

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;
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 23: 1-49 (short form) – things to notice

- The overriding themes of Luke's passion story concern the loving fidelity to God of Jesus, the suffering, innocent righteous one, who to his dying breath extends God's mercy to sinners
- The story is divided into 4 sections:
 1. The wronged and righteous Jesus is handed over to crucifixion (23:1-25)
 2. Jesus the rejected prophet calls for repentance (23:26-31)
 3. Jesus among sinners prays for forgiveness (23:32-34)
 4. Negative and positive responses to Jesus (23:35-29)

1. The wronged and righteous Jesus is handed over to crucifixion (23:1-25)

- The elders, chief priests & scribes bring Jesus before Pilate
- Only Pilate has authority to order death
- Accusations are not based in reality – in fact, it is these very people who incite the crowd to demand Jesus' death and the release of the known insurrectionist and rioter, Barabbas.
- Pilate's judgement: "I find no case against this man".
- Encounter with Herod is only found in Luke.
- Jesus remains silent – the silence of the innocent suffering servant of Is 53:7. Jesus demonstrates his complete trust in a faithful God.
- Jesus is mistreated by Herod and his guards.
- Jesus is dressed in a "white gorgeous robe" (not a 'rich cloak' as in the Jerusalem Bible version). Probably the white robe worn by candidates for office, but perhaps also has Baptismal overtones.
- Herod & Pilate become friends again – even when totally powerless, Jesus is the source of reconciliation between enemies
- Jesus is returned to Pilate – chief priests, leading men and the people (the whole of Israel, in other words) appear before Pilate.
- Judgement is pronounced for a second time: Jesus is innocent.
- Israel demands Jesus' death and the release of Barabbas.
- Pilate (for the 3rd time) pronounces Jesus innocent.
- Again, the demand for Jesus' death is made.
- Pilate questions, "Why? What harm has he done?"
- Pilate's question goes unanswered – the demand for Jesus' death is made again.
- 'Give us Barabbas' – name means 'the son of the father' – Israel demands the release of the son of the father and death of the Father's Son!
- Pilate mentions having Jesus 'flogged' – *flagratio* was a rather light beating, not the ferocious flogging often depicted in religious art – Luke never mentions that Jesus was actually flogged or scourged.
- Pilate gives in. The voice of Israel prevails & Jesus is handed over (not a legal term – legally, Pilate has pronounced Jesus innocent). The people will repent about this in verses 35 & 48 but not the leaders who will continue to taunt Jesus right to the end.

2. Jesus, the rejected Prophet, calls for repentance (23:26-31)

- Jesus is lead away.
- Simon of Cyrene is called on to help – not 'seized' as in the text. The Greek means to 'lay friendly hands on'. Luke's reason for this choice is that Simon is an image of the disciples. No one can be compelled to become a disciple (follower), but can be *called to follow*.
- Note that Simon takes up the cross and 'follows behind' Jesus.
- Large number of people follow Jesus (including women); there is much lamenting (the peoples' repentance) over the fate of Jesus.
- Jesus' harsh words: warning about the need to repent otherwise disaster will follow.
- "For if men use the green wood...." the meaning of this proverb is not clear.

3. Jesus among sinners prayers for forgiveness (23:32-34)

- Jesus and 2 others are crucified.
- Jesus prayer for forgiveness of those responsible for his crucifixion because of their ignorance is unique to Luke.

- Jesus, the rejected prophet, teaches and practises forgiveness of enemies.
- They shared out his clothing – indicates that Jesus was naked. Criminals were among those who were deprived of their clothing. In losing your clothes you lost your identity within and connection to the community. Depriving people of clothes was part of punishment reserved for criminals, prostitutes, slaves. The insane also had their clothes taken.

4. Negative and positive responses to Jesus (23:35-29)

- The people stay (accompany) Jesus – sign of their repentance – while the leaders scoff at Jesus. Luke is drawing a deliberate contrast between the conversion of the crowd and the intransigence of the religious leaders.
- Note that the taunts correctly identify Jesus as “The Chosen One”, the “Christ of God”.
- The soldiers join in – not sure if these are ‘Temple Police’ or Roman soldiers.
- Note how frequently ‘saved’ appears in the taunts. Jesus is now tempted to save his life (refer to the temptations in 4:1-13: first Sunday of lent) rather than give it away.
- They give Jesus sour wine – another ‘innocent, righteous, suffering servant’ reference to Psalm 69:21.
- Jesus, the King of the Jews – also true.
- One of the criminals: “Are you not the Christ..” Luke has cleverly put a whole confession of faith on the lips of the leaders, the soldiers and the ‘bad’ thief!
- The ‘negative’ responses to Jesus are now concluded.
- The ‘good’ thief begins the positive responses to Jesus: “This man has done nothing wrong” – Luke restates Jesus’ innocence.
- “Jesus, remember me...” the confession of faith now continues on the lips of the ‘good’ thief. He has deep faith that Jesus is truly a king who can save by granting pardon and mercy.
- Jesus declares the man free from sin: “today you will be with me....”
- Creation and the Temple give their response to the meaning of Jesus’ death: an hour of darkness (eclipse) – the day of judgement in Joel 2:31 and Amos 8:9 comes with darkness. God’s judgement against evil.
- The outer veil of the Temple, which separated all but the priests from God, is torn in two. In Jesus, the true temple, all have access to God.
- “Father, ...” from Ps 31:5, another innocent, righteous one who suffers.
- Statement of profound faith in God.
- The conversion of the centurion (Roman soldier, a Gentile) & his confession: “Truly, this was a good (righteous) man” – another positive response.
- The crowd goes home ‘beating their breasts’ – an act of repentance.
- Note Luke’s use of ‘saw’ in regard to the centurion and the crowd – with the gift of faith they ‘see’ the significance of Jesus’ forgiveness of his enemies, his fidelity to God during temptation and his mercy towards a repentant sinner.
- Note: the centurion ‘praises God’ – he is moved to praise God because of what he ‘sees’.
- The crowd has come to see, too – once preferring Barabbas, now they ‘see’ the inner meaning of Jesus’ death as a death for them.
- ‘The friends of Jesus and the women who accompanied him from Galilee...’ – unlike other Gospels, these do not flee, but remain with Jesus. They, too, see the meaning and significance of what has happened. Note: those from Galilee are not just those who have followed Jesus from that geographical place; they are also those who followed by discipleship.

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

Temptation, Transfiguration, Repentance & Forgiveness Passion & Lent (4)

Today, Passion Sunday, we hear two Gospels: the Gospel of the joyous welcome of Jesus into Jerusalem with palm branches, etc and the story of the passion and death of Jesus.

It is a simple, humble, peaceful Jesus who arrives, not in a chariot or on a war horse, but on a colt (a domestic animal). He has none of the expected signs or trappings of the Messiah or the King of the Jews.

In Luke's portrayal of the Passion Jesus remains a simple, humble, peaceful man despite all that happens. The hallmarks of innocence, righteousness, suffering servant are his and even in his suffering refuses temptation, is the cause of conversion and reconciliation, the giver of mercy and ultimately, of life itself. Jesus acts with dignity and complete faith in God.

The crowd (people), the good thief and the centurion are won over (converted) by what they 'see' happening before their eyes. The leaders are not.

It kind of begs the question about what we have 'seen' on our journey during Lent. Are we still the same as we were before, or have we, too, be swept up in the unfolding story of God's graciousness to humanity? Have our hearts been melted, our judgements softened, our faith deepened?

The Passion of Jesus is part of a three-act drama which will unfold for us in the liturgy of the Triduum (3 days – Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday).

In a way, Luke's passion is a summary of all that we have heard and seen in the Gospels of Lent. Jesus is

- the righteous one who keeps faith with God in the temptations in the wilderness,
- the One 'shot-through-with' the presence of God in the transfiguration,
- the one shows that there is a way out of sin through repentance (we are not damned for ever),
- the one who refuses to hold sin against people (Forgiving Father, Woman in Adultery, prayer for enemies on the Cross),
- the one who announces forgiveness and mercy on the Father's behalf,
- whose passion and death is a 'living' Gospel of the story of God's relationship with us,
- who takes up the mission of standing in God's place in human history and showing, in his passion and death, the depth of God's love and the power which comes from faith.

He abandons himself to the Father's will in faith so that he might be raised and continue to be the source of life for all people.

The Passion sets the scene for the liturgy of the Triduum – one liturgy spread over three days.

Jesus, in Word and Eucharist accompanies the church in its profound acts of remembering over the three days. That remembering is meant, not only to deepen faith, but to move us to profound joy in a God who forgets the past, releases and frees us to live a better

future; who gifts, graces and transfigures us with the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, restoring us to our proper place in his family as beloved sons and daughters; remaking us in his own image and likeness so that we may continue the saving, life-giving ministry of Jesus in our own time and place.

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Second Reflection

Reading the passion story is always a deeply confronting experience. It's not just the detail of the trial, torture and death of Jesus. It is the realisation that God has emptied himself of everything we expect gods to have – might, power, astonishing wealth, swift and fierce retribution, preferential treatment for some and oppression for others, life itself.

In the person of Jesus, God emptied himself into a fragile, naked, tortured human being at the mercy of civil and religious authorities. The God that the religious authorities and the people of Jesus' time expected in the Messiah is not the God who showed up in the carpenter's son. Often, too, the God we expect and want is not the God we see in Jesus.

We also remember today all those who share the passion of Jesus in one way or another. We think of people unjustly persecuted, tortured and killed, of those who face a daily passion in their search for food, water, shelter and care, of those who are today the victims of harsh civil and religious authorities, of those in war-ravaged countries, especially Ukraine.

What we see in the passion of Jesus is just how passionate God is about us humans. May we, too, be just as passionate about each other.