

Contexts

Luke's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Part of a 2 volume work (together with The Acts of the Apostles).
- 2nd 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.

Luke 1:26-38 – things to notice

- The gospel is the story of the Annunciation by the angel to Mary.
- Mark has no account of how Jesus came to be born so the church uses Luke's account this Sunday.
- Note how Luke (a masterful story-teller) sets the scene; note the detail in the story; note the dialogue between Mary and the angel.
- Though the whole scene is extraordinary, the conversation between Mary and the angel flows quite naturally.
- 'The angel Gabriel...' – identified in Jewish tradition as the guardian angel of Israel. Also mentioned in the books of Enoch and Daniel. angels are often messengers and 'explainers' of god's intentions/actions in Jewish literature.
- 'sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth' – situates the vision in a concrete place according to the events Luke has already spoken about.
- 'appeared to Mary...' – the precise form of this 'appearing' is not clear. May have been in a dream, or a moment of deep contemplation. It is not necessarily a physical appearance, though Luke paints it as such, perhaps lending greater credibility to the story by grounding it in physical reality.
- 'to a virgin betrothed to a man called Joseph..' 'virgin' imply means an unmarried girl of marriageable age. It does not imply physical virginity. The age of marriage was usually between puberty and 20. Commonly 16 for men and 14 for women.
- 'Joseph of the house of David...' – situates Joseph within the royal line of David to help fulfil some of the Old Testament prophecies about the messiah.
- 'virgin's name was Mary' – notice how Luke is filling out the details for us.

- 1st announcement: 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' Note the words.
- Mary is deeply disturbed – who wouldn't be!
- 'asked herself what this greeting could mean' – already an allusion to Mary's deeply thoughtful/contemplative response which will characterise Luke's portrayal of her.
- 'Mary, do not be afraid' – the angel is deeply reassuring about Mary's disturbance and uncertainty.
- 'You have won God's favour...' – further reassurance that Mary is at rights with God who recognises her as a good person.
- 2nd announcement: 'Listen, you are to conceive...' – Mary's mission to be bearer of a son who is to be named Jesus (a common Hebrew name meaning 'deliverer' or 'rescuer').
- Jesus' mission unfolded: Son of the most high; rule over the house of Jacob; throne of David; his reign will have no end.
- Mary's questioning response: 'But how, since I am a virgin?' Reveals a very practical Mary alongside the deeply thoughtful Mary. Never the less, it seems a strange question given Mary's betrothal to Joseph.
- Betrothal in biblical times carried with it the right to cohabitation and therefore sexual intimacy. But Luke makes clear in the story of the annunciation to Joseph that he and Mary were not cohabitating.
- The angel's answer: The Holy Spirit will come upon you; God's shadow will cover you, indicate God's fatherhood of Jesus. 'Covering' and 'uncovering' are sometimes used in OT as euphemisms for sexual relations. Being overshadowed by God is used in other places to indicate God's love and protection.
- 'So the child will be holy and will be called Son of God' – underlines God's fatherhood of Jesus.
- 3rd announcement: Elizabeth's conception of John the Baptist. A remarkable event after so many years of barrenness. Demonstrates the power of God ('Nothing is impossible to God').
- Mary's response: 'Let it be done, for I am God's servant'. Indicate Mary's openness and response to God's invitation and will for her, despite her questions and hesitations.

The Liturgical Context

The idea of God's dwelling place is very much at the heart of this Sunday's readings.

Reflection

The great Christmas feast is almost here. As always in Advent, what is promised in the first reading is brought to fulfilment in the Gospel reading. We began Advent with the cry, 'Come, Lord Jesus'. We will end it with the joyful shout, 'God is with us!'

In the first reading King David wants to build a house (temple) for God, but God says that, instead, God will build David and his descendants into a great house. God is not about building temples to himself and it's not dwelling-places made of wood or stone that God wants. God is about building a dwelling-place in human flesh. God is about building a people among whom and in whom he can live.

In the Gospel, Mary accepts God's invitation to make herself into a dwelling place for God by receiving Christ and God makes his dwelling-place in her human flesh. Through her God has come to live permanently in humanity.

That is what we, too, are about – making ourselves into a living dwelling place for Christ. The great gift of Jesus to the world is not meant to be frozen in one moment of time. Through us, that Gift is made present in every moment of history so that through us Christ is able to continue to touch, to hold and to heal the world.

The Season of Advent

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| 1. Stay Awake! | 3. Rejoice! |
| 2. Prepare! | 4. Receive! |