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LUKE 1:1-80

Today we begin a six-month study in the **Gospel of Luke**...and our passage today is the first chapter. It's a really long chapter so I want to get right into it.

Verses 1-4...

This gospel was written by a man named Luke. Luke was a physician. Luke was also a Gentile. Luke is not a Jewish name, it is a Greek name. In fact, the **Gospel of Luke** is the only book in the Bible written by a Gentile.

Matthew wrote his gospel primarily to portray Jesus as the **Messiah** and he wrote primarily to the **Jews**.

Mark wrote his gospel primarily to portray Jesus as the **Obedient Servant** and he wrote primarily to the **Romans**.

John wrote his gospel primarily to portray Jesus as the **Son of God** and he wrote primarily to the **Church**.

Luke wrote his gospel primarily to portray Jesus as the **Perfect Man** and he wrote primarily to **Greeks**.

We're not told how Dr. Luke came to know Jesus. Some theologians believe he came to Jesus under the preaching and teaching and witness of the Apostle Paul.

We know Luke traveled with Paul and we know that Luke was a faithful friend to Paul. In **2 Timothy** Paul is in a Roman dungeon and as he wrote to Timothy, he mentions those who have left him for various reasons, and he said, "**Only Luke is with me.**"

Luke makes certain we know that he has investigated all the things he is writing about. He didn't take the job of writing this gospel lightly. He wrote it after careful investigation and he wrote it under the inspiration and instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Luke wrote this letter to Theophilus and there are a couple of different ideas as to who Theophilus was.

One theory is there really was a man named Theophilus. And this may be true, but he is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture.

Another theory is Theophilus was a code name. "Theos" means "God." "Philos" means "love or friend."

And so it could be that Luke is writing a code or symbolic terminology to a man who has been saved, and was perhaps a high official in the Roman government and under threat of persecution because of belief in Jesus so as not to expose who he is, Luke says, "To the most excellent friend of God."

I believe this book was written to all of us who are friends of God...it was written to you and to me...to all of us who love God. And my prayer is that you and I will learn from this book...

I believe the key verse of this book is **19:10**: "**For the Son of Man is come to seek and save that which was lost...**" and I believe we'll see that more and more as we go along...

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The first thing Luke tells us is the story of the family of John the Baptist...

Verses 5-17...

Both Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God and they walked before Him a blameless walk! Notice **verse 6** doesn't say they were righteous in the sight of men.

My reputation is what **people think** about me.

My character is what **God knows** about me.

My reputation may impress those around me.

My character is what impresses God.

Now, we have to remember that this word from the Lord to Zacharias comes after 400 years of silence.

After the book of **Malachi** was written, there followed 400 years in which we have no recorded word from God. A lot of history happened in those 400 years, but during this period, which is known as the "intertestamental" period, there was no recorded word from the Lord God of heaven!

And these were dark days in the land of Israel. This passage tells us Herod was king. And Herod was wicked. He had nine (some say ten) wives. He had killed one of his wives and two of his sons. This is the same Herod who would later order the slaughter of all the little Jewish baby boys.

So, this was **a time of spiritual darkness in Israel...moral darkness and emotional darkness**. No word from the Lord. No prophet proclaiming the Lord's message.

Yet, in the midst of that darkness we see **two radiant lights**...we see the righteous life and the blameless walk of Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth. They knew God's commandments and they knew God's requirements and their walk matched their talk.

All must have been well in their lives...with the exception of one thing. They had no children.

Now, in today's culture having no children isn't nearly as big a deal as it was back then. Back in Bible days, folks considered this a sign of God's disfavor with a couple.

Well, the day came that it was the honor for Zacharias to go and burn incense to the Lord in the temple. This didn't happen very often. I mean, there were so many priests that very few of them ever got the privilege and honor of burning incense before the Lord on the altar.

It was the **best** day of his life.

It was the **holiest** day of his life.

It was the **highest** day of his life because he would probably never have the opportunity again. It was a **once in a lifetime** thing.

So, here's Zacharias...God's man, a man who loved God, not a hypocrite, not a pretender, a man who really loved God and today it had fallen upon him to go in the afternoon time of the burning of the incense! Remember the incense symbolized the prayers of the priests to God on behalf of the people.

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Now, historians tell us that the priest would go in and burn the incense and then come outside of the temple proper and he would address all these people in all the outer courts of the temple...and He would saying something like:

“Bless you. Bless you. I’ve just come from the presence of God.
I’ve just burned the incense. Your prayers have been heard by God.
And in the name of God I pronounce blessing on you. I pronounce
blessing on you. I pronounce blessing on you.”

That’s the way it was supposed to be...but on this day, this man Zacharias went into the temple...he carries the incense in his hand...he goes up to the altar of incense...he lights the fire...and the incense begins to burn and the whole room is filled with the sweet aroma of the burning of incense, and as he is praying and ministering in the house of the Lord, an angel appeared to him

and tells him he and his wife would have a son. And that
this son would come in the spirit and power of Elijah and
he would turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children,
and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous and that
he would make the people ready for the Lord.

Well, when Zacharias heard this, he questioned the angel... “How am I going to know what you’re telling me will actually happen?” Zacharias was having a hard time believing that God would bless him and Elizabeth with a son in their old age!

And the angel told him he would be struck silent and he would be unable to speak until all these things took place.

Well, when Zacharias came out of the temple...instead of pronouncing the blessing on the people as was the normal thing to do, he couldn’t speak at all! And the people concluded he had seen a vision. Zacharias hadn’t seen a vision, Zacharias had had a visitation! And what a visitation it was!

This passage also tells us that Elizabeth kept herself in seclusion for five months. And I believe she did this so that she could praise the Lord over and over and over for taking away her childlessness...and not only giving her a son, but giving her the son who would be the fulfillment of the long-ago prophecy of Malachi. In **verse 17**, the angel quoted from the last verse of **Malachi**.

Verses 26-38...

Six months before, an angel had come to Zacharias in the temple in Jerusalem...but this time an angel comes to a young virgin girl in her home in Nazareth.

And this passage tells us Mary was **highly favored among women**.

Let me quickly tell you of two serious mistakes that are made concerning Mary in the religious world today.

There are some who exalt her to a position of deity. There are some who worship Mary. Some call her a co-redemptrix. Some portray her hanging on a cross. They pray to Mary. They worship Mary. To these folks, Mary is as important as her Son. They are practicing Maryolatry.

These folks talk about the immaculate conception...not the immaculate conception of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the immaculate conception of Mary...that Mary herself was born of a virgin!

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They also talk about the perpetual virginity of Mary. They teach that Mary not only was a virgin when she became pregnant with the Lord Jesus Christ, but she remained a virgin all through her marriage to Joseph.

We know that's not what the Bible teaches! We know that James, who wrote the book of **James**, is the son of Mary and Joseph. And Jude, who wrote the book of **Jude**, is the son of Mary and Joseph. There were also daughters born into that marriage.

These things about Mary are not Scriptural...they have just been dreamed up in the minds of men. These things are not in the Word of God. Mary is **not** a divine person. Mary is **not** a mediator...**not** worthy of worship...**not** sinless...and **we'll see that in just a few minutes**. She is **not** someone we pray through. Mary is **not any** of those things...

But there's another mistake folks make and that is that many just simple ignore Mary. In the effort to not deify Mary, folks go the other direction. She is never mentioned. She's just sort of forgotten...but God called her "**highly blessed, favored!**" And God chose her to be the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you...is belief in the virgin birth an essential belief for the Christian? Yes! Now, you may have been saved without even knowing about the virgin birth. I mean, you may have been so young that you couldn't have understood what this meant even if someone had told you...

But, having said that, I also want to say that once you are saved, and you **are** aware of the doctrine of the virgin birth, it is absolutely essential that you believe it!

See, if you've truly experienced the new birth, this won't be a hard thing for you to believe! **Why?**

Well, first of all, we have the testimony of **God's Word!** Not once, but twice in this passage we just read, Mary is called a virgin.

Secondly, we have the testimony of **Mary herself! Verse 34...**

Thirdly, we have the explanation of the **Holy Spirit. Verse 35...**

Now, all of us in this room have seen new-born babies...either our own children or our grandchildren or babies of friends or relatives. And when we looked at these little babies, we might have said something like, "Oh, isn't she pretty?" or "Oh, isn't he precious?" But, I don't think you've **ever** said, "**Oh, isn't he holy?**"

Why? Because deeply embedded in the heart of every one of those little baby boys and girls there is a sin nature that they inherited from their parents who inherited it from their parents ultimate back to Adam and Eve.

So, we may say that they're **sweet little things** and **precious little things** and **pretty little things**, but we're not going to say that they're **holy little things** because they're tainted with a sin nature.

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But, this blessed baby who Mary would carry and bear knew no sin. He is the perfect, sinless, holy, righteous Son of the living God! And He is all this because He was not tainted with the sin nature that taints all the rest of us...and the reason He isn't is because His father was not Joseph, but God!

And that's why the virgin birth is an essential truth for the believer!!!

And then, the angel tells Mary of her cousin, Elizabeth's, pregnancy and says something so very profound! **"For nothing will be impossible with God!"**

And oh, that we might give God the same answer Mary gave Him... **"Behold, the bondservant of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word."**

Verses 39-40 tell us that Mary arose and went to visit Elizabeth.

Look at the response of Elizabeth when she saw Mary...

Verses 41-45...

Elizabeth's baby leaped within her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. When we're filled with the Holy Spirit, He imparts knowledge to our spirit that we wouldn't otherwise have. And the Holy Spirit told Elizabeth that Mary was carrying a child...but not just any child, she was carrying the Lord!

And Mary sang a song...this song is known as "The Magnificat"...Latin for "magnify" or "exalt". Mary sang this song to exalt and lift high the Lord!

The first thing I want us to see in this beautiful song that Mary sang is

verses 46-49...

...what God did for Mary... God had **saved** her. Now, God wouldn't need to save Mary if Mary didn't need saving, would He? I mean, if Mary were sinless...she would not need a Savior!

By the way, after Jesus ascended into heaven, Dr. Luke records this about the disciples and **Mary and her sons** in **Acts 1:14**:

*"These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and **Mary the mother of Jesus, His brothers.**"*

This tells us three things...Mary was **praying**...Mary had **other children**...and **they** were praying!

Not only had God saved Mary, He had also chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah. And Mary acknowledged the fact that God had done great things for her.

The second thing I want us to see is

verses 50-53...

...what God did for us...

Here Mary included all of God's people who fear Him from generation to generation. Mary named three specific groups to whom God had shown mercy... the helpless (**v. 51**), the humble (**v. 52**) and the hungry (**v. 53**).

Mary saw the Lord turning everything upside down:

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She saw the weak dethrone the mighty.
She saw the humble scatter the proud.
She saw the nobodies exalted.
She saw the hungry filled.
She saw the rich end up poor.

We need to remember that this young lady couldn't have been more than a teenager...most theologians believe she was around 15 or 16 years of age. And look at the beautiful song of praise and prophecy she sang! God was doing a mighty work in Mary's heart and life!

I want to ask you...have you ever given much thought to where you would be or what you would be without Jesus? Oh, I have! Everything good that has ever happened in my life has happened because of the Lord Jesus Christ!

He has walked with me through the valleys of the shadows of death. He has held my hand through heartache and confusion. He has brought real joy to my life...joy unspeakable and full of glory! And I know He has done the same for you!

The last thing Mary addresses in her song is...
verses 54-55...

...what God did for Israel... And as we said last week, He did this because of His great love for Israel...because of the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth three months and then returned home.

Verses 57-66 tell us of the birth and the naming of John the Baptist.

Verses 67-79...

This is another song of praise and prophecy...

This song is full of deep theological truths...and I want us to take a minute to look at some of them...

Redemption...verse 68...

To be redeemed means that we have been set free on the basis of the payment of a price. It's a word that comes out of a slave market. People were bought and sold as pieces of property in the days of slavery. From time to time someone would come and purchase a slave, pay the price for that slave and release that slave to freedom.

And there was a time when you and I were slaves to sin.
The devil had a chain around our neck and he was our
master. When he said, "jump," we said, "how high?"

We might have boasted and said, "Hey, I'm having a good time. I'm free! I can do what I want to! I can take it or leave it!" But, we never did. We never left it. We always took it.

And one day Jesus came to this earth with the purpose of dying so that He could buy us back out of that slave market of sin. Peter tells us we are not redeemed with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Jesus walked on water, but that's not why He came.
Jesus healed the sick, but that's not why He came.**

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**Jesus calmed the storms, but that's not why He came.
Jesus came to die on the cruel cross of Calvary. Praise His holy name!**

Another truth we see in this great song of Zacharias is

Salvation...verse 69 and 71...

What does it mean to be saved? To be redeemed means that on the basis of the payment of the price of the precious blood of Jesus, we have been set free from the bondage of Satan. But, what does it mean to be saved?

It means deliverance! The **KJV** word for salvation in **verse 71** is deliverance. We're delivered from our enemies. We're delivered from sin... ungodliness... immorality... unrighteousness... gossip... pride... a lying tongue. And when we're delivered **from** something, we're delivered **to** something!

We're delivered to a place of safety! **Isaiah** said when we walk through deep waters they will not overflow us. He said when we walk through the fire we won't be scorched or burned and **Daniel** teaches we won't even have the smell of smoke about us. God has called us by name and we are His!

Let me ask you...was there ever a time in your own life when you knew you were a sinner and you knew you needed a Savior and you knew you couldn't save yourself, but you called upon the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to cover all your sins? How I pray there is not a lost soul in this room today!

Well, the third thing we see in this beautiful song of Zacharias is

Forgiveness...verse 77...

Oh, how precious it is to be forgiven! I don't have to look at the past and be overwhelmed with the bad things I've done.

And I want to tell you this. If you ever are burdened by past sins...that's not God, folks! That's Satan trying to rob you of your joy. If you remember a sin you've committed and you haven't confessed and repented of that sin, then that **is** God! That's the conviction of the dear Holy Spirit. But, God isn't going to bring a forgiven sin to you mind to torture you. No!

Paul said, "I forget what is behind me and I press on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

It's impossible to press forward if we're looking backwards, isn't it?

Listen, dear friend,

God has taken our sins and put them in the middle of His back. He can't see them there!

God has taken our sins and cast them into the deepest part of the sea.

The psalmist says that as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us...Psalm 103:12

It isn't that God forgives and forgets...for God to forget would mean He isn't omniscient...it's that God **chooses** to remember our sins against us no more!!!

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Well, one more thing and we're through.

Verse 78...

The **KJV** uses the word "*Dayspring*" instead of "*Sunrise*." Do you ever buy the Dayspring greeting cards at Lifeway? That's where they got the name.

What is "Dayspring" or "Sunrise"? When we look around us we would have to agree that we're living in the day of sunset. Things are looking dark all around us...but there is coming a glorious Sunrise! "***Weeping may endure for the night but joy comes in the morning.***"

Redemption and **Salvation** and **Forgiveness** give us **joy!**

We can sing even when we don't feel like it!

We can pray even when we don't feel like it!

We can read our Bibles even when we don't feel like it!

We can praise even when we don't feel like it!

Why? **Because with God all things are indeed possible!**

Well, that's our lesson for today.

Verse 80 tells us John the Baptist continued **to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.**

And we won't see any more of John the Baptist until **chapter 3**, but this man made a profound impact for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ upon those around him. God mightily used this man! And we'll see that in a couple of weeks...