

Glimpses of the Kingdom
Hints of Jesus' Divinity
Luke 2:22-3:20
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Can anyone tell me who the most prolific New Testament writer was? Until six weeks ago, I would have answered, "The Apostle Paul." While it's true Paul is the author of 13 of the 27 New Testament books, giving him the distinction of writing more books than anyone else, it's Luke, the author of Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts, who wrote the most verses in the New Testament. In Luke and Acts, Luke wrote nearly 100 more verses than the Apostle Paul did in his 13 letters.

I'm sharing the fact of Luke's prolific writing with you not just as a piece of trivia but because we're going to be preaching on Luke and Acts through the end of August. That sounds like a long time to focus on two books, but those two books make up nearly a quarter of the New Testament, and Luke's Gospel follows the major themes of the church year. I'll give you an overview of what our trek through Luke and Acts will look like:

- During Advent, we focused on Luke 1 and 2.
- For the next six weeks, we'll be exploring the end of Luke 2 through 15.
- In Lent, the 40 days prior to Easter, we'll look at Jesus' Passion week in chapters 18–23.
- In April and May, we'll study Luke 24 and Acts 1 and 2, from Easter to Pentecost.
- From June through August, we'll explore the early years of the church in Acts 2–20.

Since we'll be studying Luke's writing for eight months in 2024, I want to provide you with a bit of background about the author and the books he wrote. Luke and Acts are sometimes viewed as part 1 and part 2 of a combined work. Luke begins his gospel with these words:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for

you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. – Luke 1:1-4

And he begins Acts by writing:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. – Acts 1:1–2

Luke's name isn't mentioned anywhere in Luke or Acts, but his authorship has been accepted from the 2nd Century to our present day. Luke is mentioned three times as a traveling companion and fellow worker in Paul's letters of Philemon, Colossians and 2 Timothy. Biblical scholars suspect that Luke may also have been the scribe for some of Paul's letters, because Paul indicates several times in his writings that his eyesight was failing, and it would appear that some of the letters he wrote were dictated to a scribe.

Unlike the other New Testament authors who were Jewish, Luke is believed to have been a Gentile. The name, Luke, is of Greek/Roman background, and at the end of his letter to the Colossians, Paul mentions his ministry partners who were circumcised—Aristarchus, Mark and Justus, and then lists Luke separately. In Paul's reference to Luke in Colossians 4:14, Paul identifies Luke as a doctor. We also gather from Luke's words at the start of his Gospel that he wasn't an eyewitness to Jesus' life but carefully gathered the material in his gospel from eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and ministry.

We don't know the exact date that Luke and Acts were written, but many historians place the writing of these books between 62–75 A.D. Bible scholar N.T. Wright following the line of thought that Luke and Acts were written in the early 70s, suggests that the context for Luke's writing may have been the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 A.D. In this scenario, Luke wrote his books at a time when the Jewish world seemed to be unraveling to assure early Christians of the truth of Jesus' claims and of the rapid growth of the early church.

After the account of Jesus' birth, which we read on the fourth Sunday of Advent, Christmas Eve day, Luke tells us that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day, as was the custom

for all Jewish males, and that He was officially given the name Jesus. The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew name, Joshua, meaning, “the Lord is salvation.” And then Luke immediately jumps into four encounters, which we’ll explore today, that begin to demonstrate to his readers who Jesus was. The first two of these occurred in the temple 40 days after Jesus’ birth when Joseph and Mary and Jesus went to Jerusalem to consecrate Him to the Lord.

In Luke 2: 25, we’re introduced to a man named Simeon:

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

³³ The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” – Luke 2:25-35

And just one verse later we’re introduced to a woman named Anna:

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. – Luke 2:36-39

Simeon and Anna were faithful followers of God who spent their lives awaiting the coming of the promised Messiah. Simeon was led by the Spirit to go to the temple that day, and Anna lived at the temple, fasting, worshiping, and praying to God. When Jesus was brought into the temple to be consecrated, God’s Spirit alerted them that Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for. Each of them prophesied that this baby was the Messiah Israel had been waiting for.

In verse 40, Luke tells us that Jesus “grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was with him.” Luke then jumps ahead to Jesus at age 12, where we’re given another hint about who Jesus really was. We read these words in verse 41 and following:

⁴¹ Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

⁴⁹ “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. – Luke 2:41-51

Verse 52 gives us a similar summary of Jesus' growth, which Luke gave us back in verse 40 after his parents consecrated Him: "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." After these words about Jesus, we jump ahead 18 years to the ministry of John the Baptist, who clearly foretold Jesus' coming. I'll begin reading at verse 1 of Luke chapter 3:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.⁶ And all people will see God's salvation.'" – Luke 3:1-6

And I'll pick up reading in verse 15:

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. – Luke 3:15-18

We've covered a lot of ground this morning in Luke 2 and 3—44 verses to be exact. What I want us to see is that Simeon, Anna and John the Baptist's encounters with Jesus and the incident in the temple were shared by Luke at the outset of his gospel to clearly

demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah. The angels' appearances to Zechariah and Elizabeth, to Mary and Joseph, and then to the shepherds communicated that Jesus was the Messiah and not just an ordinary child, but even after Jesus' birth, Luke wants his readers to understand who Jesus was. The encounters Jesus had in chapters 2 and 3 serve as confirmation of who Jesus truly was and provide us with windows into the Kingdom of God that Jesus' coming inaugurated. I'd like to recap what we learn about Jesus from these accounts:

- Simeon was led by the Spirit of God to the temple, and when he encountered the baby Jesus, he prophesied, "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel."
- Anna also was led to Jesus by the Spirit, and when she saw Him, she thanked God and spoke to all who were at the temple about the redemption of Israel that would come through this child.
- As a 12-year-old, Jesus was in the temple interacting with the Jewish religious leaders, and they all were amazed at his answers to their questions and by his understanding. When his parents finally found Him, He asked, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"
- Around the age of 30, just as Jesus was preparing to begin his public ministry, John the Baptist began prophesying about Jesus from the words of Isaiah: "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation."

The stage is now set for Jesus' baptism, his temptation by the devil in the wilderness, and his ministry of teaching, preaching, healing, driving evil spirits out of people, and raising the dead—snapshots from Jesus' life that Evan will begin leading us to explore next week.

Our sermon today is an introduction to Jesus' ministry and to the Book of Luke after the story of Jesus' birth, but in every sermon we hear, I want us to open our hearts to the truth of God's Word and to the work of his Spirit. God's Word is living and active. It's useful for

correcting, teaching, rebuking, and training us in righteousness. Just as Luke's purpose early in this Gospel is to demonstrate to his readers that Jesus is the Messiah, I'd like us to consider where we see the evidence of Jesus' Lordship in our lives. As I reflected on Jesus' encounters with Simeon, Anna, his parents in the temple as a 12-year-old, and finally, John the Baptist, I asked the question, "Where have I seen glimpses of Jesus as the Messiah in my life over the past year?" As I share my answer to that question, I'd like each of you to reflect on that question for yourselves this morning, as well.

On Thanksgiving Day, I made a list of the things I was thankful for that had occurred in 2023, and then on New Year's Day, I was reflecting again on the past year in conjunction with the question I just asked: "Where have I seen glimpses of Jesus as the Messiah in my life over the course of 2023?" It's amazing how much occurs over the course of a year. I reminisced on a health challenge I faced; on life transitions my wife, Greta, and our adult children walked through; on things we've experienced here at McBIC over the past 12 months; and on ways in which God was at work in shaping, molding, and refining me. Honestly, I was unable to come up with dramatic glimpses I received of God at work in my life in specific situations, but what I was made acutely aware of was the sense of peace and hope God gave me in the midst of whatever came to pass.

I recalled the uncertainty I had around last fall's school board election. While I sensed my time on school board, where I'd served for the past eight years, wasn't finished, I was anxious about the noise surrounding the election and the uncertainty of how I'd stay engaged in the community if I wasn't elected. I had the sense that I wasn't to invest energy in campaigning, but I wrestled with God over that. As things turned out, I was reelected, but God had given me a peace amidst the noise that if I wasn't to continue serving on school board, He would open other doors for me to serve Him in our community.

Reflecting on the past year led me to realize that my relationship with Jesus provided me with peace and hope in a variety of situations and circumstances. As Hebrews 6:19 reminds us of Jesus, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." Jesus is my anchor. He's my counselor, my confidant, and my friend with whom I process whatever is happening in my life. As I talk with Jesus, I gain insight into my own heart and motives, and I learn more

about his perspective. One of the Greek words used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit is *paraclete*. Paraclete means “one who comes alongside.” It’s Jesus’ Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who walks alongside me in my life and provides me with deep peace and hope in the face of whatever happens.

I return to the question I posed several minutes ago and encourage you to ask yourself: “Where have I seen glimpses of Jesus as the Messiah in my life over the past year?” I know that’s not an easy question to answer on the spot with little prep time, but perhaps you can give some thought to that throughout the day... maybe as you’re shoveling snow. 😊 And I have a follow up question as you look toward the year ahead: “Where do I need to see Jesus in 2024?” As you think about what’s happening in your life today and what you’re anticipating in the months ahead, where do you need Jesus to break through? Where do you need to see Him and know that He’s at work in your life or in the lives of those you love? My hope for each of us over the next five weeks before Lent is that, as we explore Luke’s gospel and pay special attention to the glimpses Jesus gave that God’s kingdom had come, we’ll also glimpse Jesus in our lives in fresh ways. That we’ll be able to recognize God’s kingdom at work in us and in the situations we find ourselves in every day.