

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Outline of Luke's Story

- 1:1-4 **Prologue** - Written in the learned style of a Greek historian
- 1:5-2:52 **Introduction: Infancy & Boyhood of Jesus** - Written in style of the Greek OT, linking the events of Jesus' birth with God's salvific history in the past.
1. Annunciations of conceptions of John the Baptist & Jesus (1:5-45; 1:56)
 2. The Magnificat & the other canticles (1:46-55)
 3. Narratives of birth, circumcision & naming of John the Baptist & Jesus (1:57-2:40)
 4. The boy Jesus in the Temple (2:41-52)
- 3:1-4:13 **Preparations for the Public Ministry** - Preaching of John the Baptist, baptism of Jesus, his genealogy, the temptations, proclaims his programme in Nazareth
- 4:14-9:50 **Ministry in Galilee** - His programme put into effect in deed & word. Peter & others are called to discipleship.
1. Rejection at Nazareth; activities at Capernaum & on the Lake (4:14-5:16)
 2. Reactions to Jesus: Controversies with the Pharisees; choice of the Twelve & preaching to the multitude on the plain (5:17-6:49)
 3. Miracles & parables that illustrate Jesus' power & help to reveal his identity; mission of the Twelve (7:1-9:6)
 4. Questions of Jesus' identity: Herod, feeding the 5000, Peter's confession, first & second passion prediction, transfiguration (9:7-50)
- 9:51-19:27 **Journey to Jerusalem** - trains his disciples for Christian discipleship
1. First to second mention of Jerusalem (9:51-13:21)
 2. Second to third mention of Jerusalem (13:22-17:10)
 3. Last stage of journey till arrival in Jerusalem (17:11-19:27)
- 19:28-21:38 **Ministry in Jerusalem** - Jesus' ministry in city that killed the prophets
1. Entry into Jerusalem & activities in the Temple area (19:28-21:4)
 2. Eschatological discourse (21:5-38)
- 22:1-23:56 **Last Supper, Passion, Death & Burial** - Institution of the Eucharist, completion of his programme with his death in the hands of the Father
1. Conspiracy against Jesus, Last Supper (22:1-38)
 2. Prayer & arrest on the Mount of Olives, Jewish & Roman trial (22:39-23:25)
 3. Way of the cross, crucifixion, burial (23:26-56)
- 24:1-53 **Resurrection Appearances in the Jerusalem Area** - The empty tomb, appearances & final ministry in Jerusalem
1. At the empty tomb (24:1-12)
 2. Appearance on the road to Emmaus (24:13-35)
 3. Appearance in Jerusalem & ascension to heaven (24:36-53)

1. Luke: The Writer

There are legends about each of the evangelists. Mk is said to be John Mark, a disciple of Peter who had accompanied Paul & Barnabas on one of their missionary journeys. Mt is said to be the apostle who was a tax-collector when Jesus called him. John is said to be the Beloved Disciple who had a special relationship with Jesus. According to tradition, Lk was a Gentile convert, a disciple of Paul & a physician. Is this tradition credible?

Firstly let's deal with the question of Lk being a Gentile convert. In both the Gospel & Acts which he also wrote, there are many references to Jewish traditions. But occasionally there are inaccuracies e.g. what occurred 40 days after Jesus' birth. We're told Mary & the baby Jesus were taken to the Temple for "their purification." Technically, only Mary had to be purified. This ritual was needed because blood had been spilt during the process of childbirth. There was a different ritual for the child Jesus. He was a first born & ever since the exodus when God saved the first born of the Israelites, firstborns technically belonged to God. They had to be bought back from God with a sacrifice (for the poor, two turtle doves or two pigeons). This was called the rite of redemption. Lk calls what happened 40 days after the birth "their" purification, when technically it was Mary's purification & Jesus' redemption. He simply didn't know the difference between the two. The fact he doesn't know Jewish traditions that well, gives credence to the tradition that he was a Gentile Christian.

Even though Lk was not Jewish, he shows great respect for the Jews & Jewish ways. He believed it was God's plan to call the Jews first. So he treated this plan with respect.

What about the tradition that Lk was one of Paul's disciples? There is a difficulty with this tradition. In Acts, Lk occasionally gets details of Paul's story wrong e.g. compare Lk's version of what Paul did after his conversion to that in Galatians. At other times, he does not seem to know what Paul did for rather significant stretches of time e.g. the fact Lk only has a couple of stories about Paul's rather extensive mission in Ephesus. If Lk were a disciple, wouldn't he have known Paul's story better?

There is a way to deal with this difficulty. Throughout most of Acts, Lk tells the story in the third person singular & plural ("he" & "they"). In a few places (16:10ff; 20:5ff; 27:1ff), Lk slips into the first person plural ("we"). It's possible Lk was a disciple of Paul, but only during the material covered by the "we" sections that would probably only amount to several months. He was a disciple, but not for all that long.

Finally, was Lk a physician? There are hints in his writings that he was. Firstly there is the vocabulary. Whenever Lk quotes verses from Mk, he changes a large number of words to more sophisticated words. This is something one would expect from an educated physician. A second argument in favour of him being a physician is the fact Jesus often performs miracles in this Gospel out of compassion. Again, this is something one would expect of a doctor. The third piece of evidence that Lk is a physician is how he treats a few passages in his Gospel. When Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, one of the disciples cuts off the ear of the High Priest's slave. Only in Lk's Gospel do we hear Jesus put the ear back & healed it. When Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, Lk uses a more technical term than is found in the other Gospels to describe her severe fever. Finally, there is the story of the woman who

suffered from a haemorrhage for 12 years. In Mk, we hear the woman had spent all her savings on doctors who didn't do her any good. When Lk tells the same story, he conveniently omits the fact the doctors took all her money. For all these reasons, it's very probable Lk was, in fact, a physician.

Why Luke Wrote the Gospel

Now we know who Lk was, we can ask why, when & where he wrote his Gospel. Mk wrote in a simple manner to tell the story of Jesus in a very unsophisticated way for the early Christian community that, according to Paul in 1 Cor., did not include many who were rich or educated. Mt wrote for Jewish Christians expelled from the synagogue. We believe Lk wrote for an educated Gentile audience. His Gospel is much more literary than Mk or Mt. He wrote in very good Greek.

There is an ancient tradition that he wrote his Gospel in Southern Greece c.80-85 AD, around the same time that he wrote Acts & approximately the same time that Mt was writing his Gospel (though it doesn't seem Lk & Mt knew about each other's Gospels for there are significant differences in their accounts e.g. the infancy narratives).

What sources did Lk use? We know he (& Mt) used Mk. He also used Q – the verses we find in Mt & Lk but not found in Mk. Some believe Mt, the tax collector & apostle, collected the verses contained in Q). His final source is one called "L". This was Lk's own particular material e.g. that contained in the infancy & resurrection narratives as well as much of the material found in 6:20-8:3 & 9:51-18:14. While Mk pasted his sources together as best he could & Mt constructed an intricate matrix of material from his sources, Lk puts them together with an artistic touch that produces a literary masterpiece.

A Complicated Prologue

Lk begins with a 4 verse Prologue setting out why he produced another Gospel. He says it will be an "orderly" account (implying previous accounts were not quite as orderly).

From the vocabulary Lk uses in the Prologue, it's obvious he wants his account to be not only orderly but educated. Lk uses a number of words in these verses that are so sophisticated they never appear again in the Bible. He wants to impress his readers. He wanted to make Christianity available to those among the better educated in society. This very sophisticated vocabulary was especially important because of the material that follows. The rest of the first two chapters were written in an archaic form of Greek called Septuagint (LXX) Greek – the Greek used in the Greek translation of the OT. It was thought to be simplistic & even a bit crude. If an educated Greek had opened Lk's Gospel & found the first two chapters of material written in what they would have considered to be poor Greek, chances are they would never have read on. But if Lk begins the Gospel with 4 verses of highly sophisticated Greek & then continues in LXX Greek, the reader would have known it was not because the author could not do any better. He would have understood Lk was writing in LXX Greek on purpose.

Finally, Lk dedicates his works (Gospel & Acts) to a certain "Theophilus." This might be an important person whose favour Lk was seeking, possibly even someone from

the family of the Caesars. E.g. we know one of the Caesars, a certain Domitilla, converted to Christianity at the end of the 1st cent. AD. A second possibility was that Theophilus was a rich patron who was going to pay for the transcribing of the Gospel onto scrolls. This was an expensive process & Lk might have needed someone to help him financially. A third possibility (the most probable of the three) is that it is a symbolic name. “*Theos*” in Greek means “God” & “*phileo*” means “to love.” So Theophilus was anyone who loved God i.e. Christians. Lk might be dedicating his Gospel & Acts to the early Christian community.

2. The Infancy Narratives

A Diptych

The rest of chaps 1&2 are the story of the Annunciation & birth of John the Baptist & Jesus. It is laid out as a diptych, a set of two pictures placed side by side. Each of the pictures has its own value, & together they present a more profound message. John the Baptist’s story is miraculous, but that of Jesus is even greater.

As said above, these chapters are written in LXX Greek. Did Lk inherit this account from another source & simply incorporate it into his work without changing too much, or did he write these chapters this way on purpose? The latter is much more probable, for Lk certainly had no qualms about changing the Greek in Mk’s Gospel. Why would Lk have chosen to use this archaic form of Greek? It’s similar to a technique directors use in films when they want to speak of things that happened long ago. They go from filming in colour to black & white. The archaic form of Greek gives that same sense, of events that happened long ago (for they precede the rest of the material in this Gospel by a few decades).

The Annunciation of John the Baptist

The main part of the Gospel begins with the story of Zechariah going to the Temple to perform a sacrifice – this is why the symbol for this Gospel is an ox, for this is most likely the animal Zechariah would have sacrificed. In those days there were 24 clans of priests, so many they would only come to the Temple to perform sacrifices once every 24 weeks. When they arrived, they would cast lots (pieces of bone or dice) to determine which priest would actually perform the daily sacrifices. This was seen as an honour & was also profitable since the priest who performed the sacrifice would receive certain parts of the animal.

Zechariah was chosen, but during the sacrifice he encountered an archangel named Gabriel (one of the three named in the Bible, although in other sources there are another four named). There is no description of what he looked like. Angels do not always appear with wings. Yet, it immediately becomes obvious that Zechariah sensed something special was going on.

The angel tells him his prayers have been answered & he & his wife Elizabeth would have a child. Zechariah asked Gabriel how this could be, & Gabriel answered that because he had asked this, he would not be able to speak. Why was Zechariah punished for asking this question while Mary asked the same thing & was commended? The key to understanding this is found in what Gabriel said, that Zechariah’s prayers had been answered. Zechariah & Elizabeth had been praying for a

child for a long time, but when Zechariah was told God would answer those prayers, he didn't believe the power of his own prayers. This is probably why Zechariah was silenced; he had said enough for the time being. Now he could await the fulfilment of God's promise in silence. But Mary was not praying for a child. The last thing she would have wanted at this point was a child, at least before she was fully married to Joseph.

Zechariah came home after the time of his service was over & his wife Elizabeth became pregnant. The story is like many of the other OT annunciation stories. An elderly couple who desperately wanted children were visited by a messenger of the Lord who promised them they would have a child who would be special to the Lord.

Gabriel Visits Mary

The same archangel, Gabriel, then visits Mary, a young virgin from Nazareth betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter. This is the same description of Mary & Joseph we find in Mt with the exception of where Mary & Joseph lived. If one reads Mt's account carefully, Mary & Joseph lived in Bethlehem before the child was born & only moved to Nazareth when they returned from exile in Egypt. Lk has them begin in Nazareth, go to Bethlehem for the birth, & then move back to Nazareth.

Betrothal in those times was a formal contract in which one was considered to be married (though one did not yet live with the betrothed). It was an intermediate time during which the newly married couple could gather whatever they needed. If Mary was engaged to a carpenter, then she was poor. This was not the best prospect for a marriage in terms of social status. People in these days were carpenters because their families had lost their land in previous generations so they could not be farmers. They were forced to be poorly paid artisans in order to earn a living.

The archangel greets Mary by calling her "full of grace." There is more to this greeting than we see on the surface. In Greek, there is a verb tense called the perfect tense. It is used for actions which began in the past but which were still continuing in the present. Mary was already full of grace when the angel appeared for she was always full of grace from the moment of her conception. This is what we profess in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. This is why Mary could be so available to the Lord's invitation. Those of us damaged by sin often become defensive when we are challenged to do something that seems difficult or even impossible. If someone were to ask us to do a favour, we would likely answer, "What's in it for me?" Mary didn't do this. She offered her life & love to the Lord. She is an example of vulnerability & service.

The Visitation

Mary had just been invited into a mystery of God's love. Her first & continuous response was generosity. Instead of thinking about her own needs, she decided to visit Elizabeth who was six months pregnant & who needed her help.

One element of this story is a bit confusing. Elizabeth is said to be a relative of Mary. Elizabeth was married to Zechariah, a priest. This meant he & she were both from the tribe of Levi. But Mary & Joseph belonged to the tribe of Judah. In those days, people did not intermarry between tribes. How could Mary & Elizabeth be related? We don't

have a clear answer. But this is the only Gospel that says John the Baptist & Jesus are related. Mk & Mt don't say anything about it. Jn has John the Baptist say he did not know Jesus. But we have to be careful with this statement as it is a little ambiguous. It could mean:

- John & Jesus were cousins but they hadn't seen each other for a long time & so didn't recognise each other,
- or they were cousins but John didn't know Jesus was the Messiah,
- or they had never met before.

We just don't know what Jn intended to say. There are some things in Scripture we can't work out. That doesn't mean there is something wrong, only that we can't fully understand it.

Elizabeth greets Mary, telling her her baby leapt in her womb the moment she heard her greeting. The first person to recognise Jesus' presence in the world was an unborn child. Mary expresses her joy & wonder by proclaiming the "Magnificat." Much of this hymn is taken from the canticle Hannah proclaimed when her son Samuel was born (1 Sam 2:1ff). Are these the exact words Mary said on this occasion? Most believe this canticle, that of Zechariah (1:67ff) & that of Simeon (2:29ff) were all likely early Christian hymns. Lk borrowed them because he felt they expressed well the feelings of the people involved. This is a common technique in NT times - Paul also quoted pre-existing hymns in 1 Cor 13 & Phil 2.

The Magnificat is a hymn of the *anawim*. The poor in Jesus' day were despised by those who held power. The rabbis felt that since they were poor, they did not have time to study the Law. If they didn't study the Law, then they didn't know the Law. If they didn't know it, then they didn't keep it, & they were therefore sinners. If one met a poor person in the street, one should not even talk to that person lest one be contaminated by that person's sinfulness.

In Lk's Gospel we see the exact opposite attitude toward the poor. They are called the *anawim*, the poor ones of God. The *anawim* were the poor, sinners, women, foreigners etc., anyone who was broken & lived at the margins of society. Because of their brokenness, they were ready to embrace Jesus when He came into their lives because they needed Him (& they knew they needed Him). Mary represents the *anawim*, the lowly ones of God. She speaks of the mighty being brought low & the lowly being lifted up. God reverses the fortunes of both the mighty & the powerless.

The Birth of John

Lk tells us Mary stayed with Elizabeth for 3 months & then went home. The way this is phrased makes it seem as if she left before the child was born. This is strange for one would have expected her for the birth of the child. There are a few possibilities.

- Maybe she left because others would be at the birth so she would not be needed;
- or possibly Lk said this in a clumsy way & didn't mean to say she left before the child was born;
- or she had to get home before it was too dangerous for her to travel (she was already 3 months pregnant & travel in those days was difficult & often dangerous).

Zechariah & Elizabeth named their child John. In Hebrew, *Johanan* means "Yahweh

is merciful.” Zechariah then regains his voice & uses it to proclaim God’s fidelity to his promises in the canticle called the Benedictus (1:68ff). The central verse states that “God has remembered his holy covenant.”

The Birth of Jesus

The story of Jesus’ birth begins with the proclamation of a worldwide census called by Caesar Augustus. This is one detail of the story that’s very difficult to sustain. We have many records from the ancient world, but we have no records of any worldwide census. There was a census in the province of Judea, but that was only c.6 AD & not 6 BC when Jesus was probably born. (The monk who invented the modern calendar was Dennis the Short & he made a small mistake in his calculations). Even if there was a census, one would not have to travel to one’s ancestral home; one registered where one was living. Joseph & Mary would have registered in Nazareth if that is where they were living. Finally, the account also says this occurred when Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Quirinius was never really governor of Syria. He was the legate & that was in 6 AD.

What can we say about the census? Mt had the Holy Family start out in Bethlehem & only move to Nazareth after their exile in Egypt. Lk has them start out in Nazareth & move to Bethlehem & then move back to Nazareth when the child was born. Lk must not have known exactly what happened & he used the story of a census that occurred long ago as a way to get the Holy Family from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the birth of the child.

Even if not historical, this gives Lk the chance to mention the name Caesar Augustus. By so doing he is giving an implicit message: the birth of this child in a back water province would change the great Roman Empire. This is later fulfilled when Paul preaches in Rome at the end of Acts. This is a typical technique used by Lk called *foreshadowing*. He mentions something & we then see it fulfilled much later in the text. This is a way of saying God has a plan which is worked out in God’s own time.

We hear the child was born in a manger because there was no room in the inn. Even if the Holy Family did not travel to Bethlehem to register for the census, they still could have lived in a cave. They were very poor. Joseph was, after all, a carpenter which was a sign of extreme poverty. We know poor people in the Holy Land lived in caves. E.g. in Nazareth everyone lived in caves (which is why Nathanael asked if anything good could come from Nazareth). Jesus was clothed in swaddling clothes. These were rags which were wrapped around the baby to keep the child warm.

The Shepherds

Lk then tells us the shepherds were in the fields by night when the angels announced that a saviour was born for the people of Israel. In Jesus’ time shepherds were not well respected. They were looked on as thieves & possibly even murderers. They were representatives of the *anawim*, the broken ones who needed Jesus the most. This is part of a pattern we see throughout Lk’s Gospel. It begins with Jesus reaching out to the shepherds & ends with Jesus inviting the Good Thief into Paradise. From beginning to end, Jesus reaches out to the *anawim*.

When was Jesus born? We celebrate Jesus’ birth on Dec. 25th, Christmas Day. But if

the shepherds were in the fields by night, then Jesus was probably not born in December. Shepherds would stay in the fields during the spring for that's when the sheep would give birth to their lambs & the shepherds had to be there to help them if they got into trouble during the birthing process. Why do we celebrate Jesus' birth in December? Early Christians wanted to celebrate this feast on a day that was already a pagan holiday. They didn't want to draw unnecessary attention to themselves, so it was better to celebrate when everyone else was already celebrating something. Dec. 25th was the feast of the birth of the Sun for it's the first day one could see the day getting longer after the winter solstice. Jesus was the light of the world, so it made sense to take that feast & make it the day to celebrate Jesus' birth.

The Circumcision & the Presentation

Mary & Joseph had Jesus circumcised on the 8th day. Again this is typical of Lk's Gospel. The Holy Family (as well as Zechariah & Elizabeth) were observant Jews & salvation came from the Jews. Lk wants us to know that those faithful to this tradition would be ready to embrace Jesus when He came into their lives.

40 days after Jesus' birth, the Holy Family goes to the Temple for Mary's ritual of purification & Jesus' ritual of redemption. While the Holy Family was in the Temple, they met Simeon who had been waiting for the Messiah of the Lord. He proclaimed a canticle which speaks of his hopes having been fulfilled. The canticle was probably originally a funeral hymn that Lk borrowed to represent Simeon's sentiments.

Simeon also speaks to Mary & tells her a sword would pierce her heart. Traditionally this has been interpreted as referring to the sorrow she would endure when she witnessed her son's passion. This is the image used on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows (Sept. 15th). Yet, there is an older interpretation about this saying. In the Bible, the heart is where one thinks, not where one feels. When it says Mary pondered things in her heart, it means she was trying to work out what was going on. The sword that would pierce Mary's heart (mind) was the Word of God which was a sword so sharp it could separate bone from sinew. What revelation would be so profound it would cut Mary to the quick? It was possibly that her son was the Son of God. She knew very well her Son was special, that He was the promised Messiah. She knew, after all, how she had become pregnant. Yet, in those days, the Messiah was thought of as a hero, not as God Himself. She expected her son to be a king or a general, not God. Also, even if Jesus was called the Son of God, in the OT that term only meant "hero." That is how she would have heard those words. Finally, Mary, being Jewish, prayed every day that there was only one God, Yahweh. How could her son also be God, especially when she was the one who changed His nappies? Of all people who ever lived, she had the hardest time believing her son was God, & yet she did. How do we know she believed Jesus was God? Lk has her present with the early Christian community on Pentecost morning. It was his way of saying she was the perfect disciple for she believed the Word of God & made it incarnate in the world.

This section closes with the Holy Family meeting Anna, a prophetess who had awaited the consolation of Israel. All through Lk's Gospel, when we hear a story about a man, we also hear a story about a woman.

Jesus Lost in the Temple

Lk's infancy narrative ends with a story of Jesus when he was 12. The family went up

to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. (While the feast was originally a family feast celebrated in one's home, by this time it & Pentecost & the Feast of Booths had become pilgrimage feasts). Why is this the only story of Jesus from between the time He was an infant & when He began His public ministry? There must be some reason why Lk would mention this particular episode.

It might be to answer a question: when did Jesus figure out He was God? Since He was always both God & man, one would think He always knew it. But Phil 2 speaks of Jesus surrendering His divine prerogatives, embracing our humanity. Ignorance is part of our human condition. Could Jesus have been one with the Father in love but not know it intellectually? This story might provide the answer. A Jewish boy was considered to be a man at 12 years old. Lk seems to be saying maybe He knew He was God when He knew He was a man. In fact this is when He tells His mother the Temple is His Father's house. He recognises who His true Father is.

There could be another level to the story. It might be a foreshadowing, like the mention of the census. Is there another time when Jesus disappears for three days when He is about the Father's business? Isn't that what happened when Jesus died on the Cross? Maybe Jesus was preparing His mother so that when He died & disappeared into the tomb for three days she could still trust. This could explain why Jesus did not appear first to His mother on Easter Sunday. One would have expected Him to appear to her first of all, but instead He appears to the disciples. Maybe He did not appear to her because she didn't need it; she already trusted.

3. The Resurrection Narratives

We now pass to the three stories of the Resurrection in chap.24. In the first account, the women go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body because they had not had enough time to do it on Good Friday. They went to the tomb "very early" in the morning, which meant after one could see light at the horizon but could not yet see the sun. The account mentions the names of three women who went, & then adds there were a number of other women with them. Again, this shows the importance of women in the Gospel. In Jn, there had only been one woman, in Mt two, in Mk three, but here it seems as if the whole Lady's sodality came out to the tomb.

There are two men dressed in white in the tomb. They are obviously angels, but why are they called men & not angels? It has to do with the symbolism of this account. The women hear about the resurrection but they don't see the risen Jesus. This is just like when we first come to the faith. We hear about Jesus from other people, not from angels or directly from a voice from the heavens. The two men represent the fact we learn about the resurrection from people (teachers, parents, clergy etc.).

When the women tell the disciples what had happened to them, the disciples consider their tale to be nonsense. This is a bit of a dig at the disciples. God had chosen the women to be witnesses, why did the disciples not trust what they were saying?

The second account occurs on the road to Emmaus. The day of the resurrection, two disciples set out from Jerusalem to walk to Emmaus. They met a stranger on the way who then accompanied them. It was Jesus, but they didn't recognise Him. (3x the disciples don't recognise Jesus after the resurrection: here, when Mary Magdalene looked for Jesus in the garden & in Jn 21 when the disciples were fishing). Other

times, they fully recognise Him & are even able to touch the nail marks in His hands & His feet & the wound in His side.

Jesus explains the Scriptures to them along the way, & they speak later of their hearts having burned as He spoke. His emphasis here & in the other two resurrection accounts is that He had to suffer & die just as it had been foretold. This is a Lukan theme: God had a plan & it is our duty to follow it. When we do, we'll find joy (not necessarily happiness). Joy is the sense of peace we find when we're doing what we should, even if it's not pleasant at times.

When the disciples reach the place they intended to stay for the night, they invited Jesus (Whom they still did not recognise) to stay with them. They began their evening meal & recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread. This is obviously a reference to the celebration of the Eucharist. Jesus then disappears from their sight. In this second resurrection account, the disciples met Jesus in sacrament &, even if they did not realise it at the time, in Word. Again, this is what we experience. We first hear about Jesus (as in the first account) & then we meet Him in sacrament & word (as in the second account).

One other detail worth mentioning. When the disciples run back to Jerusalem to tell the others what happened to them, they are told Jesus had also appeared to Peter. The only way this would have been possible were if Jesus had appeared to them at the same time He was appearing to Peter. We call this bilocation. Our resurrected body will not be encumbered by the limitations of time & space. In heaven, we will be with God, our families & friends etc. all at the same time. Here on earth, we must choose because we can only be in one place at a time, there we will be with all of them.

In the third account Jesus appears to the apostles & commissions them to preach the forgiveness of sins. They see Jesus face to face. As we continue to grow in faith, we pass from hearing about Jesus from others to meeting Him in sacrament & word until we finally see His presence everywhere e.g. in worship, nature, in service to others etc. By choosing these particular accounts (from the many Lk could have chosen), he gives us a paradigm of the Christian life. This is a reminder that we pass through stages in our spiritual growth. It is not instantaneous & complete the moment we accept Jesus into our lives. It is a gradual process of discovery & surrender.

Notice how Jesus' disciples are commissioned to preach the forgiveness of sins. Our faith is supposed to be something we share with others. A good examination of conscience is to ask what percentage of our parish's budget is spent on evangelising the unchurched. Most parishes spend most of their money on those who already show up, not on those who are yet to embrace the faith or who have fallen away from it.

The chapter & the Gospel end with a short version of the Ascension (Lk has a longer version in Acts). Jesus ascends into heaven on the clouds. This is a biblical way of saying He went into heaven. We know heaven is not up or down. It's a different dimension of existence where we're one with God. But some Scriptures spoke of the Son of Man coming down from heaven on the clouds, thus Lk speaks of His going back into the clouds. What really happened on Ascension Thursday? We can't be sure if this is exactly how it happened. If He wanted to, Jesus could have just disappeared from the disciples' sight. The problem was that if Jesus had done this, the disciples, who were simple people, might not have understood what was happening. Maybe He

did go up into the clouds so that the disciples could see the fulfilment of Scripture & understand where He was going.

4. Luke's Particular Viewpoint

Parables of Mercy

Having looked at the start of the Gospel (the Prologue & infancy narrative) & the end of the Gospel (the resurrection narrative), both specifically Lukan material, it may be useful to look at some of Lk's parables. While Mk has relatively few parables (mostly on the Word of God) & Mt's parables deal largely with the coming judgement, Lk's parables speak of mercy, compassion & forgiveness. In fact some of our favourite parables are only found in Lk. Yet, we should read them carefully, for Lk often adds a twist to his stories that challenges us to see things in an entirely new way.

The story of the Good Samaritan is a good example (10:29ff.). The Samaritans were a mixture of the poor Jewish people whom the Assyrians had not exiled when they took the educated & richer people off into captivity in 722 BC & the pagans whom the Assyrians brought in to replace those exiled. Even though they could be considered half-Jews & acknowledged the Torah to be sacred literature, they were considered to be heretics by the Jews. When they volunteered to help the Jewish people rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, their help was rejected. They therefore tried to hinder the project. John Hyrcanus, one of the kings of Israel, later destroyed the Samaritan temple on top of Mount Gerazim. They hated the Jews & the Jews hated them. So they would be the last people one would ever consider to be the heroes of a story told to Jewish people.

The parable speaks of a man on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. Even today this road is dangerous. It winds through dangerous curves & has hidden caves all along the way. The man was accosted by thieves who left him for dead. A priest & a Levite both passed by & did not stop to help him. Though it's easy to condemn them for their lack of concern, there is actually a good reason why they should not have stopped. First of all, the brigands who had waylaid the man could have been hiding nearby. In fact this was one of their techniques. They would use the wounded traveller as a decoy to catch other travellers unawares. This is similar to the fear we experience when we see a car broken down at the side of the road. Should we stop & help the person, or are we afraid it might be a trap?

Furthermore, the priest & the Levite were both dedicated to the service of the Lord. If they touched the wounded man, they would have made themselves ritually impure & they would not have been able to participate in the liturgy. They could have asked themselves, "Which is more important, to serve God or man?" For Jesus, the answer to this question was obvious. They should have served the wounded man as the Samaritan did. The Samaritan not only cared for him on the spot; he also told the innkeeper to charge his account for anything the man's care might cost. This man was therefore truly his "neighbour's keeper."

The twist in the story is the identity of the man who was charitable. It would be comparable to someone telling a story about the "charitable terrorist." That's so distasteful to us, & yet Jesus purposely chose a hero who was totally unexpected to challenge His listeners to re-evaluate their prejudices.

A second parable about mercy is that of the barren fig tree (13:6ff.). The man in charge of caring for the tree checked with its owner because it wasn't bearing any fruit. The tender was told to dig around it & manure it & give it another chance. This is what God does. He gives us another chance (though we should note this was its last chance, for we should not presume on God's mercy).

In ch.15 we have two parables that speak of God's attitude toward sinners. The first (15:1ff.) speaks of a lost sheep. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep that are safe to search for the one in danger. As we've already seen with the story of the shepherds coming to adore the Christ child & the good thief, God reaches out to those most in need of Him. Some might feel this is not fair. Why do sinners get more attention from God than those who remain faithful to Him? Shouldn't He show them more love rather than loving the very people who had rejected Him? The answer is no. God's ways are not fair according to our human standards. God is most of all loving, especially to those who need His love most. At the end of the story when the lost sheep is found, the shepherd invites his family & friends to a celebration so that they could share in his joy. We're told God is filled with joy whenever a sinner returns to Him.

The lesson is repeated immediately after with the story of the woman who loses a coin (15:8ff.) & searches all through the house to find it. Again she celebrates with her neighbours when she finally finds the coin. This combination of parables involving a man & then a woman is typical of Lk. E.g. the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed planted in the ground (man's work) & yeast put in dough (woman's work). Both men & women are important in the kingdom.

The message that God only wants sinners to return to Him is reinforced by one of the most famous parables: the Prodigal Son (15:11ff.). The story opens with Jesus speaking of a man who had two sons. The younger son goes to his father & asks for his inheritance. This is not only presumption. It is also thoughtlessly cruel, for he is effectively telling his father he wished he were dead. The son takes his inheritance & squanders it on loose living. When he has spent his money, those he thought were his friends abandoned him. He ends up feeding pigs (this detail would evoke horror in a Jewish audience). He realises his father's servants had more than enough to eat while he was starving, so he decided to return to his father & beg for forgiveness. It's not clear whether the son's apology is sincere. Is he truly sorry for what he did or is he only saying what is necessary to get back into his father's favour?

It's the father's reaction that is astounding. If he were a good Jewish father, he would have had his son put to death (this was the law of Israel). If he had not done this, then he should at least have waited in his house until his son came on his hands & knees & begged for his forgiveness. Instead, the father waited outside for his son & ran to him when he caught sight of him. Notice the father forgives his son even before he has a chance to ask for forgiveness. Maybe he did this because he knew the son's apology was only a line. He even ordered a feast be prepared to celebrate his son's return.

The young man's older brother then arrived. He was furious his father forgave his good-for-nothing brother. He was angry his father seemed to treat the brother better than he treated him even though he had stayed & worked for his father the whole time. The father begged his older son to celebrate with him for "your brother was

dead & now he is alive.”

There are so many lessons we can learn from this parable. Firstly, it speaks of God’s mercy & how He desires we turn from our sin & live. It also speaks of God’s great respect for our freedom. He let the younger son go on his way even though He knew it could be disastrous. God does not force us to love Him; He invites us. We should also hear that we don’t earn God’s forgiveness. It’s based on the fact the other person needs it, not that the person deserves it. We realise what the person did was a symptom of his/her brokenness. All we want is to love that person into healing.

We can also learn from the older brother’s reaction (similar to ours at times?). If God was just according to our standards, He would have rewarded the older & shunned the younger brother. Instead, He was more concerned with mercy than justice. Finally, notice what the father says to the older son. Everything the father had was always his. The reward for doing good deeds is to be able to do those good deeds. Heaven is not only what we will receive at the end of time. It already begins now. We are already in heaven inasmuch as we are living in love. If the only reason why we do good is to obtain an eternity of pleasure in heaven, aren’t we being a bit selfish? Isn’t heaven where we will be like God, & God reveals Himself as one Who reaches out to us in mercy, service & love?

The next parable is not so much about God’s mercy as the call to show compassion to those around us (similar to the story of the Good Samaritan). It’s the story of the rich man & Lazarus (16:18ff). This is not Lazarus, the brother of Martha & Mary. Lazarus was a rather common name in NT times. This was simply a very poor man.

There was a rich man who refused to help poor Lazarus. The rich man is sometimes called “Dives” – the Latin word for “rich man.” When he dies, he is sent to hell as a punishment for not helping Lazarus while he was alive. Lazarus goes to heaven where he is in the bosom of Abraham – the image presented is that of the heavenly banquet. In ancient times, people reclined at table. Lazarus was given the seat next to Moses & could lean back onto his chest like the Beloved Disciple did to Jesus at the Last Supper. The rich man’s punishment is a reminder we will be judged on the basis of how we’ve treated our brothers & sisters (the same message as in the parable of the separation of the sheep from the goats).

God also refuses to send more warnings to the rich man’s brothers. He tells the rich man they already have received enough messages. God cannot force us to convert. He can only invite us. We should never claim we didn’t know what we were supposed to do for we have already been warned.

Another parable combining the ideas of mercy & judgement is that of the Pharisee & the publican (18:9ff). The Pharisee was full of himself. He boasted about his religious practices as if that earned him special consideration. But the publican humbly admitted his guilt. The humble publican was forgiven while the Pharisee was not (for he was self-righteous). God offers His mercy, but we have to be willing to reach out for it. If we think God owes us something, then we can never really become vulnerable. It’s only when we recognise our brokenness & our need for forgiveness that we can open our hearts to the love God is offering us all the time.

The final story is not a parable but a continuation of the theme we’ve been studying:

that of Zacchaeus (19:1ff). Jesus entered the city of Jericho where a certain Zacchaeus lived. He was a tax collector. People hated tax collectors. No one likes to pay taxes, but tax collectors were also seen as collaborators with the occupying power: Rome. Also, the system of tax collection in those days was inherently dishonest. Someone would put out a bid for the right to collect the taxes in a certain area. He would pay up front, & then everything he collected belonged to him. The people living there had few legal rights, so he could bully them to give whatever he wanted. We also hear Zacchaeus was short, but he desperately wanted to see Jesus, so he climbed a sycamore tree. One can picture how absurd it would have seemed to those standing nearby. The children were probably standing by & throwing stones at him (while the parents silently approved).

Jesus calls Zacchaeus down & speaks to him, inviting Himself to supper. The people were annoyed. Why on earth would Jesus go to this sinner's house? But it was exactly because the man was a sinner that He went to his house. Zacchaeus is an *anawim*, someone who needed His love & healing. Zacchaeus responds to this kindness by promising to repay many times over anyone he might have defrauded (very likely considering he was a tax collector). Jesus is very pleased & tells Zacchaeus "today salvation" was coming to his house.

Firstly, notice that salvation was coming "today." In theology, there are two types of eschatology (the teachings about what will happen at the end of time). There is future eschatology which says these things will be fulfilled at some future date. But there is also present eschatology which speaks about the promises being fulfilled now. What sort of salvation is occurring now? As soon as we meet Jesus, we are already saved from fear, hate & sin. We are already experiencing heaven here on earth.

Lk also presents this idea by his use of certain terms concerning healing. Whenever Jesus heals someone & there is no expression of faith, Lk just says the person was "healed." When there is an expression of faith, then Lk uses the word "saved" to describe what happened to the person. The person was not only healed physically; that person was also healed spiritually.

Prayer & God's Will

Having looked at these parables & stories, we can now look at certain themes found throughout the gospel. The first we will look at is prayer. In Mk & Mt, Jesus prays relatively few times: 2x & 3x respectively. In Lk, he prays 11x. That's quite a considerable change & it obviously means something.

In Lk, Jesus prays whenever He is about to do something important e.g. when He chooses the Apostles (6:12ff), when He asks Peter who people think He is (9:18), when He is transfigured (9:28) etc. He prays in order to discern the Father's will for Him & to be able to fulfil it. God has a plan for each of us & we will only find joy if we cooperate with that plan. Lk develops the idea of God having a plan in various ways. We've already seen he mentions one idea in a passage & then has it fulfilled later in the text. He also uses the word "must" frequently. He also speaks of kings & then applies that title to God. This shows God is in charge, but to make sure God does not come across as an autocrat, he balances this term with the word "father." This shows us God is a loving parent Who only wants what is good for us.

This raises the ideas of obedience & discipline. In modern society these can be like dirty words, but in the Bible they designate surrender to God's will. This is how we can become the best person we could ever be. Lk doesn't go into the question of how specific God's will is (e.g. does God have a specific vocation for each of us? Does God meddle in day-to-day questions – what are we going to eat or wear? etc.); or how God's will interacts with free will. (A healthy image of the interaction of God's will & free will might be that of a partnership in which God is the senior partner). Nor does he give a guideline of how to discern the Father's will other than to pray (e.g. one could also speak of spiritual reading, fasting, spiritual direction, looking for signs, taking small steps in our actions, trying to find peace with our decisions etc.).

Intercessory Prayer

There is another purpose for prayer in Lk (17:1ff; 18:1ff) which is to ask for the things we need. If one were to ask a group of Christians, "Do we change God's mind when we pray?" the most frequent answer would probably be, "No!" If we were to press on & ask those people why we pray, then they would most likely say, "To learn to accept what God was going to send anyway." This is a wonderful spiritual thought, but it's not what Jesus teaches in Lk's Gospel! He speaks of a persistent widow who nags an evil judge into giving her her rights (18:1ff). Eventually the judge gives in just to get her off his back. The remarkable thing about this parable is that the evil judge represents God the Father. The lesson is that prayer changes reality.

Again Lk doesn't explain how it changes reality. To give a simple explanation, we could say that when we pray for someone, our love joins God's love & that love visits the person we are praying for. When people are loved, it changes their reality. Prayer is a spiritual caress. Even if the person doesn't know we are praying for him/her, the person can sense it for there is a level of communication beyond words (like when one thinks about a friend & the phone rings & the friend is on the line). One caution is necessary, though, for at times God's answer to our prayers is "No" for that is the most loving answer God can give us. Whether God says "no" or "yes", it will be because that is the most loving answer God could possibly give us in the situation we find ourselves in. Prayer is one of the most important & powerful things we can do. God created the world with words, & we help recreate it in His image when we pray.

Jerusalem

In Mk & Mt, most of the action occurs in Galilee. Jesus only goes up to Jerusalem at the end of the Gospel. In Lk & Jn, Jerusalem is much more important. Lk considers Jerusalem to be the chosen city in which God's plan for salvation will be revealed. This is why we hear about Jerusalem & the temple so early in the story (i.e. the account of Zechariah's annunciation, the presentation in the temple, the story of Jesus being lost in the temple). Then in 9:51, Jesus heads for Jerusalem. From that moment, He is heading to His destiny, even if it is not until 19:28 that He actually arrives in Jerusalem. Then in the Acts, we see that the Good News goes forth from Jerusalem, the religious centre of the universe, to Rome, the political centre of the universe.

This theme reinforces the idea that God has a plan, but also that there are special places, holy places, where we can encounter the Holy One. God is everywhere, but certain places help us to be receptive to His presence. This is the idea behind shrines & pilgrimages.

Kings

We've seen that Lk uses the term "king" for God. This title reminds us God is in charge of our lives. But there is another reason for his use of the title king & his naming of kings & governors. He is possibly trying to write an apologia for his community i.e. telling the Roman authorities that Christians are good citizens & at the same time reminding Christians to be good citizens. This is exactly what the Jewish general, Flavius Josephus, did after he was captured by the Romans during the Jewish Civil War. He wrote a history of the Jewish people to show the Romans the Jews were not really bad people. They had only been misled by the Zealots.

Likewise, Lk gives an apologia for his own Christian community. Was he trying to convince the Romans not to persecute Christians (something they had already begun to do)? Was the reticence of Pilate to kill Jesus (23:1) & Gallio to punish Paul (Acts 18:12) a signal to Roman authorities that this is the way they should really act?

Jesus Brings Peace

Being a stoic, Lk longed for a well-ordered community in which people lived in peace. He considered it to be essential for the Christian community to give a good example. When Jesus came into our lives, it was supposed to change everything. This is why Lk speaks of the idealistic life of the early Christian community in Acts 2:42ff & 4:32ff. Lk also shows how even during Jesus' life, people got along when He came into their lives. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod (Lk 23:6ff). Prior to this, Pilate & Herod hated each other, but after Jesus comes into their lives, they become best friends.

Lk is a bit of a Pollyanna in his descriptions. Even he has to admit there were disagreements, but he also strongly stresses the good will of the community. Might his descriptions of community life be less of a description of how the community actually was & more of a goal the community should aim for?

Food

It's interesting how many times Lk mentions food in his Gospel. Parables often revolve around meals e.g. the father of the prodigal son celebrates his return with a meal; the rich man is punished for not sharing his meal with Lazarus etc. Jesus gives His most important instructions at the Last Supper. He eats fish when He rises from the dead. Heaven is even described as a heavenly banquet. This is very odd because Stoics did not believe in enjoying food. The good Stoic was one who fasted until he died for as he wasted away, he became less & less material (which they considered to be evil) & more & more spiritual. This is one area where Lk rejected his Stoic roots when he became a Christian. He affirmed the goodness of this world & all its creatures.

5. The Beginning of the Ministry

John the Baptist

Having looked at some large narrative sections & themes, we can look at some short passages. Some of these stories were borrowed from Mk or Q which Lk then changed to push his own agenda. At other times they are stories only found in Lk.

The passage that speaks of the preaching of John the Baptist begins with the names of a number of civil & religious officials (remember how Lk liked to name drop to show that Christians were good citizens). What is very unusual in Lk's account is how John gives advice to tax collectors & soldiers. Normally, Jewish authorities wouldn't have anything to do with either of these, but John the Baptist doesn't condemn them. He doesn't tell them to leave their jobs, jobs that many saw as corrupt & tainted with collaboration tendencies. He simply told them to do their jobs as best they could. That would be enough for them to be considered righteous.

This was also a message for Lk's community. He was telling them that they could participate in many different occupations & still be good people as long as they did those jobs with the proper spirit.

The Genealogy of Jesus

In 3:23ff, we hear the genealogy of Jesus. It is different from the one in Mt 1:1ff. While Mt traced Jesus' ancestry to Abraham & David, Lk traces it all the way back to Adam. Jesus had not only come to save the Jewish people. He came to save everyone. Don't try to reconcile the two lists. These genealogies were more symbolic than historic. It is not that one list is right & the other not. Both are true in their symbolism.

The Temptations in the Desert

Like Mt's Gospel, Lk speaks of three temptations in the desert (4:1ff). The devil tried to entice Jesus to misuse His authority for selfish purposes. In Mt, mountains were very important. They were where one experienced God's revelation. So the last temptation occurs on a mountain. In Lk, the importance of Jerusalem is stressed. This is why the last temptation occurs on the parapet of the temple in Jerusalem (4:9ff).

The Spirit of the Lord

In Mk, Jesus goes into the synagogue in Nazareth after He performed various miracles showing He had the power to do anything: a nature miracle (Mk 4:35), an exorcism (Mk 5:1ff) & a healing (Mk 5:2ff). In Lk, He visits the synagogue as His first act of His public ministry. He quotes a proclamation from Isaiah to define His ministry. Jesus describes His ministry as proclaiming the Good News to the poor & liberty to captives. He was to initiate a year acceptable to the Lord. Normally, the promises contained in this passage were fulfilled when the Jewish people celebrated their Sabbatical & Jubilee years. Slaves were set free; debts forgiven; land was returned to its original owner. Jesus was proclaiming Himself to be the embodiment of these celebrations. One would no longer have to wait 7 years or even 50 years for these things to happen. When Jesus came into the world, He established a new order of mercy & compassion. He called us all to live as brothers & sisters, sharing what is in excess to feed the poor (remember the description of the early Christian community in Acts 2 & 4).

As in Mk, Jesus is rejected by His own (although Lk softens Jesus' words so that He does not include His own family among those who reject Him). Jesus then speaks of foreigners in the history of Israel who were favoured by the Lord: the widow of Zarephath & Namaan the Syrian. If the Jews rejected Jesus, then He would reach out to the Gentiles. This is part of Lk's message: first the Jews & then the Gentiles.

6. Jesus' Mission of Compassion

The Beatitudes

The beatitudes are found in the Gospels of Mt & Lk. This means they were originally part of the Q source, the sayings that appear in Mt & Lk but not in Mk. In Mt, they are part of the Sermon on the Mount. This is typical of Mt's Gospel where important revelations occur on mountains. In Lk, the Beatitudes are presented on the plain (which is probably more historic).

In Mt there are 8 positive Beatitudes while there are 4 positive & 4 negative in Lk. The latter is a more Jewish way of teaching. This is how Joshua renewed the covenant with God when the Israelites entered the promised land. He had one group of priests stand on one mountain & another on the opposite mountain. One group would shout out, "Blessed are those who honour their parents, etc." while the other group shouted out, "Cursed are those who do not." Since Lk contains both blessings & curses, his version is probably closer to what Jesus actually said than Mt's version.

The other major difference between Mt & Lk is that Mt's version of the Beatitudes is more spiritualised (e.g. blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who hunger & thirst for righteousness) while Lk's version is more physical (blessed are those who are poor, blessed are those who hunger & thirst). This fits Lk's belief that the *anawim* are most able to embrace Jesus' message because they are not trapped by their riches. They live in need & know they are in need, & so when someone comes along who answers that need, they are ready to accept Him.

The next section continues the themes of loving one's neighbour & praying for those who persecute one (the same material as in Mt 5:38ff). There are a few subtle changes. Instead of saying, "The pagans do the same," Lk speaks of "the sinners." This makes sense if Lk is writing for Gentiles & Gentile Christians. He doesn't want to insult them by using them as an example of those without virtue. Lk also adds the idea of lending money to those who might not repay the debt. Then, whereas Mt speaks of being perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, Lk speaks of being merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful (showing again the difference between a converted Pharisee concerned with righteousness & a converted physician concerned with mercy & compassion).

The Widow of Nain

A miracle that only appears in Lk is the story of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (7:11ff). Typical of Lk's Gospel, Jesus performs this miracle out of compassion. The widow had been left all alone in the world. The only Jewish institution which would help her was gleaning, the gathering of those crops the harvesters had missed. Jesus performed the miracle of raising her son for her benefit.

This is not a resurrection from the dead but a reanimation. In a resurrection, one receives a new body that no longer suffers from the limitations of this human body. One will never die again. With reanimation, one comes back to life with this present physical body so one would one day have to die again.

The Anointing of Jesus' Feet

There is an anointing story in all four Gospels. But the details vary greatly between the Synoptic version & that found in Jn. In Jn it is Mary, the sister of Martha & Lazarus, who anoints Jesus' feet. In the Synoptics, an unnamed woman anoints Jesus' feet as an act of courtesy. Only Lk tells us the woman anointing Jesus' feet was a great sinner. In this account, the people object not because of the extravagance of her action but because she was unclean. The Pharisee who invited Jesus even objects that if this man were really a prophet, then He would have known what type of woman she was & He wouldn't have let her touch Him.

But it's exactly because Jesus knows she is a sinner that He treats her with such kindness. She needs Him, & He responds with compassion. This is another example of Jesus reaching out to the *anawim*, the poor ones of God. Jesus tells His host that her great love brought her great forgiveness.

The Women Who Serve Jesus

In Lk 6:12ff, we hear of the call of the twelve Apostles. It's important in Lk that there be twelve Apostles. This was part of God's plan. This is why in Lk Judas must be replaced by another (Matthias) at the start of Acts. Paul gives a different definition of what it means to be an Apostle. He speaks of Apostles as anyone who gives witness to the risen Jesus. He thought himself as good an Apostle as the others.

In 8:1ff, Lk balances out the call of these male Apostles with the report of the women who followed Jesus & served their needs. Lk often balances a story of a man or men with a woman or women e.g. child Jesus brought to Simeon & also to Anna. In the other Gospels, the women are not mentioned by name until the Passion. Here, they are His disciples even during His public ministry.

The Transfiguration

The Synoptics report the Transfiguration, but typically each has slightly different details. E.g. Lk is the only one that specifically mentions that Jesus went up the mountain with Peter, James & John to pray, consistent with Lk's emphasis on prayer. Then, a couple of times in the account, Lk speaks of Moses & Elijah as "the two men", reminiscent of the two men who gave witness to the Resurrection on Easter morning. Lk also stresses the transcendent nature of the event by speaking of how the disciples were heavy with sleep. (Remember how a number of OT figures received their revelations from God in either sleep or a trance). Still, although the disciples were afraid, they enter the cloud that overshadows them. This sounds like an invitation for those reading the Gospel to take heart & enter the mystery of God.

Jesus is Rejected by the Samaritans

In 9:52ff we hear that Jesus passed through Samaria on His way to Jerusalem (a journey that began in the previous verse). The Samaritans would not welcome Him because He was heading for Jerusalem. The disciples, in a fit of self-righteous indignation, asked Jesus to cause fire to come down from the skies on their village. Jesus rebukes them, for He has come for everyone & not just for the Jews.

7. Jesus on His Way to Jerusalem

The Mission of the Seventy

Only Lk mentions that in addition to the twelve Apostles, there was another group of disciples, the “seventy” (10:1ff) whom Jesus sent out on mission. This number is probably an allusion to the 70 elders Moses chose to share in his authority. They return rejoicing that they were able to exercise power over demons. Jesus acknowledges this, but then tells them the greater honour is that their names were written in heaven. In the enthusiasm of their first mission, the 70 focused on their power & not on the deeper meaning of their ministry, that it revealed a relationship of love with God. When we preach the Word of God, whether in a formal ministry or simply by giving good example in one’s family, it’s easy to become self-righteous & to focus on the negative as opposed to celebrating God’s love & mercy. We can become so focused on the wrong things happening around us that we forget to see the good things also occurring in our midst.

Martha & Mary

This is also the only Gospel that speaks of the episode in which Martha complains because her sister Mary is not helping her with the housework associated with entertaining their guests (10:38ff). Jesus tells Martha that Mary had chosen the better part by spending time with Him while Martha was running around doing things. This is a parallel to the story of the 70 returning, who like Martha had been caught up with what they were doing (exorcising demons) & not on what it meant (having a relationship with God).

Throughout much of Church history, this passage has been used to argue that the contemplative life is better than the active life. Since Vatican II, the Church has said each form of life is good if that is what God has called us to do.

One can also apply this story to family life. We sometimes get so caught up with doing things (e.g. preparation for Christmas, a big family meal) that we all but ignore the people around us. One example is that we sometimes work ourselves to death to buy a house for our family, but then we don’t have quality time to spend with them. The moral of this story is just as valid today as it always was.

The Our Father

Like the Beatitudes, the Our Father comes from the Q source, the sayings that are in Mt & Lk but not in Mk. Typically, Lk begins his version by telling us Jesus was praying just before His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. Like the Beatitudes too, Lk probably has the more original version. In Lk, the Our Father is simply a series of petitions banded together; in Mt it is a formally developed prayer. Lk probably is telling us what Jesus actually said while Mt gives the Our Father that was in use in the community when Mt was writing his Gospel.

The line in the Our Father that bothers many people is “lead us not into temptation,” as if God would try to tempt us to sin. A better translation of this verse would probably be, “Deliver us from the trial.” There was a belief that at the end of the world there would be a period of tribulation in which everyone’s faith would be tested

& purified. The person praying this verse recognised that he/she was not sure of his/her faith & whether that faith was strong enough to lead one through the difficult times that were coming. The person asks to be protected & strengthened during that time of trial (whether it be the trial & tribulation at the end of times or the daily trials we face in living our faith).

True Blessedness

This is also the only Gospel with the story of a woman who proclaims “Blessed is the womb that bore You...” (11:27f). Jesus responds, “Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God & keep it.” Jesus is not excluding His mother from the category of the blessed when He says this. In Lk, Mary is the perfect disciple. She is the one who listens to God’s invitation to be the mother of her Son & accedes to it. Lk consistently softens those sayings from Mk that would imply that the family of Jesus had a difficult time accepting Him as the Messiah. Jesus is saying that her blessedness is not due to biological considerations. It’s due to the depth of her faith.

The Danger of Riches

We’ve already heard how Lk shows a preference for the *anawim*, the poor ones of God, for they are those who are most ready to embrace Jesus & His message. At the same time, there is a warning for those who are rich because they could easily think themselves self-sufficient & spend all their energy on accumulating riches. We hear this when Jesus addresses the question of an inheritance (12:13ff). How often inheritances give rise to family disputes! Jesus argues that it’s just not worth it.

We see this theme again when Jesus speaks about the man who tore down his barn to build a bigger one (12:16ff). The man was going to die that very night & his possessions would belong to someone else. Our possessions cannot bring us true security & peace. They are more likely to get us into trouble for they cause us to be too self-sufficient. (James speaks of this in his letter when he says our every plan should be conditioned with the phrase, “if God wills it”).

Lk speaks of it again in sayings from Q in which he speaks about the birds of the air & the lilies of the field & how our treasures should be in heaven (12:22ff). All these episodes are a powerful call to put in proper perspective the importance of the things of this world.

What would Jesus say about a middle class life style? What’s the balance between prudent preparations for retirement & selfish concern for one’s own comfort? What does simplicity (in dress, recreation, food, housing) have to do with the kingdom of God? How do we know if we have too much? These are all questions we need to reflect on.

Two Miracles

In 13:10ff & 14:1ff, there are a pair of miracles on the Sabbath. Typical of Lk, the first involves a woman & the second a man. The woman is healed from a stooped condition (possibly caused by the bending of the spine that we recognise as a result of osteoporosis) while the man is healed from dropsy (a rampant form of oedema caused by liver problems). Jesus is confronted by Pharisees who object to His working on the

Sabbath. Their point is that these people had been ill for a long time. What was the problem with waiting another day? Jesus' point is that they had been waiting a long time & He wouldn't make them wait any longer. He justifies His action by quoting exceptions to the work law on the Sabbath (e.g. feeding one's ox, rescuing a child who had fallen into a well). These two episodes remind us that the Sabbath is for worship & rest but also for doing good (e.g. visiting a nursing home, inviting a lonely relative for a meal at our home, etc.).

Supper Stories

A series of supper stories & sayings follow (14:3ff) reminding us how important food is for Lk. The first is only found in Lk & suggests that when one goes to a banquet, one should choose the less important seat lest someone more important arrive & one be asked to move to a lesser seat. It's a question of whether one only seeks recognition & prestige in what one does (e.g. volunteering for a charity, at work, in one's family relations) or whether one seeks to be humble.

A second dinner saying is that when we have a banquet, we should invite those who can't pay us back. This could be applied to who we invite to Christmas & Easter meals (even inviting the difficult relatives who no one else wants around) or those with whom we associate at those meals (choosing to spend time with those who are lonely as opposed to those with whom we have a good time).

The third supper passage is the parable of the great supper that comes from Q. It is the parable of the king (Mt) or rich man (Lk) who throws a banquet & invites guests who don't come. So he invites others to the banquet so that it might be filled. The only major difference is that Lk doesn't include the information about the one man who comes without a wedding garment & who is therefore punished. We have to ask if this was an addition in Mt, possibly another saying he had from his sources. Maybe he didn't know where to put this saying, so he stuck it on to the end of this story because both involved weddings. That would explain why in Mt's version (22:1ff), it seems a bit unfair. How could the man be expected to have a wedding garment when he was taken off the street? Again, Lk is probably the more original version.

Counting the Cost

In 14:25ff, Lk expands the saying about the cost of discipleship. He speaks of choosing Jesus over our family & taking up one's cross to follow Him. (Although in Lk, there is a very Jewish formulation for Lk has Jesus say that we must "hate" one's family, a Jewish way of saying we must love Jesus more than one's family). But Lk goes on to speak of counting the cost of one's commitment before one makes one's choices (e.g. making sure one has enough funds to complete a building project or enough troops to fight a battle). To be a disciple is not easy, & one has to be willing to pay the price. Sitting on the fence & hedging one's bets is not enough; one has to surrender totally to God's will & love.

The Wicked Steward

There is a very unusual parable in Lk 16:1ff. Jesus speaks of a steward who is called to task for cheating on his duties. He was fired, but before he left, he decided to make friends for himself with the people who owed his master grain & oil, etc. It almost

sounds as if Jesus is condoning dishonesty. Part of the explanation could be that the amounts were exaggerated because he had been charging the debtors unfair interest. Yet, that's not really the point Jesus is making. He is speaking of cleverness. In the Middle East, being clever, knowing how to get things done, was seen as an important virtue. In the West, we might see this as sneaky, but in the East it was seen as creative & resourceful.

Jesus' point is that we tend to be clever in affairs of the world. Why is it we can be so slow in things of heaven? E.g. we can work out how to see our favourite TV programme if we're out, but sometimes we can't find enough time to pray. We can work out what to say to someone to get back at them for a slight, but can't work out how to make peace with that same person. If the Kingdom of God is really that important to us, then we should use all our resources to secure it.

What Thanks Should We Expect?

Lk has a very challenging saying in 17:7ff. He asks what thanks a servant should expect for having done his duty. Sometimes when we try to follow God's law, we feel God owes us. We are good; therefore God should give us a good biopsy, winning lottery numbers, a trouble free life etc. But wasn't being good what we wanted to do all along, or were we just good in the hope of obtaining a great reward?

Even when we talk about heaven, it sometimes sounds as if we're just following God's law to earn an eternity of pleasure. Isn't that selfish, only thinking of our own profit (even if it's in terms of eternity)? What if in heaven we will continue to work & serve (though it won't be frustrating as it often is here on earth)? What if our reward will be the opportunity to continue to do what we're already doing here?

Gratitude

The other side of the coin is the willingness to be grateful for all that God has done for us. Jesus heals ten lepers (17:11ff), but only one returns to thank Him & he was a Samaritan. This provides two of Lk's themes: gratitude & the fact that the hero of the story is an *anawim*, a foreigner.

People sometimes feel as if they have worked hard to earn all they have. Why should they be grateful? They fail to see they could have been born without many of their talents or they could have been born in a country where even with those talents they would not have had the opportunity to earn enough to feed their own family. We have been so blessed. Also, we often ask God or the saints for a favour. Do we remember to thank them when we receive a reply to our prayers, even if it's not necessarily the reply we wanted? If a friend only called us when that person needed a favour, how long would that person remain a friend?

8. The Last Days of the Life of Jesus

Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem

After Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He lamented the pain the city would see (19:41ff). Unlike Mt who almost revels in the destruction that would come on his persecutors, Lk reports that Jesus felt compassion. God does not desire the death of

sinner, but that they turn from sin & live. For Lk, Jerusalem was the focal point of God's revelation. How could Jesus desire its ruin?

The Last Supper

There are slight differences in Lk's account of the Last Supper (22:15ff). He speaks of the Passover being fulfilled in the kingdom. It seems as if he is referring to the Last Supper meal being fulfilled on the cross. Jesus also speaks of His blood being poured out for many. Instead of saying the cup contains Jesus' blood as we hear in Mt & Mk, Lk says the cup contains the covenant in Jesus' blood, a version also found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. This might have been a softening of Jesus' words because the original phrasing, that the cup contained blood, might have been too disturbing for Gentiles. This is one case where Mt & Mk's version might be more original, but it also shows us a link between Lk & Paul (they use the same phrasing).

Last Minute Instructions

Because meals were so important to Lk, it should not surprise us that Jesus gives some of His most important teachings, a type of last testament, at the Last Supper. In the ancient world, these last instructions were believed to have special importance for they encapsulated all of what the person had tried to say during his life.

Jesus first tells His apostles they should not exercise their authority as the pagans did. They were to measure their importance on how much they served others, & not on how much they were served.

Jesus speaks of how Satan would sift them like wheat. He then turns to Peter & tells him to strengthen his brothers when he turned back. The turning back is a reference to Peter's triple denial & the need to turn back from that. Peter is being given special authority over the other apostles. In Mt, this passage of authority is found in the Keys of the Kingdom passage (ch.16). That passage speaks of the power of the underworld opposing the Church (Satan sifting the Apostles like wheat). In Jn, we find this same mandate in ch.21 (which has a triple question of whether Peter loves Him, reminding us of the "turning back" saying). These three Gospels all affirm a special role for Peter in the Church.

Immediately after this, Jesus speaks of being ready for what was coming. Earlier, He had told them to trust in God, carrying no purses or other provisions. Now He tells them to bring a sword. They reply that they have two, & Jesus says, "It is enough." This is a very confusing passage. Why would Jesus command them to arm themselves? He rejected violence when He was arrested. Maybe He was simply saying, "Be ready for what's coming." The Apostles then interpret His sayings in an overly literal way (as when He said to be careful of the yeast of the Pharisees & they thought He was talking about bread). In this case, the phrase "it is enough," might very well be an expression of frustration at their misunderstanding what He was really saying. It would be like saying "All right; I've had enough of this nonsense."

In the Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus leads Peter, James & John into the Garden of Gethsemane. "Gethsemane" means "oil press", & there is archaeological evidence that there were oil presses in the

area around the garden. He leaves His disciples at the entrance & goes in further to pray to the Father. Lk is the only Gospel that speaks of His being strengthened by an angel. It's also the only Gospel that speaks of His sweating blood. This phrase could mean one of two things. It could mean He was sweating so much it almost seemed as if He were bleeding, or it could mean blood was pouring out of His skin. This occasionally happens when someone is highly traumatised. These two ideas, the angel & the sweat, are not found in all the ancient mss of Lk. Some think they may have been added by a scribe later.

When Jesus is arrested in the garden, He asks Judas if he was going to betray Him with a kiss. This was the way Judas intended to point Jesus out to the soldiers in a rather dark garden. Yet in Lk, Judas doesn't actually kiss Him. Is this another example of compassion? Lk the physician, as we've already seen, then has Jesus heal the slave whose ear had been cut off.

The Trials & The Passion

As we've seen, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod after which Pilate & Herod become best of friends. But it's Herod's & not Pilate's soldiers who mock & torment Jesus. Herod's soldiers were not Romans. Pilate also openly declares Jesus' innocence (23:13ff). These details might be phrased this way to remind Roman officials that Christians, like Christ, were really innocent & should not be persecuted.

The biggest difference in the Passion narrative is that Jesus meets the weeping women of Jerusalem (23:27ff). Women once again play a significant role in the narrative. Jesus expresses His compassion for them.

In Lk, Jesus also prays for the forgiveness of those who were crucifying Him. At the very minute they are hatefully hurting Him, He is concerned for them.

Only in Lk does one of the two thieves (traditionally named Dismas) defend Jesus. He is told he would be in paradise that very day. (Remember how the scene forms the closing frame of Jesus' outreach to the poor & broken. The opening frame was the invitation to the shepherds to adore the baby Jesus. From beginning to end in Lk, Jesus reaches out to those who most need Him). Also, this is another example of how the promises of salvation would be fulfilled immediately (as it was with Zacchaeus).

While Jesus is on the cross, we don't hear Him cry out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" This was the first line of Ps 22, & Jesus was expressing both His feelings of abandonment & His trust that God would deliver Him, a sentiment found at the end of this psalm. The difficulty is that Lk's Gentile readers might not have understood the nuances of this quotation. It might have seemed scandalously weak to them, so Lk dropped it. Rather than doubting the Father's intention, Jesus places His spirit in the Father's hands (23:46). The Greek philosophers reading Lk's Gospel would have been impressed with Jesus' equanimity in the face of torment. (There are other passages where Lk softens the emotion of Jesus' reaction).

The centurion's words under the cross are quite interesting. In Mt & Mk, he proclaims Jesus is the "Son of God." In Jewish circles, the phrase "Son of God" meant "a hero." But since the man was a centurion & therefore a pagan, the phrase "Son of God" took on a new meaning for it would mean more than the old Jewish meaning, it meant that

He truly was the Son of God as we understand it.

Lk might have been worried his Gentile Christian readers would not understand this statement & might interpret it as saying Jesus was one of the minor deities of which they had too many. So Lk took another direction with the centurion's proclamation. He had him say, "Certainly this man was innocent" (23:47). Again, we have a Roman official recognising how Jesus was innocent, & by implication how His followers, Christians, were innocent.

Conclusion: Luke's Original Message

These many passages help us see how Lk took the story of Jesus passed down to him & shaped it to serve his audience. Sometimes, he changed a phrase or added another detail to an already existing story. At other times, he added a whole new story from his original source (which is not to say the story was not true, only that it was most useful in developing Lk's themes).

We saw how Jesus is presented almost as a new philosopher who teaches about mercy & compassion. We found that while the Gospel was intended for a fairly educated audience, it was the *anawim*, the poor ones of God, who are held up as exemplars of true discipleship. It's easier for them to embrace Jesus than for those who are better off. They recognise their weakness & dependence. Those better off often feel themselves to be self-sufficient. This was not why the rich were blessed with material goods. The well off were given riches by God so that they would use them to help those who were less well off. Tertullian, a writer in the early Church, says that what was in excess is robbed from the poor.

Lk demonstrates some Stoic tendencies. We see God has a plan for us all & we will find joy if we discern & obey that plan. This Gospel recognises the need to bow to God's will for God is both king of our lives & a loving parent who only wants what is good for us. We could even say that Jesus heals the wound that Adam, the first man, caused by his disobedience through His own obedience & trust of the Father's will.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is also portrayed as the model of obedience & submission to God's will. Unlike Mk in which the family of Jesus has a difficult time accepting who Jesus is, in Lk Mary is the perfect disciple. Even though her thoughts (heart) were cut to the quick by the sword of discernment, she believed, for she was among the disciples at Pentecost.

Women in general are treated with much more respect than in Mt or Mk. We saw the pattern of having a story or a parable about a man quickly followed by a story about a woman. Women followed Jesus & ministered to Him & His disciples. A number of them also showed up after the Resurrection & gave witness to it.

Foreigners are treated with more respect & are often seen as examples of faith. While Lk respected the Jews & Jewish tradition, he doesn't forget his readers were not Jews & therefore had to feel welcomed in the community.

We witnessed Lk's incredible talent as an artist. He shapes the three accounts of the Resurrection to provide an outline of the Christian life:

- first we hear about Jesus from others,
- then we encounter Him in sacrament & word,
- & finally we recognise His presence everywhere.

We also saw his talent in the construction of the infancy narratives as a diptych. The stories of the birth of John the Baptist & Jesus are presented as parallels, but that of John is great while that of Jesus is greater. But it was in the infancy narratives that we had to wonder a bit whether Lk considered his primary obligation to be a historian or an artist. We saw how he probably borrowed the canticles of Mary, Zechariah & Simeon from pre-existent sources & put these words in their mouths because he felt this is the tenor of what these characters would have said. But we also had to wonder about the historicity of a couple of details of the story (the fact the holy family is portrayed living originally in Nazareth & not Bethlehem as it is in Mt & the presentation of the story of the universal census which doesn't seem credible).

Lk's version of Jesus' story is beautiful. It also reminds us its message must be available to whichever audience it is being presented. We shouldn't make the Gospel say whatever we want it to say, but the message of Jesus is certainly rich enough to speak to any culture in any era & offer salvation to all.

Finally, Lk certainly reminds us of our obligation to preach the forgiveness of sins. We're called to be Jesus' messengers. Whether we do that in simple, quiet ways or we sell everything & go to distant lands to preach, we are called. So many do not know about God's mercy, love & compassion. So many are trapped in lifestyles that leave them lonely & experiencing a sense of meaninglessness. They need us not only to proclaim the Gospel in our own lives, but also to renew the Acts of the Apostles, spreading the Gospel once again from its spiritual base all the way to the political & commercial centre of our modern world.

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