, in first century Rome only 2-3% of the population was considered **“rich.”** Everyone else was impoverished. Here, Mary takes on the one percenters.

I recently read an article on the Magnificat, where author DL Mayfield, wrote, *“In all my long years of being in church, of knowing the Christmas story backward and forward, I never heard these verses emphasized. Here, Mary comes across less like a scared and obedient 15-year-old and more like a rebel intent on reorienting unjust systems. I loved this Mary.”*



[Where had she been all my life?](#)” We don’t often think of Mary crusading for social justice, but here she is...

Over the centuries and around the world wherever Mary’s words are read they stir up controversy and upset the apple cart... In the past, countries like India, Argentina, Guatemala have banned Mary’s Song from being read in public. It’s a threat to the status quo!

Apparently, Mary was carrying a Savior who wasn’t just concerned with salvation from sin, but salvation from systemic poverty and political oppression as well.

If you’re concerned with racial injustice or political oppression you have a friend in Mary and her Son.

And she ends her Magnificat 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 had searched the Scriptures and found where the birth of her Son would fulfill God’s covenant with the Jewish patriarch Abraham. Jesus was the seed of God’s salvation.

Verse 56, **“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.”**

In Jewish tradition a boy’s naming occurred at his circumcision. *And though it wasn’t customary, for some*

reason everyone expected Zacharias to name his son after himself - the Hebrew equivalent of Zacharias, Jr.

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. *And it could be he couldn't hear either.* Thus, they communicated through signs. "And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John."

And the moment the old priest penned "John," **thus obeying the Lord**, his speech returned. "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 Zacharias' son! The people kept their eye on John!

Remember, Zacharias' silence had been brought on by his doubt. But his belief and obedience now creates a stream of praise... There're two hit songs in Luke 1. Mary's Magnificat, and what follows here, Zacharias' song. What the Church calls "**Benedictus**" or "**Blessing**."

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, 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 boy, but the focus of his song is on Mary’s Son.

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.”

Notice, God’s intent is that we serve Him “**without fear.**” In this time of the Covid virus we should be smart. Let’s wash our hands, and keep our distance, wear a mask when it’s wise to do so - but God doesn’t want us living in fear. We’re to serve Him **without fear!**”

“**And you, child** (now he speaks to his own son, John), **will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways...** John’s job will be to prepare the nation for Jesus’ coming. He’ll be the Messiah’s advance man.

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 Scripture - "*the Dayspring*" or "sunrise."

Our world has been shrouded in darkness from the sin of the first man onward. But Jesus came into the world to shine the first glimmers of morning light. He dispels the shadows and warms all He touches. Jesus is *the dawning of a new day* for those who follow Him.

Before we settled on the name "*Calvary Chapel*," we thought about calling the church "*Dayspring*." I still like that name. Our Lord has risen over this dark world.

The Chapter closes speaking of John. "*So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.*"

We'll catch up with John again in Chapter 3...