

# Luke 1a: HG Bishop Youssef

His Grace Bishop Youssef ~ فسوي ابن الالة فاين تاطع • LUKE 1: 1 - 25 ~ Bible Study

## Outline of the Chapter

- 1-4: Prologue to the Gospel and Dedication to Theophilus
- 5-25: Birth of St John the Baptist announced to Zecharias
- 26-38: Annunciation to St. Mary
- 39-45: Visit of St Mary to Elizabeth
- 46-56: Magnificat
- 56-58: Birth of St John the Baptist
- 59-66: Circumcision of St John the Baptist
- 67-80: Zacharias' Prophecy

## Prologue

<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

- Exposition
  - St Luke is sending this gospel to a person named Theophilus and telling him that many people wrote narratives about the life of Christ, but this narrative is very known to me, personally.
  - It is known to him personally because he received it from eyewitnesses. Luke took upon himself the responsibility to understand perfectly the things that had happened since the very beginning and to write them accurately, so that Theophilus would know what was instructed
- Prologue
  - Gospel of Luke is the only gospel to start with a prologue, and he followed the style of prologue that was common in the literature at the time
- "Many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative"
  - St Luke seems to attest that other gospels exist in his time, which are not as accurate.
  - Some scholars estimate 30 or more gospels from the first two centuries.
  - The Church only ever accepted four gospels.

- Origen testifies that from the very beginning, the Church only acknowledged four Gospels as being inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- The beginning
  - "just as those who from the beginning were..."
  - The life of Christ started by the Annunciation of the Birth of John to Zacharias
- Eyewitnesses and ministers of the word
  - Those who delivered these things to Luke and his contemporaries were eyewitnesses
  - Ministers of the word are the apostles
- Perfect understanding of all things
  - St Luke is saying that he has traced the traditions to their very sources and will write them in their consecutive order, that Theophilus may be fully convinced in the truth he was instructed in.
- Most Excellent Theophilus
  - "most excellent Felix" (Acts 24:3) - so "most excellent" must imply a high rank or public figure
  - Theophilus means "Lover of God"
  - Theophilus is a common name in Greek - no reason to assume that Theophilus wasn't the name of someone that Luke knew
    - Some theorize that Theophilus was a sponsor of St Luke who sponsored him to author Luke and Acts
    - Some theorize that Theophilus is a benefactor who wanted to stay anonymous, and so Luke called him "lover of God"
    - Some say that Theophilus is a noble of Antioch
    - Some suggest that Theophilus refers to all believers of Christ

## Annunciation of the Birth of John the Baptist

<sup>5</sup> There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup> And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. <sup>7</sup> But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

- Setting the Stage
  - St. Luke sets the time period as being during the time of Herod
- Herod, king of Judea
  - By the 1st Century, Judea was not a separate state, but was under Herod with Samaria, Galilee, Idumea, etc.
- Zacharias
  - Name means "God Remembers"
- Division of Abijah
  - Aaron, the High Priest, had four sons - Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar
  - Nadab and Abihu offered profane fire in Leviticus 10 and were consumed by fire
  - Eleazar and Ithamar would spring up 24 families: 16 from Eleazar and 8 from Ithamar

- At the time of King David, the number of priests became too much... so King David divided them into 24 divisions and each would serve one week (1 Chronicles 24)
- Abijah is the 8th Division
- Elizabeth
  - Name means "The Oath of God"
  - Direct descendant of Aaron - this is a great honor to have both husband and wife as descendants of Aaron the High Priest
- Righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.
  - Righteous before God: not just before men, but before God, who sees the heart
  - Walking in all the commandments and ordinances: this is the evidence of their righteousness
    - Commandments were known (like the 10 commandments)
    - Ordinances are duties ordained for us to follow and fulfill (fasting, prayer, etc.)
  - Blameless: Doesn't mean they are without sin, but that they are living a life of repentance
    - If I wash my clothes every day and someone sees me with clean clothes it doesn't mean the clothes were never dirty... it means that they've been cleaned.
    - Origen: "Our Lord Jesus referred to the Church in Ephesians 5:22 as 'glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.' This does not mean that the son of the Church has never sinned, but rather he leads a life of repentance."
- They had no child
  - A family without child was considered reproach because it cuts off all hope of having the Messiah from that family
  - The Lord deigned to bring St John the Baptist in this remarkable way overcoming the two obstacles:
    - Elizabeth is barren
    - Elizabeth and Zacharias are both advanced in years

<sup>8</sup> So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. <sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

- Offering of Incense
  - To offer incense was a great occasion in the life of a priest because it may never happen. With over 20,000 priests, the odds that it falls on any given one are low
  - Every evening, there was an evening incense - and the Levites would go into the holy place and they would prepare it (dump ashes from last time, trim the wicks of the candles, etc.) in preparation for the priest. Then they would go outside and pray until the priest came out of the Holy Place. There would be one priest at the altar of offering outside and one priest at the altar of incense. And once the priest outside

offered the lamb on the altar, the priest inside would dump incense on the fire of the altar of incense.

- This symbolizes many things:
  - the aroma going up at the same time as the death of the lamb symbolizes the death of Christ on the Cross as a sweet aroma to the Father
  - The raising of incense is a raising up of the prayers of all the people outside
- The angel's appearance
  - It had been 400 years since the last Divine Communication... God went 400 years without any prophecies, angels, etc. But now that the Father is going to send His only-begotten Son, He sends an angelic messengers to announce His intention; the prepare the mind of the people to receive such great news.
  - The appearance of the angel was sudden and unexpected, so Zacharias was fearful
  - The angel stood on the right side of the altar of incense

<sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. <sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. <sup>15</sup> For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." <sup>18</sup> And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." <sup>19</sup> And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you <sup>[d]</sup>these glad tidings. <sup>20</sup> But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

- Do not be afraid
  - When the angel says these words, there is a power associated with them to cast away any fear from the heart
- Your prayer is heard
  - The prayer for offspring ("and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son")
- John
  - Name means "God is gracious"
  - God made an oath/promise to Adam and Even ("Elizabeth" = Oath of God) and in the fullness of time ("Zacharias" = God Remembers), God fulfilled the promise by sending us Grace through His only-begotten Son ("John" = God is gracious)
- "Many will rejoice at his birth"
  - Until now, we rejoice at his birth
- "Great in the sight of the Lord"
  - All of us want to be great... for some it is to be rich, for some it is reputation and honor, for some it is prestige and position... but true Greatness is to be "Great in the Sight of the Lord"
  - Christ said about John that He is "the greatest among those born of women"
  - He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink

- No lover of wine or strong drink can be great in the sight of the Lord
- Filled with the Holy Spirit
  - John is filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb
  - Zacharias is filled with the Holy Spirit when John is born
  - Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit at the visit of St. Mary to her
- He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God
  - John was an instrument to turn many of the Israelites who verbally worshipped Christ but denied Him in error, superstition, etc.
  - "those who turn many to righteousness [shall shine] like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3)
- John and Elijah
  - John is granted the spirit of Elijah and resembles him
    - Celibacy
    - Dress: Camel hair cloak and leather loincloth
    - Mission: Sent by God to call the covenant people to repentance
    - John stood before King Herod as Elijah stood before King Ahab
  - The Jews believed (and still do) that Elijah would come before the Messiah. We believe that Elijah will come at the Second Coming of Christ
  - "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:6)
- Zacharias demands a sign
  - "How shall I know this"
  - Gabriel reminds him of who he is - "I am Gabriel" the second archangel!
  - Zacharias had the honor of being the first one to whom the news of salvation is announced, and the first one to whom the Lord spoke in hundreds of years... and yet he asks for a sign.
    - Asking for a sign shows spiritual weakness... doubt, lack of faith.
    - Especially as coming from an angel and coming to a priest
- Archangel Gabriel
  - Name means "The hero of God" or "The might one of God"
  - One of the seven archangels who is responsible for being the messenger of good news
  - He came to Daniel to tell him about the restoration of Jerusalem
  - He came to Zacharias to declare the glorious office of St John the Baptist
  - He came to St Mary to announce the Birth of Christ

<sup>21</sup> And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. <sup>22</sup> But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. <sup>23</sup> So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. <sup>24</sup> Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, <sup>25</sup> "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people."

- It happened before that some priests died while making their offerings (i.e. because of their sins), so they got worried when he didn't come out

- Leviticus 10
  - Numbers 16
  - Numbers 40
  - 2 Chronicles 26
  - Days of his service = one week (Sabbath to Sabbath)
    - 2 Kings 11:5
  - Elizabeth hid herself five months
    - Maybe she was amazed at the angelic announcement and went into isolation in order to meditate on the wonderful goodness of God and to praise God in rejoicing
    - Maybe she considered how she could best do her part to train this child and be the best mother
    - Maybe she kept herself hidden lest she exposes herself to ridicule before knowing for certain it was reality
  - Take away my reproach among people
    - In those days, having children was a blessing from God... the Messiah could come from these children!
    - Rachel, mother of Joseph, said "God has taken away my reproach" when she was barren and gave birth to Joseph
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