

## Contexts

### Luke's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Part of a 2 volume work (together with The Acts of the Apostles).
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Century tradition names the work for Luke and claims he was the same person as the companion of Paul. However, there are significant differences between Paul's writing and what appears in Luke about Paul's writing which seems to suggest that the author of Luke was not the Luke referred to in Paul's letters.
- Author is clearly an educated man and a city-dweller, not a country-sider.
- Sources include Mark's Gospel and the Q source and a good deal of other material.
- From Mark: the narrative detail about Jesus' life
- From Q, the 'sayings' (teachings) of Jesus.
- Don't really know where the other material comes from, e.g. the infancy & childhood narratives.
- Work is addressed to "Theophilus" which means, "Lover of God" – this could be a specific individual, or simply every Christian.
- An ordered account of life of Jesus and apostles
- **Structure of Luke's Gospel**  
Following the author's preface addressed to his patron and the two birth narratives (John the Baptist and Jesus), the gospel opens in Galilee and moves gradually to its climax in Jerusalem

A brief preface addressed to Theophilus stating the author's aims;

1. Birth and infancy narratives for both Jesus and John the Baptist, interpreted as the dawn of the promised era of Israel's salvation;
2. Preparation for Jesus' messianic mission: John's prophetic mission, his baptism of Jesus, and the testing of Jesus' vocation;
3. The beginning of Jesus' mission in Galilee, and the hostile reception there;
4. The central section: the journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus knows he must meet his destiny as God's prophet and messiah;
5. His mission in Jerusalem, culminating in confrontation with the leaders of the Jewish Temple;
6. His last supper with his most intimate followers, followed by his arrest, interrogation, and crucifixion;
7. God's validation of Jesus as Christ: events from the first Easter to the Ascension, showing Jesus' death to be divinely ordained, in keeping with both scriptural promise and the nature of messiahship, and anticipating the story of Acts.

### Luke 24: 46-53 – things to notice

- These are the last verses of Luke's Gospel.
- Even though in Acts 1:3 Luke says that the Ascension takes place 40 days after the resurrection, in his Gospel the Ascension takes place at the end of Easter Day. The reason for the difference between these 2 tellings of the same story is that in his Gospel Luke is providing a 'doxological' ending – an ending with the worship of the disciples. In the Acts of the Apostles Luke is providing an 'ecclesiastical' (church community-based account) about how the Church 'must leave the posture of joyful worship to travel the highways of the world with the Good News'. (NJBC)
- This Sunday's Gospel is the final part of the story about the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The disciples have returned to Jerusalem and are sharing the story of

what happened to the on the road with the rest of the community – that is, not just the 11. While they are talking, Jesus suddenly appears, wishes them 'Peace' and eats with them.

- then Jesus opens the minds of the other disciples (just as he had for the 2 on the road) to understand the scriptures
- This Sunday's Gospel then begins at verse 46: "So you see now that it was written that
  1. the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead, and
  2. that repentance & forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem
- You are witnesses of these things & I am sending down to you what the Father has promised (ie the power of Holy Spirit). Jesus is commissioning the disciples to preach repentance & forgiveness to the world, fuelled with the power of the Spirit – as becomes clear in the Acts of the Apostles.
- Stay here (in Jerusalem) until you are clothed with power from on high.
- Then he took them (led them out) to Bethany (where Martha, Mary & Lazarus lived), about 2.4km from Jerusalem. Luke uses the Exodus theme.
- He blesses them (the only time Jesus blesses people in Luke) and withdraws and is taken up to heaven. 'At the conclusion of the liturgy of his life Jesus blesses the disciples'. NJBC
- The disciples worshipped him (this is the only time in Luke's Gospel where the disciples worship Jesus – at last they understand who he really is) and return to Jerusalem with great joy where they wait for what has been promised 'continually in the temple blessing God'.
- Note the disciples unexpected response of 'joy' even though Jesus is leaving them.
- These are the final verses of Luke's Gospel.
- There is an echo of the story of Old Testament Prophet Elijah, who as he ascends to heaven sends down a double share of his spirit on Elisha his servant.
- Note that Luke's Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the centre from which the faith will spread to other nations. The Gospel also begins and ends in the Temple – for Luke, the place of continuity between the old and the new.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

We hear both of Luke's accounts of the Ascension this Sunday. The version Luke gives in the Acts of the Apostles is the first reading.

The feast of the Ascension commemorates the return of Jesus to the Father. Jesus leaves in the body but remains with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

According to the pattern suggested in Luke, it occurs 40 days after the Resurrection, that is, on a Thursday. However, in many places (including Australia) the Feast is now transferred to the following Sunday. We will celebrate the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit in next week's feast of Pentecost (the fiftieth and last day of the Easter Season). Traditionally, the 9 days in between were a 'novena' of prayer in preparation for the celebration of Pentecost. This idea is still preserved in the special prayers and readings for masses between Ascension and Pentecost.

The true meaning of the Ascension is not in Jesus' leaving, but in his sending of the Holy Spirit, the one who will "clothe them in power".

The Feast of the Ascension proclaims that there is a life beyond that which we see and experience here; a life that we will all share in fully at the end of time. That awareness can bring a good perspective to the way we live our lives.

Next Sunday we will celebrate the feast of Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus remains present to the Church for all time. That Spirit is the presence of God which we carry within us and which enables us to be in communion with the Father and the Son, sharing their life.

Ever since Easter, we have been proclaiming that Jesus is alive. We have been listening to the stories of the first groups of disciples as they witnessed and preached the Good News. The feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost help us to realise that we are part of that long tradition of faithful disciples and our task is to witness to and preach the way of Jesus in every thought, word and action. That is both our gift and our ministry, in Jesus' name, to the world.