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Luke Chapter 1

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Abstract: A commentary on the events of Luke 1, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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Luke Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Beginnings

Luke's elegant report in chapters 1 and 2 leads readers directly to Jesus of Nazareth. Luke's narrative draws an ever finer focus on events that surround Jesus' birth and youth, finally coming to rest squarely on him as he emerges from childhood into adulthood. These chapters also fitly frame a story about beginnings, first within families involving real people, culminating in the births of two special children, John and Jesus. Much later, the record introduces readers to the beginnings of the Christian movement as it grows from an obscure sect in a remote corner of ancient Palestine to a religion that penetrates the heart of the Roman empire, a growth chronicled by Luke's Gospel and his book of Acts.

This theme of beginnings takes further shape in the dawning day of salvation (see 1:78; 2:30–31, 38) as well as in the births of lambs which, not surprisingly, may hint at the birth of the Lamb of God (see the Note on 2:8). With a twisting touch, Luke sets off birth by emphasizing Elisabeth's barrenness and subsequent pregnancy. In a different but related vein, the fearsome opposite of birth—death, including the deaths of sacrificial animals and the anticipated death of Simeon (see 2:24, 26, 29)—underscores the promising prospect of beginnings. But even here, death may point to Jesus' own, both as a sacrifice and as a joyful reversal of mortality.

B. Sacred Space

Within the broad geographical setting that Luke's Gospel and book of Acts spread out before us, beginning in the eastern Mediterranean region and ending in Rome, the first indicator of place is "the temple" or, more accurately, the sanctuary (see the Note on 1:9). Thus, Luke opens his story at one of the most sacred spots on earth, thereby breathing into his story

an air of holiness. Furthermore, he underlines the sanctity and centrality of this setting first by mentioning “the people . . . without” the sanctuary (1:10)—those inside the temple grounds but not inside God’s house—and then by noting “the house of Zacharias” which lies at a distance from the temple and city (1:40). Clearly, these other spots—the temple courtyard and, more distantly, Zacharias’s home—are removed from the holy center in a receding order of sanctity. By such a conception, Luke subtly yet consciously buttresses and expands the sacred beginning of his story (see the Analysis on 23:44–45). By the end of chapter 1, the home of Zacharias and Elisabeth has also become a place of spiritual power and illumination, complementing the temple’s hallowed character.

In this light, it is worth noting that, within the sacred enclosure of God’s house, Zacharias expresses a lack of faith as he speaks with God’s messenger (see 1:18). Hence, within the most sacred room on earth known to Luke, a “blameless” official of God’s priesthood expresses his doubt about God’s power (1:6, 18–20). Does Zacharias thereby defile the sanctuary? Probably not. But he carries the mark of God’s displeasure outside the holy place where others can see it.

What shall we make of all this? On one level, Luke’s Gospel’s story of redemption opens in Jerusalem at its most sacred spot yet ends not only with Jesus’ predictions of the destruction of the same temple (see 21:6, 20, 24) but also with Jesus’ death at nearby Calvary, an event that itself confers on Calvary a deep sacral character. In a related vein, the story begins with the arrival of an angel in the sanctuary, an event that shows God’s respect for the Mosaic order, of which the temple is the apex, and ends with a decisive withdrawal of divine pleasure for the current Mosaic order as Jesus dies at the insistence of those who have custodianship for the sanctuary and the Mosaic law. What is more, fewer than twenty-five years later, the temple doors are shut against Jesus’ followers, effectively sealing them from worshipping there and setting up the temple and its city for their destruction at Roman hands in AD 70 (see Acts 21:30).¹

C. Contrasts

We also sense that Luke, who apparently writes in the 70s of the first century, seeks to answer questions about Christianity that have arisen in the larger Roman world, a world that his friend Theophilus represents (see 1:3; JST

1. Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 396.

3:19; Acts 1:1; and the Introduction V.A). After all, within recent memory Jews of Palestine and Roman legions have fought a bitter war that ends with the fall of Jerusalem and its temple, as well as the fortresses of Machaerus and Masada a little later. In the run-up to the war, Romans identify Christians simply as Jews. But Luke seeks to set the record straight by clarifying that Christians, and those who are involved in founding their movement, are very different from other Jews. For example, it is Jews who incite and lead the unruly crowds that oppose Paul and his companions in Asia Minor and elsewhere (see Acts 13:50; 14:2, 19; 17:5, 13; etc.). In contrast, those associated with the beginnings of the Christian movement, including the parents of John the Baptist and Joseph and Mary, are upright citizens who are circumspect observers of law and order, particularly visible in their respect for the Mosaic code (see 1:6; 2:4–5, 22, 24, 27, 39, 42, 51; the Note on 23:56; the Analysis on 2:21–24).² This respect extends even to the angel who approaches Zacharias within the temple not to announce a change in the law but to announce the birth of one who will, in time, begin that change (see D&C 84:28). Thus, an important contrast that excoriates lawless Jews and exonerates faithful Christians is woven into the fabric of Luke’s records.

Luke further frames his story through other contrasts, not only those that we see, say, between the responses of Zacharias and Mary to the angel’s visits³ but also those visible between Elisabeth and Mary, or between the newly born children and the aging Simeon and Anna—youth contrasted to old age. Some of the contrasts are almost hidden, such as those associated with Gabriel, who is Noah⁴ and who announces life but has witnessed widespread death in his own day. Indeed, Gabriel announces the birth of the Savior who will offer life to those who have died in the flood (see Moses 7:38–39; 1 Pet. 3:18–21).⁵

On another level, the story begins with an expression of disbelief, a dimension that will characterize the reaction of most people to Jesus and his message. Thus, on a metaphorical level, Zacharias represents many whom Jesus will meet, particularly officials and especially those in the holy city—“blameless” but unbelieving (1:6). By contrast, God finds faith in a

2. Evans, *Luke*, 342.

3. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 80, 82.

4. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), 157 (hereafter cited as *TPJS*).

5. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *Pearl of Great Price*, 131–32. These observations about Gabriel come from an honors paper by Richard Gardner (September 1999).

young woman far removed from the holy sanctuary and its city—Mary in Nazareth (see 1:38, 45).

In a further manifestation of contrasts, the theme of light also dances through the first two chapters in counterpoint to the lightless “power of darkness” that gathers in Jerusalem at Jesus’ arrest (22:53). In the first instance, the infant Jesus is a bearer or bringer of light. For his coming draws down into the world angelic appearances and illuminating prophetic words. In his youth, we see him enlightening an audience of sages in the temple (see 2:46–47; JST 2:46–47). Among other instances of light in Luke 1–2, we notice the following:

1. In the sanctuary, both the candelabrum and the incense altar burn fuel and thus produce light, the lamps dispelling any darkness.
2. Enlightenment comes from angels who appear to Zacharias, Mary, and the shepherds.
3. Angels bring both the light of their countenances—they appear to the shepherds during the night (see 2:8)—and the light of their messages.
4. Enlightenment arises within words of prophecy from Elisabeth, Mary, Zacharias and Simeon.
5. Light is implicit in the accounts of searching and finding—the shepherds find the babe (see 2:16), Simeon and Anna come upon the family in the temple (see 2:27, 38), and Jesus’ parents discover him there (see 2:46).
6. Light is also implicit in resolving the “troubled” feelings of Zacharias and Mary (see 1:12, 29).
7. The lambing season, hinted at in the adults’ actions with the sheep (see 2:8), points to the time of year when days are growing longer and nights are shortening.
8. There is an implicit dimming of light when Jesus departs from the temple in Jerusalem (see 2:39); the same can be said about other places—when Jesus leaves Bethlehem and Egypt (see Matt. 2:14, 21).
9. In this connection, particularly in the Joseph Smith Translation, we find the clear sense that the youthful Jesus is an illuminator of those who listen to him in the temple (see 2:46–47; JST 2:46–47).

D. Humanity

In yet another pattern, we have to be impressed with the human links that Luke preserves in his account. He takes pains to note that both John and Jesus are born of women, thus connecting them to this world and not simply to a heavenly or ethereal realm. He also presents Jesus as a son of Adam, the first man, emphasizing Jesus’ humanity (see 3:38). Moreover,

his record underscores Jesus' descent from David and his inheritance of David's earthly throne, besides his endless "kingdom" (1:32–33). Later, Luke's version of the genealogy will stress this same human linkage, in addition to tying Jesus closely to God (see 3:31–32, 38).

In this connection, it is important to notice that Elisabeth and Mary stand at the center of chapters 1 and 2. What do they represent? What does their relationship mean for the story? In partial response, Elisabeth represents disappointment and unfulfilled dreams, having lived her life without a child. Even so, she is gracious and without jealousy toward the youthful Mary, standing as a perfect model for all (see 1:42–45). In another response, it is with Elisabeth that the Lord begins his miracles in a physical, palpable way: "Elisabeth conceived" (1:24).⁶

On a further level, although Elisabeth experiences most of her trials before her grand reward of a child, Mary's troubles are just beginning because of the way that people will view her pregnancy. It is easier for a person to see the gracious blessings of God in the later life of Elisabeth than in Mary's youth. Thus, only those with an eye of faith can see Mary's situation for what it is and will become. Even Joseph does not possess such an eye at first, turning from her. He also represents others who do not believe her story about the angel (see Matt. 1:18–21). We can only imagine the difficulties that Mary faces when she returns to Nazareth from Elisabeth's home. Although Luke does not write about Mary's experiences immediately after her return (see 1:56), he leaves the door wide open for seeing that she meets severe challenges at home, now that she is about four months along and obviously pregnant (compare John 8:19, 41–42). Even so, we must never lose sight of the fact that God entrusts his secret of the ages to two women—namely, whom the mother of the Messiah is to be.

One of the important elements in chapter 1 touches on family and home—preparing a family to receive spiritual blessings. The appearance of the angel to Zacharias certainly brings this priest abruptly to understand God's imminent plans. And his months alone with his thoughts and with the memory of that visit while he cannot speak or hear plainly lift him to new spiritual heights. His transformation begins at the sanctuary but continues in his home. Elisabeth's pregnancy and her preparation to nurture her child will bring her to fresh spiritual awareness, all occurring within her home. And John, of course, carries the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb, pointing to her supernal spiritual preparation (see 1:15; D&C 84:27).

6. Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 22–23.

As further evidence, we note the rush of celestial enlightenment onto Elisabeth at the arrival of Mary (see 1:41) and the descent of spiritual power onto Zacharias at the naming of their son, all within their family and home (see 1:64, 67).

We must also take account of threads that tie Mary back to the stories of Sarah, mother of Isaac, and Hannah, mother of Samuel. If we recognize Sarah as the mother of covenant Israel and Hannah as the mother of the ancient kingdom of Israel because she bears Samuel who anoints the first king,⁷ then Elisabeth can perhaps be thought of as the mother of those who embrace the heavenly kingdom, and Mary the mother of the one who institutes the kingdom. The links to Sarah occur mainly in circumstances that surround Elisabeth: old, past childbearing years, without child, seemingly forsaken by God. The connections to Hannah stand forth chiefly in Mary's story: young, mother of a child of promise, singer of a song of praise to God (see 1 Sam. 2:1–10).⁸

E. Composition

Luke introduces us to the story of Jesus at about the moment in time that Matthew selects—notwithstanding Joseph Fitzmyer, who sees the original Luke beginning with chapter 3 (see the Introduction III.C).⁹ The starting point is different for the Gospel writers Mark and John. Mark, who evidently writes the first of the Gospel accounts, begins his report with the ministry of John the Baptist. John the evangelist, on the other hand, opens his account with Jesus' premortal roles. Luke and Matthew select the time of Jesus' birth to begin their stories, emphasizing Jesus' incarnation, his birth into the flesh. It may be that, by emphasizing Jesus' connection to this world through his mother, Luke and Matthew are already answering those who deny such a tie, including those against whom John writes in his correspondence (see 2 John 1:7).

We must ask about Luke's sources for chapters 1 and 2. This segment of his record differs in important ways from the rest of his narrative. We observe clear indications of Hebrew or Aramaic features which do not otherwise characterize the writing of Luke, a person who writes and speaks

7. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 35–38, notes God's control of the womb, even to controlling the destiny of "the nation Israel."

8. Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 25–26, 67–68.

9. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:488–89.

Greek.¹⁰ This circumstance leads some students of the New Testament to conclude that Luke draws on a finished source for his first two chapters. In this light, we notice that at the heart of these chapters stand the recollections of not only those who know about events surrounding John's birth (see 1:65–66) but even of occurrences that touch Mary herself (see 2:19, 51). We also suspect that these individuals—and Mary is to be reckoned among them—tell and retell their stories to friends and confidants (see the Introduction II.E). The patent connections to the temple that lie in the story of Zacharias and Elisabeth and undergird most of chapter 1 form a further factor. Although such links do not prove that this couple or their acquaintances are the source of this report, the temple ties in the account are most natural in the home and working environment of a priest. Additionally, in the aftermath of these events, God enrolls more witnesses among the acquaintances of John's parents, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna, as well as those who hear their stories (see 1:65; 2:18, 25, 38).

F. Southerners in the North

The reasons that the families of Mary and Joseph, both from southern Bethlehem stock, find their way to Nazareth in the north remain unknown. But we can draw reasonable inferences from the historical situation. In 104 BC, the high priest–king Aristobulus, from the ruling Hasmonean family, sends forces to the north from Jerusalem and subdues Galilee's inhabitants. In order to ensure that government matters function properly, Aristobulus sends officials from the south to take up residence in Galilee and to manage Hasmonean political and economic interests.¹¹ It is likely that a substantial number of these officials sink roots into the soil of Galilee and raise their families there. In this light, one possible reason why the families of southerners, such as those of Mary and Joseph, are living in northern towns like Nazareth is that their forebears move northward either as government functionaries or as people who see an opportunity for a different kind of

10. For example, *TDNT* 1:4; 5:270.

11. Josephus, *A.J.* 13.11.3 (§§318–19); Schürer, *History*, 1:141–42, 217–18; Aryeh Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), 80–83; Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 25–28; Andrea M. Berlin, “Jewish Life before the Revolt: The Archaeological Evidence,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 36, no. 4 (2005): 417–70; Morten Hørning Jensen, *Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and Its Socio-economic Impact on Galilee* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 14–15.

life after Galilee comes under Hasmonean control. After all, the artisan's skills that Joseph possesses will come from his father and grandfather, and those skills are in demand in expanding cities such as Sepphoris in the north; the renovation of the temple in Jerusalem, with its need for skilled workers, is still decades away. Another possible reason is that the forebears of Mary and Joseph, with ties to the royal family of David, see Galilee as a place to escape potential retribution by the Hasmoneans, who might view Davidic family members as competitors for the throne of the Judean kingdom.¹² Whatever the case, these families, with roots reaching back to Judea, evidently come into possession of properties in the north while still retaining connections to the south, including property. It is this sort of situation that we seem to meet in the story of the journey of Mary and Joseph to take care of tax matters in Bethlehem, where both of them, as we will suggest, are to register to pay taxes (see the Note on 2:5; the Analysis on 2:1–7).

G. Names

What can we say about the meanings of the names Zacharias, Elisabeth, and John? Do they point to special dimensions of the story? In a very real sense, they do. Zacharias or Zechariah means “Yahweh/Jehovah remembers.”¹³ Elisabeth or Elizabeth seems to be “[my] God is an oath” or “[my] God is good fortune.”¹⁴ Possibly, one could see her name as “God will be or make an oath.” John or Yohanan means “Yahweh/Jehovah has been gracious.”¹⁵ In light of events chronicled in chapter 1, where these three people are featured, each of these names enriches the significance of the report.¹⁶

12. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 87, 89–90.

13. *TDOT*, 4:69–72; Theodor M. Mauch, “Zechariah,” in *IDB*, 4:941, 943; Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 26.

14. Marshall, *Luke*, 52; Edward P. Blair, “Elizabeth,” in *IDB*, 2:93.

15. *TDOT*, 5:22–26, 30–35; Bruce T. Dahlberg, “Johanan,” in *IDB*, 2:929.

16. Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 26.

PROLOGUE (1:1–4)

King James Translation

¹ Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, ² Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; ³ It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

New Rendition

¹ Inasmuch as many have endeavored to set forth a narrative of the things which have been fulfilled among us, ² just as those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning have handed these things down to us, ³ it seemed good to me as well, since I have investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it for you in orderly sequence, noble Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may understand for certain concerning those principles which you have been taught.

Notes

1:1 *Forasmuch as*: The Joseph Smith Translation replaces this expression with a declaration about Luke’s authority for writing his Gospel: “As I am a messenger of Jesus Christ” (JST 1:1). Such a statement offers clarity because in the Greek version this verse, and in what follows, Luke discloses his knowledge of other written accounts and, though they exist, he seeks to justify his own record.

***many have . . . set forth . . . a declaration*:** Luke acknowledges (1) the existence of other accounts when he begins his Gospel and (2) his at least partial dependency on some of them. In addition, he signals that he will be giving his own shape to the materials that he inherits (see also 1:3).

***set forth in order a declaration*:** The meaning is that Luke intends to set out, in a fresh way, a narrative of events, as the Greek term *diēgēsis* (“narration”) illustrates,¹⁷ following them through to the end.

***most surely believed among us*:** The basic sense of the passive form of the verb, when dealing with things, is “brought to fulfillment” or “achieved” (Greek *plērophoreō*). Further, the passive underlines that it is God who does

17. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 427; Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 194 (hereafter cited as BAGD).

it.¹⁸ Luke is treating matters that have occurred and are already known. By adding the phrase “among us,” Luke indicates that he is a witness, specifically to events that he narrates in the book of Acts.¹⁹

1:2 *they delivered them unto us:* The verb “delivered” is a common New Testament term which, among its meanings, carries the sense “to pass on” or “to transmit” the story or tradition about Jesus, frequently in an oral form (Greek *paradidōmi*; see 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Pet. 2:21). The verb also has to do with the oral tradition among Pharisees (see Mark 7:13).²⁰ In this verse, Luke seems to be alluding to his own first encounter with the message about Jesus, the story that brings him to the Savior and comes from eyewitnesses. Whether that message first comes to him in oral or, perhaps, written form he does not say.

they . . . were eyewitnesses, and ministers: Although the English word order in the KJV might lead us to believe that the expression “eyewitnesses, and ministers” agrees with the preceding pronoun “us,” thus making Luke an eyewitness of events that he records, it does not. In the Greek text, it is clearly “they” who are the “eyewitnesses” and Luke therefore stands in the second or third generation of converts who receive “those things which are most surely believed” (1:1).

from the beginning: This expression, widely repeated in Greco-Roman literature, clearly points to eyewitnesses, the founding generation, both who know Jesus and whom Luke meets and interviews (see Introduction II.E).²¹

eyewitnesses . . . of the word: The legal dimension of the expression “eyewitnesses . . . of the word” becomes clear in Peter’s speech that follows Jesus’ death. In that speech, Peter sets out the qualifications of the person who will replace Judas Iscariot as a member of the Twelve: such a person shall “have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us” (Acts 1:21–22). In this light, an eyewitness “of the word” stands in an important place within the early Christian community because that person can bear witness of what he—legally, always a male—sees and hears from Jesus, from the beginning of his ministry to the end. Within the guidelines of law, such a person’s witness possesses legal force.

18. BAGD, 676; *TDNT*, 6:309–10; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§310(1).

19. Johnson, *Luke*, 3.

20. BAGD, 619–21; *TDNT*, 2:171.

21. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 12–38, 114–54.

the word: The prominence of this expression is not to be missed. While it does not carry the same set of meanings that it bears in John’s Gospel (Greek *logos*), that is, pointing to Jesus, the term refers to the message that missionaries carry into the world, a message that Theophilus hears and, presumably, accepts.²²

1:3 having had perfect understanding: Luke nods toward his extensive research efforts; though the exact meaning of the verb (Greek *parakoloutheō*) is debated, the expression must mean “because I have examined everything carefully.”²³

in order: The Greek term *kathexēs* denotes the accurate ordering of events, in a sequential row (see Acts 11:4), an objective that Luke seeks to govern his narrative.²⁴ As we shall see, at important junctures his ordering differs from that of others.

most excellent: Because of how this phraseology appears elsewhere in Luke’s work, it seems to be a proper way of addressing prominent Roman officials (see Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Hence, it is reasonable to believe that Theophilus is a Roman official.

Theophilus: The meaning of the name is “friend of God,” which leads some commentators to suppose that Theophilus is not a real person but merely a fictional device to address anyone who might be a friend of God. But Theophilus is certainly a real person who is probably the sponsor of Luke’s writing and publishing effort.²⁵ It is important to note that Luke mentions Theophilus twice, here and in Acts 1:1. Joseph Smith adds a third instance at JST 3:19 (see the Note on 3:13).

1:4 those things: The Greek term is *logoi*, “words,” meaning the details of the gospel.²⁶

instructed: As with the term “delivered” in 1:2, this verb carries a likely reference to the first time that Theophilus hears the message about Christ, a message that brings him to inquire and possibly to believe (Greek *katēcheō*).²⁷ Whether on the basis of this verb we can conclude that Theophilus is already a believer remains problematic.²⁸

22. BAGD, 478–80; *TDNT*, 4:102–7.

23. BAGD, 624; *TDNT*, 1:215; Plummer, *Luke*, 4; Marshall, *Luke*, 42–43; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:296–97; Johnson, *Luke*, 28.

24. BAGD, 389; Marshall, *Luke*, 43.

25. Morris, *Luke*, 74; Johnson, *Luke*, 1, 28–29.

26. Plummer, *Luke*, 5.

27. BAGD, 424–25.

28. *TDNT*, 3:638–40.

Analysis

Luke's prologue presents the best example in the New Testament of meeting the early standards of Greek historical writing, especially those achieved by the historian Thucydides (c. 460–400 BC). These first four verses of Luke's account, hinting that he intends his work to rise to the high level of history reporting in his world, set out the objectives of his story.²⁹ First, while standing in continuity with the "many" who have written before, his approach will be fresh, but with his own "understanding of all things" (1:1, 3). Second, his account will rest on his own research into matters as they have transpired "from the very first" (1:3). He plans to raise to view the events that stamp an initial, defining shape on what will follow in Jesus' ministry. Third, his work will be thorough; it will be concerned with "all things," as he is able to assemble them into a meaningful whole (1:3). Fourth, he proposes to write the story of Jesus accurately, "in order" (1:3). This is not to say that others have written inaccurately. Rather, Luke simply announces to his readers that he has consciously striven to achieve accuracy.³⁰

Luke's choice of terms discloses much about the processes of missionary work in his day. He is, after all, one of its beneficiaries. He characterizes the missionary message as "a narrative" and as "the word" (see the Notes on 1:1, 2). He also talks about "the words" that have played a role in Theophilus's conversion (see the Note on 1:4). Most of these terms point to the content of an oral presentation from a missionary to an investigator. Such content is "delivered" by "eyewitnesses, and ministers" so that a person is "instructed" in the truth about the Savior (1:2, 4). Implicit is the sense that people receive the basics, the fundamental message that Jesus is the Messiah. Also implicit in the expressions "the word" and "the words" rests a concept that the missionaries carry a fuller version of the story to the investigator, potentially bringing a deeper understanding that invites further exploration (1:2, 4).

29. *TDNT*, 3:395–96.

30. See a similar summary in Plummer, *Luke*, 4–5.

ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH (1:5–25)

King James Translation

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. 8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, 9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. 14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. 15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. 16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn

New Rendition

5 In the days that Herod was king of Judea, there was a certain priest named Zacharias from the priestly division of Abijah, and the name of his wife, who was of the daughters of Aaron, was Elizabeth. 6 Both were righteous in the sight of God, conducting themselves blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. 7 And they had no child, because Elizabeth was unable to have children, and they were both advanced in years. 8 And it came to pass while he was fulfilling his duties as a priest before God in the order of his division, 9 in accordance with the custom of the priest's office, that he was chosen by lot to go into the Lord's sanctuary and make the incense offering. 10 And all the assembly of the people were praying outside at the time of incense.

11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. 12 And when he saw him, Zacharias was shaken and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Ghost while still in his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will 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.

18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. 19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. 20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. 22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. 24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, 25 Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people ready for the Lord.”

18 And Zacharias said to the angel, “How will I know this? For I am old, and my wife is advanced in years.” 19 And answering, the angel said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God. And I was sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And behold, you will be silent and not be able to speak until the days when these things will happen, because you did not believe my words, which will indeed be fulfilled in their due time.”

21 And the people were waiting for Zacharias and were amazed that he spent so much time in the temple. 22 And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. For his part, he kept nodding to them and remained mute.

23 And it came to pass that when the days of his service were completed, he went to his home. 24 After these days, his wife, Elizabeth, conceived and kept herself in confinement for five months, saying, 25 “This is how the Lord has treated me in the days when he looked on me to take away my disgrace among men.”

Notes

1:5 *Herod, the king*: By introducing Herod, who ruled Palestine from 37 to 4 BC, Luke places events into a historical context which we can check. Herod comes to power under a commission issued and celebrated by the Roman Senate in 40 BC. But afterwards it takes him three years to consolidate his power against enemies and other pretenders.³¹

31. Josephus, *A.J.* 14.14.5 (§§385–89); Schürer, *History*, 1:287–329.

the king of Judaea: The formal title remains unknown, although Luke may be right. Other ancient sources do not specify Herod’s title, simply calling him “king.”³²

priest . . . daughters of Aaron: This couple descends from Aaron, from either Eleazar or Ithamar (see 1 Chr. 24:1–6), which places the couple’s oldest son John in the position to become the high priest, as Doctrine and Covenants 84:28 implies. (Aaron’s older sons, Nadab and Abihu, die without children—see 1 Chr. 24:2.) During the prior 150 years, the office of high priest is first seized by the Hasmonean family (see 1 Maccabees 14:27–48) and then held as a political payment by King Herod for cooperating priests.³³ Even so, Josephus insists that during previous centuries his people exert the utmost care in seeing that the line of priests remains pure.³⁴ Such accords with the instructions in Leviticus 21:7, 13–15.

the course of Abia: According to Ezra 2:36–39, only four of the twenty-four divisions of temple priests return from the exile in Babylonia. But the four quickly reconstitute the twenty-four. Abia (or Abijah) is the eighth division of priests (see 1 Chr. 24:10; the Note on 1:8), which serves at the temple during the eighth and thirty-second weeks of the year.³⁵ Because of the large number of priests in his division, Zacharias actually serves no more than one day of his assigned week in temple functions.³⁶

his wife was of the daughters of Aaron: By this note, it becomes clear that Elisabeth is of the preferred family descent to marry a priest, assuring the proper ancestry for any children, though the law does not prevent a priest’s son from marrying outside the tribe of Levi (see Lev. 21:7, 13–15).³⁷

1:6 both righteous before God, walking . . . blameless: Luke strikes the chord that those associated with the earliest phases of the Christian movement respect law and hold standards of righteousness (see 2:4–5, 22, 24, 27, 39, 42, 51; 4:16; the Notes on 4:16; 16:16–17; 20:47; 23:56). Moreover, with an unexpected, generous tone, Luke’s narrative will lift the curse of childlessness from Zacharias and Elisabeth. Beyond this, certain individuals carry the potent appellative “righteous” or “just” (Greek *dikaios*) at the

32. Strabo, *Geography* 16.2.46; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 5.75; Tacitus, *History* 5.9.

33. Schürer, *History*, 1:193–94.

34. Josephus, *Ag. Apion* 1.7 (§30).

35. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services As They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (rpt., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 86–88; Morris, *Luke*, 75.

36. Schürer, *History*, 2:292.

37. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 213–21; Ze’ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Press; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 129–31.

beginning of his Gospel and near the end, forming a literary *inclusio* that ties the whole together (see 2:25; 23:47; the Note on 23:50).

ordinances: The noun here (Greek *dikaiōma*) means “statute” or “regulation” in the Old Testament sense of performing temple ordinances (see Heb. 9:1).³⁸

1:7 no child: Of all the family tragedies that can occur in ancient Israel, as stories in the Old Testament attest, the lack of a child in a marriage is one of the worst. Not only does a childless person lack an heir but also is deemed cursed or unacceptable before God (see 1 Sam. 1:4–7; Isa. 54:1–7). But Luke does not intend to leave us with the impression that Elisabeth remains in this state. Instead, he will soon put Elisabeth in the select company of Sarah, Hannah, and other women in the Old Testament to whom God earlier grants special children.³⁹

Elisabeth was barren: The common assumption is that the woman, Elisabeth in this case, is infertile. We do not know the medical reason for her barrenness, whether it is a physiological condition that afflicts Elisabeth or one that afflicts Zacharias.

well stricken in years: It is Zacharias who is the source for this notion in his objection to the angel’s promise (see 1:18), evidently indicating that Elisabeth is past her child-bearing years.

1:8 his order: Twenty-four orders of priests have existed from early times, leaving each order with one week twice a year for service at the temple (see 1 Chr. 24:7–19; the Note on 1:5).⁴⁰ Following Zacharias, many other priests will eventually become faithful to the new order announced by the angel (see Acts 6:7), indicating a “transformation of the priesthood” through the gospel message.⁴¹

1:9 his lot was to burn incense: According to *Mishnah Tamid* 5.2, a priest can offer the incense once in his lifetime.⁴²

lot: The appearance of this term, which is implicit in the verb (Greek *lanchanō*), ties the narrative to events at the end of Jesus’ life, that is, to the soldiers casting lots for Jesus’ clothing (see 23:34), to Judas’s loss of his lot or inheritance (see Matt. 27:3–10), and to the act of replacing Judas by casting sacred lots (see Acts 1:17, 26—the term translated “part” in Acts 1:17

38. BAGD, 197; *TDNT*, 2:219–23; *TLNT*, 1:343–44.

39. Marshall, *Luke*, 53; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:323.

40. Schürer, *History*, 2:245–50; *TDNT*, 3:262.

41. *TDNT*, 3:264.

42. Marshall, *Luke*, 53; Morris, *Luke*, 76.

is the Greek word for lot, *klēros*). The lot itself might consist of a shaped stone, a colored stone, a die, or knuckle of an animal.⁴³

into the temple: The Greek term *naos* generally refers to the sanctuary within the temple structure (see 1:21, 22; 23:45), but occasionally to the external courtyards (see the Notes on 2:37 and 19:45).⁴⁴ The occurrence of the term *naos* only in chapter 1 and at 23:45 forms an *inclusio* that bridges the Gospel text, emphasizing its unity.⁴⁵

1:10 the whole multitude: Is the occasion a festival, as the apparently large gathering implies? Likely not. We consider the following. Concerning dating, the priestly order of Abia is the eighth of twenty-four (see 1 Chr. 24:10; the Note on 1:5), and its time for temple service is during the eighth and thirty-second weeks of the year, the former coming two months after the new year, which in New Testament times apparently falls in the autumn.⁴⁶ The eighth week comes too late for the Feast of Tabernacles and too early for Hanukkah (November–December). Hence, the large crowd may simply be due to the beginning of the Sabbath.

the time of incense: Of the daily events at the temple, this offering may have been morning or afternoon, though afternoon is more likely because of the large crowd.⁴⁷ A regular service, of course, is implicit in the evident willingness of people to wait for Zacharias to emerge even though he is delayed (see 1:21).

1:11 there appeared: The sense of the passive form of the Greek verb *horaō* is “was seen,” meaning that Zacharias sees the angel in a straightforward manner. No hint exists that Zacharias undergoes a vision or experiences a dream when meeting the angel.⁴⁸ This element of direct encounter with celestial personages underlies much of Luke’s narrative (see the Notes on 1:12, 29; 22:43; 24:24, 31, 34). Importantly, the passive form of the verb (Greek *ōphthē*) occurs only here and at 22:43 and 24:34, pointing to an *inclusio* that underlines the overall unity of Luke’s Gospel.⁴⁹

43. BAGD, 463; *TDNT*, 3:758–64; 4:1–2; Fred D. Gealy, “Lots,” *IDB*, 3:163–64.

44. *TDNT*, 4:885.

45. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

46. Schürer, *History*, 1:126–27, 594–99; James C. Vanderkam, “Calendars: Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish,” in *ABD*, 1:817.

47. Edersheim, *Temple*, 152–73; Schürer, *History*, 2:300–2 and n. 39; Morris, *Luke*, 76; Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer, *The Ritual of the Temple in the Time of Christ* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2002), 31–45.

48. *TDNT*, 5:317, 324, 342, 356.

49. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:324; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

an angel: The arrival of the angel signals that heaven will guide following events and that celestial changes are afoot, thus filling one of the tasks assigned to angels: “to do the work of . . . the Father, . . . to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ . . . that they may bear testimony of him” (Moro. 7:31). Because of the angel’s arrival, those outside the sanctuary that day, though they do not hear the angel’s voice, still become witnesses that heavenly events are underway (see 1:21–22). In addition, the repeated appearance of angels, both at the beginning of the Gospel and at its end (see 1:26; 2:9; 24:4, 23), forms an *inclusio* that ties the opening of Luke’s story to its end (see the Note on 24:4).⁵⁰

right side: Or south side of the incense altar, nearest to the candelabrum. The notation “right side” is from the angel’s point of view; Zacharias sees him on his own left side. In theater language, we say “stage right.” In the center of the sanctuary, in front of the veil, rests the incense altar. To the north stands the golden table of the shewbread; to the south rests the seven-branched candelabrum.⁵¹ Hence, we are to envision that the angel appears between the altar and candlestick, between the light and smoke, symbols of God’s presence during the Exodus. Moreover, the tenor of the angel’s message ties to the locale or spot where he stands—it is to be good news.⁵² The angel’s first words, “Fear not,” confirm this sense of good news (1:13). Similarly, ancient drama features the initial words of messengers as an omen of the news that they bear.

1:12 when Zacharias saw: This observation buttresses the notion that Zacharias and others behold celestial visitors in a firsthand, sensory way (see the Notes on 1:11, 29; 24:24).

troubled: The verb (Greek *tarassō*), hinting at the sense “terrified,”⁵³ is related to the word that describes Mary’s response to the angel’s coming in 1:29, placing Zacharias and Mary on a continuum. The words point to the emotional or psychological response of each to the unexpected intrusion of the divine world into their own. Importantly, this verb appears near the end of Luke’s Gospel and forms an *inclusio* that imparts unity to the whole (see the Note on 24:38).

1:13 Fear not: These reassuring words (1) set the tone for the message that follows (see the Note on 24:36), (2) duplicate the words to Mary and

50. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

51. Schürer, *History*, 2:296–98.

52. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:324–25.

53. BAGD, 812–13.

the shepherds (see 1:30; 2:10), and (3) indicate that the angel knows the thoughts of Zacharias who is frightened by the angel's sudden appearance (see 1:12).

thy prayer: On one hand, Zacharias and Elisabeth may still be praying for a child (compare Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam. 1:10–12). If so, Zacharias's response in Luke 1:18—"Whereby shall I know this?"—may indicate that he does not take seriously his own prayers for a child. But this view is improbable because Elisabeth is past her childbearing years (see 1:7). On the other hand, the angel may be referring to Zacharias's prayer for the redemption of Israel as he officiates in the sanctuary. If so, his prayer is one that he offers as a matter of his priestly role or as a matter of private but set worship.⁵⁴ At this moment, the angel promises the fulfilment of his prayer for Israel's redemption.

thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son: This is the most surprising part of the news that the angel brings because "Elisabeth was barren" and "well stricken in years" (1:7). Besides the child's roles that the angel discloses (see 1:14–17), modern scripture unveils other dimensions of this infant's activities (see D&C 27:7–8; 84:27–28).

1:14 thou shalt have joy and gladness: The first set of blessings to flow through the birth of John will come to his parents. Only later will John become important for others—"many shall rejoice" (1:14).

1:15 neither wine nor strong drink: Some have guessed that John lives the life of a Nazirite whose vow is set out in Numbers 6.⁵⁵ But he seems not to be restricted by all the points of the vow. Hence, it seems better to say that John avoids alcoholic beverages, an act that sets him apart from his contemporaries. Moreover, his vow-like life also distinguishes him as a person who tries to live a holy life dedicated to God, as one does who lives temporarily under a vow, such as those whom Paul accompanies to the temple in Acts 21:23–26.

filled with the Holy Ghost . . . from his mother's womb: This aspect appears also in Doctrine and Covenants 84:27. One point seems to be that the Holy Ghost enlivens John while he is in his mother's womb, not merely from the time of birth. Hence, when the babe leaps (see 1:41), spiritual power overflows to his worthy mother who then prophesies. Elisabeth thereby becomes a witness to the fulfilment of the angel's prophecy to her husband. In this connection, Elisabeth's words to Mary demonstrate that

54. Edersheim, *Temple*, 152–57, 165, 168–69; Morris, *Luke*, 76.

55. Plummer, *Luke*, 14.

the spirit of prophecy comes to rest on her while she is expecting her child (see 1:42–45).⁵⁶ Furthermore, these words set out God’s view of Elisabeth’s holy habits and righteous routines.

1:17 *he shall go before:* John’s role of being a forerunner includes being born first. Thus timing matters in the divine hegemony.

spirit and power of Elias: The angel reveals that this “spirit and power” can rest on persons other than Elijah, who, according to prophecy, is to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children” (Mal. 4:6). One of those persons is John (see Matt. 17:10–13; D&C 27:7).⁵⁷

Elias: This spelling represents the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name “Elijah” because Greek does not put an “h” sound in the middle or at the end of a word.

to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children: This first part of John’s task ties to Elijah’s prophesied mission as noted in Malachi 4:6, here loosely quoted. On a broad scale, the Baptist’s work has to do with restoring family relationships, particularly in light of 1 Kings 18:36–37, where Elijah appeals to the God of his people’s ancestors and then prays that he has “turned their heart back again” both to God and to their forebears. According to the messenger who appears to Joseph Smith, this work continues into the latter days (see JS–H 1:36–39).

to turn . . . the disobedient to the wisdom of the just: This prophecy frames the second part of John’s mission. For this line, there is no comparable source to that of Elijah’s work in Malachi 4:5–6. To be sure, a hint about Elijah’s future actions appears in his prayer in 1 Kings 18:37, which includes turning his wicked people back to their God and may apply here. The phrase “wisdom of the just” carries the meaning “proper thinking of the righteous.”

to make ready a people: Throughout Luke’s Gospel, his term for “people” (Greek *laos*) regularly points to those who distinguish themselves from others in their worship, in their response to the message of salvation, and in following faithfully (see 1:10, 21, 68, 77; 2:10, 31, 32; 3:15; etc.). Only twice does Luke apply the word “people” to those who are arrayed against the Savior (see 19:47; 23:13).

1:18 *Zacharias said . . . Whereby:* The important dimensions of this scene are twofold. First, Zacharias shows himself to be a person of exceptional courage because he does not fear to express his doubt even to an

56. TDNT, 6:835.

57. TDNT, 6:836–41.

angel. Second, Zacharias responds to the angel's message with a focus on the physical and biological elements of the angel's promise. In his mind, the possibility of Elisabeth and him becoming parents is gone. He does not yet see the divine hope of a spiritual healing for their physical bodies. But, of course, he will.

Whereby shall I know this?: Zacharias's question is tantamount to requesting a sign which the angel gives to him by taking away his speech and hearing. Such a sign is perfect for the situation because all who see him during the coming months, including during his next tour of duty at the temple, will know that something has changed. Hence, Zacharias's life becomes a proof of the angel's words to his family, friends, and all who wait expectantly outside the sanctuary on this day.

my wife well stricken in years: The key for understanding Zacharias's doubt is his knowledge that Elisabeth is beyond her child-bearing years.

1:19 I am Gabriel: The angel appeals to his authority, which he ties to God by almost repeating the divine name "I am." His authority also derives in part from his name, which means "man of God" or "God has shown himself mighty."⁵⁸ Adding the culminating dimensions of his authority, he declares where he comes from ("the presence of God") and that he bears a divine commission ("I . . . am sent").

1:20 thou shalt be dumb: Zacharias's dire situation is compounded, evidently by the angel, by his inability to hear, which is plain from his later exchange with his neighbors about the name of his son (see 1:62–63, and the Note on 1:62; compare Alma 30:49–52).

until the day that these things shall be performed: For Zacharias, there will be an end to the sign he suffers, unlike for others (see Jacob 7:1–20; Alma 30:6–59).

their season: The noun (Greek *kairos*) consistently carries the meaning of the decisive or important moment in matters tied to divine influences (see 4:13; 8:13; 12:56; 18:30; 19:44; 20:10; 21:8, 24, 36).⁵⁹ The only exceptions occur at 12:42 and 13:1.

1:21 the people waited: When the delayed Zacharias emerges from the temple unable to speak and hear, these people become the first witnesses that God is moving among them for some higher purpose (see the Notes on 1:65; 2:17; 24:48). We should assume that Elisabeth accompanies him to Jerusalem for his week of service.

58. Walter Brueggemann, "Gabriel," in *IDB*, 2:332–33; *TDOT*, 2:367–71, 377–78.

59. *TDNT*, 3:455–56, 458–61.

he tarried: The incense lighting does not require much time.⁶⁰ It seems that some people in the crowd are long-time temple attenders and know the routine, thus being surprised “that he tarried so long in the temple.”

1:22 he could not speak . . . and remained speechless: We must assume that Zacharias’s condition, coupled with his deafness, which can constitute a blemish (for a list, see Lev. 21:17–23), does not render him ritually unfit for the remainder of his week of service. For Luke says that he remains at the temple through “the days of his ministration” (1:23), a remarkable example of faithfulness to his priesthood duties. In addition, we are justified in seeing him return approximately six months later when his priesthood order is on duty again, all while unable to speak and hear. Incidentally, the people of the Dead Sea forbid priests with voice disorders from reading scripture aloud, and they see deafness as a blemish, though blemished priests at the temple can provide some services.⁶¹ In a different vein, as R. E. Brown points out, Zacharias’s silence at the beginning of the Gospel, that is, his inability to recite the required blessing at the end of the incense-lighting service, which appears in Numbers 6:24–26, is balanced by Jesus’ blessing of the eleven Apostles at the end of the Gospel story when “he lifted up his hands, and blessed them” as the priest is to do (24:50).⁶²

seen a vision: This expression represents the viewpoint of the gathered crowd. But here the Greek verb *horaō*, “to see,” points to Zacharias’s direct, physical sight of the angel (see the Notes on 1:11, 12, 29; 22:43; 24:34).⁶³

1:23 he departed to his own house: This notation makes clear that Zacharias and Elisabeth dwell outside the capital city, as do many other priestly families.⁶⁴ For a possible location, see the Note on 1:39. Even though Luke’s story features only Zacharias here, we should think that Elisabeth is in town for his temple service and accompanies him back to their home.

1:24 Elisabeth conceived: Above all, this event signals the beginning of the fulfillment of the angel’s robust prophecy. It is notable that the Lord chooses begetting and birth to herald his dawning message.

60. Edersheim, *Temple*, 166–70.

61. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, vol. 3A of The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1822–26.

62. Brown, *Birth*, 280–81; also Edersheim, *Temple*, 170–71.

63. *TDNT*, 5:317, 324, 342, 351.

64. Edersheim, *Temple*, 83; Ehud Netzer, “The Winter Palaces of the Judean Kings at Jericho at the End of the Second Temple Period,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 228 (December 1977): 1–13, especially 6 and 12.

hid herself: Does Elisabeth fear that, if she broadcasts news of her pregnancy, something will go wrong and she will suffer more shame if the child is not born, or is not born normally? Does one sense fear on her part? It seems not. It is just as possible that this expression points to her intensified spiritual efforts to show her worthiness before God and to remain steadfastly by the side of her now impaired husband (see the Analysis on 1:39–56). It is important to observe, further, that she remains within her home as the natural place to intensify her spiritual endeavors to be worthy of bearing her child of promise. We must also reckon with the possibility that she chooses to remain out of sight of relatives and neighbors for her full pregnancy (see 1:58).

1:25 he looked on me: Elisabeth knows that the eye of the Lord has come to her and that, in its coming, it brings a miracle.

my reproach: The common wisdom is that a barren woman has offended God. For years, Elisabeth lives under this suspicion from others and under her own cloud of doubt about herself (see the Notes on 13:12; 23:29).

Analysis

By writing about King Herod, Luke places his story within a known epoch of history that connects to the eras of the Roman emperors Augustus and Tiberius (see 1:5; 2:1; 3:1). In this way, he follows good historical practice. Throughout his Gospel account and his book of Acts, he will show how events in Palestine, a small corner of the wide Roman empire, eventually influence matters in Rome with the arrival of the Apostle Paul in that city (see Acts 28:16–31).

The incidents that Luke narrates, beginning with the priest Zacharias in the sacred sanctuary of the Jerusalem temple, start in remarkable fashion. For they involve the unexpected appearance of God’s angel, who heralds a new day of making “a people prepared for the Lord” (1:17). Perhaps oddly, God has chosen that this moment will come to pass through the birth of a child. More than this, the birth will be miraculous, healing a childless husband and wife in the process. But the mechanics will be natural, not spectacular. Because the angel’s announcement occurs in the temple during a regular ceremony, many become aware that something special is afoot. After Zacharias returns home, others of Zacharias and Elisabeth’s acquaintance will learn of the unusual movement of divine power among their people, though they may not grasp its sweeping grandeur.

Zacharias’s appearance in Luke’s story achieves much of the effect that the man Nicodemus does in John’s Gospel (see John 3). Both are respected

members of society, an observation that rests on their respective stations in life when the narratives of Luke and John find them. Both represent examples of devoted, deeply faithful people who are sensitive to and observant of the religious standards of their day. Both stand in for others of their kind who, as they do, receive satisfaction in lives dedicated to God. And both are blind and unresponsive to what they meet when they finally encounter divine power and teaching. We learn that this situation changes in Zacharias's case; concerning Nicodemus, we only know that he remains sympathetic to Jesus to his death (see John 19:39).

One of the results of Zacharias's condition is that he is left entombed within his mind, rolling the angel's words through his head again and again, with little ability to communicate with others. Because later in the story he is ready to receive God's healing and prophetic powers (see 1:64, 67–79), we sense that during the months of his imposed silence he is continually wrestling with his proper relationship to God. Even though he starts badly, he succeeds marvelously. We see his ennobling response to duty in the fact that he stays to the end of his week of service rather than retreating (see 1:23). We then assume that he returns to the temple about six months later when his order again has responsibility, even though he is limited in what he can do and even though other priests may look askance at him because of his seeming botch of the incense-lighting service. If he does not come back to serve as expected, we judge that Luke would make a note of it.

Concerning Elisabeth, we perceive that she is already a spiritually susceptible person who intensifies her holy ways so that, when her young cousin Mary visits her, God can pour out his Spirit on her (see 1:41–45). Moreover, throughout her married life she endures her acquaintances' reproaches, both spoken and unspoken. As with her husband, the news that she will bear a son must catch her completely off guard. How Zacharias communicates this fact to her we do not know. We assume that, as with most women of her day, Elisabeth is illiterate. So he presumably cannot communicate directly with her by writing, but perhaps through a literate family member. By the time of her son's birth she knows what his name is to be (see 1:59–60).

Fortunately for the priest Zacharias, he enjoys the support of a loyal wife. Though he disappoints the angel of God by his response, Elisabeth still stands by him and nurtures him through the long, silent months that follow his once-in-a-lifetime service at the incense altar. The two of them stand as a shining example of how a couple pull together to meet a significant challenge, even if the challenge affects one person more than the other.

We cannot step away from these lines without noting connections to the Bible stories of Sarah and Hannah. For each of these barren women, of course, a divinely inspired message points to a future, miraculous birth of a special child. Beyond this point, the accounts of Sarah and Hannah diverge, but that of Elisabeth ties to each. Concerning Sarah and Elisabeth, because of age, each is without hope of posterity of her own. Moreover, in their cases, God obliges himself to perform a miracle for women past their child-bearing years by announcing special births. In effect, their stories come down to the declaration uttered by the angel Gabriel: “with God nothing shall be impossible” (1:37). Concerning Hannah and Elisabeth, their differences in age are notable, the one young and the other older in years. But the barrenness of each brings to her the unwanted and unwarranted attention from others. Additionally, their sons fulfill important prophetic roles. And just so that we do not miss the scriptural connections between the sons, Luke records of the youthful John that “the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit” (1:80), knowing full well the scriptural reports of Hannah’s son: “the child Samuel grew before the Lord,” and then “Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him” (1 Sam. 2:21; 3:19).⁶⁵

THE ANNUNCIATION (1:26–38)

King James Translation

26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, 27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. 28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. 29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

New Rendition

26 And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph of the house of David. And the young woman’s name was Mary. 28 And coming in to her, he said, “Greetings, you who are favored! The Lord is with you. [You are blessed among women.]” 29 But she was confused at the statement, and wondered what kind of greeting this was.

30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found

65. Brown, *Birth*, 268–69; Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 25–26.

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. 31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? 35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. 36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing shall be impossible. 38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David, his father, 33 and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and there will be no end to his reign.”

34 But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I do not know any man?” 35 And answering, the angel said to her, “The Holy Ghost will come upon you and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore the holy child that is born will be called the Son of God. 36 And behold Elisabeth, your kinswoman, even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be infertile. 37 For all things are possible with God.” 38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. May it happen to me according to your word.” And the angel left her.

Notes

1:26 in the sixth month: The reference is not to the time since Zacharias leaves the service at the temple (see 1:23) nor to the sixth month in the Jewish calendar, which Luke’s gentile readers know nothing about, but to the period of Elisabeth’s pregnancy that has just passed its fifth month (see 1:24, 36), thus tying together the two parts of the story, that concerning Zacharias and Elisabeth and that concerning Mary.⁶⁶

66. Marshall, *Luke*, 64; Green, *Luke*, 85. For a different view about the “sixth month,” see Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ,” *BYU Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 5–38; a response can be found in Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, “When Was Jesus Born? A Response to a Recent Proposal,” *BYU Studies* 51, no. 3 (2012): 53–81.

a city . . . Nazareth: The same Greek term for city, *polis*, describes Nazareth in 2:4 (see also 1 Ne. 11:13). Greek does not have a word for “town” but has one for city and village. In Luke’s reckoning, or that of his source, Nazareth rates as a city.⁶⁷

1:27 virgin: The Greek term *parthenos* appears frequently in the Old Testament as well as in Matt. 1:23. In light of contemporary sources, the presence of the word here serves to emphasize both Mary’s virtue and her honorable status, indicating that she is worthy in every way of God’s notice (see 1:34, 37).⁶⁸

espoused: The same term appears in 2:5. The earliest age for marriage, which typically follows betrothal by a year, is twelve years and a day.⁶⁹ The procedure involves the father of the prospective groom meeting with the father of the prospective bride, usually in the company of a number of male relatives of both men. If the two parties agree, the groom’s father pays a bride price, called *mohar*, to the bride’s family and the betrothal begins, usually lasting a year.⁷⁰

of the house of David: The phrase can modify either “a virgin” or “a man,” or both, though it likely ties to Joseph. In 2:4 it becomes clear that Joseph descends from David; from 1:32 and 1:69 we infer that Luke knows of Mary’s descent from David’s house (see Rom. 1:3).

1:28 came in unto: The clause indicates that Mary is within an enclosure, either a room or a courtyard, which the angel enters unexpectedly, doubtless in her home.⁷¹ We compare a similar idiom tied to a residence, “go in unto the house” (1 Ne. 3:11; see also Mosiah 9:5–6; Alma 15:5; 19:2–3; 22:2; etc.). The Greek verb *eiserchomai* regularly points to a solemn entry into a special space.⁷² Hence, we find here a more than subtle emphasis on the home as a place of spiritual enlightenment (see the Note on 1:40). In accord with a second-century tradition embedded in the *Protevangelium of James* 11.1–2, art occasionally portrays Mary hearing the voice of the angel at a well that is away from her home. According to this apocryphal account,

67. TDNT, 6:522–25, 530–31.

68. TLNT, 3:44–52.

69. Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 248–49, 321, notes on *Ketuboth* 3:1, 8, and *Kiddushin* 1:2.

70. Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 41–43.

71. Marshall, *Luke*, 65.

72. TDNT, 2:676–77.

the angel appears later in her home. Luke's language does not support this tradition.

Hail: Luke's term here is the common greeting in Greek (*chaire*).⁷³ Though some commentators see special significance in this word, no reason exists to view it as bearing a deep meaning, even though the angel's greeting—as a whole—leads Mary to wonder (see 1:29).⁷⁴

highly favoured . . . blessed: A sense exists that even before Mary undergoes trials in her adult life, she enjoys a high regard in the heavens (see 1:30), implying that she has enjoyed an important stature in her premortal life. Further, the revelations of her role as the mother of God's son in 1 Nephi 11:18–21 and of her name in the angel's message to King Benjamin about the coming Messiah both point to her lofty premortal status (see Mosiah 3:8). Such a view stands against the observation that God, in an act of unexpected grace, chooses her without regard to her history of faithfulness.⁷⁵

favoured: The noun form appears in 1:30: "thou hast found *favour* with God." Three other passages repeat forms of the Greek term, all applied to Jesus: "the child [Jesus] grew . . . and the *grace* of God was upon him" (2:40); "Jesus increased . . . in *favour* with God and man" (2:52); "all [in Nazareth] bare him witness, and wondered at the *gracious* words which proceeded out of [Jesus'] mouth" (4:22; emphasis added). The fact that Luke writes of Mary and Jesus with the same terms underscores that she stands on the same spiritual continuum as her son (see also 4:22).

the Lord is with thee: This statement, common in the Old Testament, is equivalent to the meaning of the name Immanuel, "with us (is) God" (Isa. 7:14).

blessed art thou among women: This clause does not appear in some important manuscripts of Luke's Gospel and appears to be copied from 1:42. Its earliest attestation is in the Diatessaron (AD 150–160). However, the Joseph Smith Translation of 1:28 keeps the clause and then adds: "for thou art chosen and blessed among women," underscoring heaven's high estimate of her.

1:29 when she saw: A number of early manuscripts omit this expression; but almost as many include it. The fact that Luke's record brings forward so many direct encounters with personalities from the heavenly world argues

73. BAGD, 881–82.

74. Brown, *Birth*, 321–24.

75. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 16, 18; Green, *Luke*, 86–87.

for keeping this reading because it matches what we find elsewhere (see the Notes on 1:11, 12; 22:43; 24:24, 31, 34).

troubled: See the Note on 1:12. The word must carry the sense of fear because the angel encourages Mary not to fear (see 1:30; John 12:27).

1:30 *Fear not:* On this expression, see the Notes on 1:13 and 2:10. Plainly, the angel’s initial greeting does not settle Mary’s fright at seeing someone in a place where she obviously does not expect an intruder (see 1:28).

1:31 *thou shalt conceive:* It is this part of the angel’s declaration that sticks in Mary’s mind because, as soon as she is able, she questions how it will occur (see 1:34).

1:32 *Son of the Highest:* The phrase can also be rendered “Son of the Most High” and is equivalent to “Son of God.” The title “Most High” or “Most High God” also appears as “God Most High” (Hebrew *‘el ‘elyon*). This expression signals that God is above all and recalls the Spirit’s title for the coming Messiah in 1 Nephi 11:6: “the Son of the most high God.” In the angel’s words, quoted by Luke, Jehovah (“the Lord”) and El Elyon are equated. There is evidence that El Elyon is originally a pagan title that is later adopted for Jehovah at Jerusalem.⁷⁶ This title points to a number of divine attributes; see Psalm 47:2: “the Lord most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth”; also Genesis 14:19–20, 22; 2 Samuel 22:14; Psalms 7:17; 9:2; 18:13; 21:7. It is significant that the angel expresses this title before referring to the child’s Davidic kingship, indicating that the child’s role as Messiah rests first and foremost on his divine sonship (see the Notes on 1:76 and 2:14).⁷⁷

his father David: Jesus’ link to the royal Davidic line is made secure by other references to this fact—through both his father (see 1:27) and mother (see Acts 13:22–23; Rom. 1:3) as well as through the words of the blind man at Jericho (see 18:38; the Note on 20:41).

the Lord God shall give . . . the throne: This throne is to be acquired neither by conquest nor by inheritance, but is to be a gift from God.

1:33 *he shall reign:* The eternal character of Jesus’ future reign rests not only in this prophecy but also in the allusion to Isaiah 9:6 (see also Dan. 2:44; 7:14; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 11:15).⁷⁸

house of Jacob: This expression is equivalent to “house of Israel” and reflects the idea of all descendants of Jacob.⁷⁹

76. *TDOT*, 1:255–56; Martin Rose, “Names of God in the OT,” in *ABD*, 4:1004.

77. Marshall, *Luke*, 67–68.

78. Plummer, *Luke*, 23–24; Marshall, *Luke*, 68.

79. *TDNT*, 5:129–30; *TDOT*, 1:7; 2:113–15; Marshall, *Luke*, 68.

1:34 *How shall this be:* Mary’s question, which shows that she is thinking clearly and possesses courage in the presence of a heavenly messenger, differs from that of Zacharias, whose question expresses doubt that the angel’s prophecy can be fulfilled. Mary’s query focuses on the means by which she will conceive.

1:35 *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:* The verb translated “to overshadow” (Greek *episkiazō*) basically means “to shade.” But it also bears the sense “to protect,” as it does here (see the Note on 9:34; also LXX Ps. 90:4; 139:8).⁸⁰ Beyond promising protection, the angel’s answer seems vague about how Mary will conceive.⁸¹ That said, he is also rehearsing the experience whereby she will know that his words are true. Notably, other passages that speak of the means by which Mary conceives are similarly vague (see Matt. 1:20; 1 John 5:1; 1 Ne. 11:18–20; Alma 7:10). Concerning this passage, Harold B. Lee declares that “we need not question His [God’s] method to accomplish His purposes.”⁸² Further, because power (Greek *dynamis*) is present in his conception, from his birth Jesus will carry special powers that become evident during his ministry (see the Notes on 4:6, 36; 9:1; the Analysis on 4:1–13).⁸³

1:36 *cousin:* This translation of the Greek term *syngenis* is as old as Wycliffe. The word is a generic term for relative.⁸⁴ It also appears in 1:58 for Elisabeth’s relatives. Hence, we do not know the exact relationship between Mary and Elisabeth. Because Elisabeth is of the family of Aaron (see 1:5), this term hints that Mary also descends from priests through one or more of her ancestors and evidently transmits to her expected son the rights to the priesthood.⁸⁵

her, who was called barren: Elisabeth is known among certain contemporaries by the pejorative term “barren”; the expression here clarifies that she does not confer this appellation upon herself. This term also recalls the situation of Sarah, mother of Isaac, perhaps intentionally (see Gen. 18:11).

80. BAGD, 298; *TDNT*, 7:399–400.

81. *TDNT*, 2:300; 5:835; 7:400.

82. Clyde J. Williams, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee: eleventh President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 14; also *TDNT*, 6:405, “only the result is important, not the nature of the act.”

83. *TDNT*, 2:301; 6:362–63, 402.

84. BAGD, 780.

85. *TDNT*, 4:238; 7:740 n. 17; Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 31–32.

She too lives beyond her child-bearing years before the Lord performs the miracle of new life for her and Abraham.

1:37 *nothing shall be impossible*: This final statement frames the formal conclusion of the angel’s message, driving home his divine point. As in the case of “barren” in the prior verse, the expression here points to the miracle of the birth of Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah (see Rom. 4:19–21).

1:38 *handmaid*: As the occurrence of this Greek term, *doulē*, in 1:48 illustrates,⁸⁶ Mary sees herself as God’s bondservant, perhaps even as his slave who does his bidding for the rest of her life. But to serve him in this capacity is no mean role.

***be it unto me according to thy word*:** Mary’s response suggests that, during the short interview with the angel, she senses what her promised child will mean for her, including her fall from her society’s standard of uprightness when people discover her pregnancy. Her words also hint that she grasps, in a measure, what it will mean to be the mother of God’s son.

Analysis

The earliest prophecy about Mary and her son comes from the lips of Isaiah more than 700 years before her birth. On a day in 734 BC, when the Syrian and northern Israelite armies surround Jerusalem, King Ahaz and his entourage walk outside the protective walls of the city to inspect “the conduit of the upper pool” which brings water into the city, possibly from the northern pool of the Bethesda pools. There, within bowshot of the hostile armies, Isaiah meets the king to assure him that the siege will soon end. Additionally, he prophesies that the “sign” of the Lord’s deliverance will be that “a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Though the meaning of these words has stirred debate, and though the prophet Nephi makes nothing of the words when he quotes them from his own copy of Isaiah’s record (see 2 Ne. 17:14), reasons exist to see them pointing to Mary and Jesus. What is the evidence?

First, although the Hebrew term translated “virgin” can mean a young woman, married or unmarried, the third-century Jewish translator of this passage into Greek renders the word as *parthenos*, showing that he understands the term to refer to an unmarried virgin.⁸⁷ Hence, one modern interpretation—that the word refers to Isaiah’s wife—does not square with this ancient translator’s view.

86. BAGD, 204.

87. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1339; *TDNT*, 5:827, 832–33, 835.

Second, the promised child is hard to explain if we hold that the Savior is that child. Why? Because Isaiah tells King Ahaz that, by the time the child learns how “to refuse the evil, and choose the good,” both of the warring kings will be dead (Isa. 7:16). This passage sounds as if the child will be a contemporary of Isaiah and the king. And that view is a real possibility. But the “name Immanuel” potentially points to another era, to another reality. The meaning of Immanuel, “God with us,” carries within it a promise of God’s presence among his people, not in some vague sense but in a concrete, palpable way. Almost immediately we think of John’s lines about the Savior, “the Word was made flesh, and *dwelt* among us” (John 1:14; emphasis added).

Concerning Mary, it is in the Book of Mormon that she most visibly stands forth as a person known to God long before her birth. Though the young prophet Nephi does not learn her name, he sees her in a vision “bearing a child in her arms” almost six hundred years before she is born. The virgin of the vision, as the accompanying angel tells Nephi, “is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.” In addition, she will reside in Nazareth (1 Ne. 11:20, 18, 13). About a hundred years before she is born, an angel visits an aging king named Benjamin and reveals that the coming Savior’s “mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:8). The precision of the prophecy in naming her is remarkable. Two generations later, but long before her birth, the prophet Alma declares that Mary will be “a precious and chosen vessel,” effectively making it known that she is already well regarded in heavenly realms (Alma 7:10).

In another vein, if Luke indeed writes during the seventies decade of his century, following the devastating Jewish war with Rome (AD 66–70), it is impressive that he boldly repeats the angel’s prophecies to Mary about her son’s messiahship. Expressions such as “the Lord God shall give unto him [Jesus] the throne of his father David” and “he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever” carry a confident sense of optimism for the future that the war has not beaten out of Christians (1:32–33). It is most unlikely that Luke would have made up these sorts of heartening expressions in war’s aftermath.

MARY IN ELISABETH'S HOME (1:39–56)

King James Translation

39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; 40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. 41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: 42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. 43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

46 And Mary said,
My soul doth magnify the Lord,
47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:

for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;

and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is on them that fear him

from generation to generation.

51 He hath shewed strength with his arm;

he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

New Rendition

39 So rising up in those days, Mary traveled quickly to a city in the hill country of Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And it came to pass that, when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leapt in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost 42 and exclaimed with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And whence has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, my baby leapt for joy inside my womb. 45 And blessed is she who has believed that there will be a fulfillment of things spoken to her from the Lord."

46 And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit has rejoiced because of God, my savior;
48 because He has looked upon the humble station of his servant.

For from now on, all generations will consider me blessed

49 because the Mighty One has done great things through me,

and Holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is upon generation after generation,

on those who reverence him.

51 He has performed a mighty deed with his arm;

he has scattered the proud because of the disposition of their hearts.

<p>52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.</p> <p>53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.</p> <p>54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;</p> <p>55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.</p> <p>56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.</p>	<p>52 He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the humble.</p> <p>53 He has filled the hungry with good things and has sent the rich away empty-handed.</p> <p>54 He has come to the aid of Israel, his child, remembering his compassion,</p> <p>55 just as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed, forever.</p> <p>56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.</p>
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Notes

1:39 *Mary arose*: It is apparent that Mary senses an imperative implicit in the angel's news about Elisabeth's pregnancy—that she go to visit her, much like the women who carry the news of Jesus' resurrection to others, likewise following a meeting with angels. Together, these two actions by women form a literary *inclusio* and underline the unity of Luke's Gospel (see the Note on 24:9).⁸⁸ In a different vein, we ask, What is the timing of Mary's trip? If we place Jesus' birth in the spring of that year (see the Note on 2:8), then Mary makes the trip during July. We reach this conclusion in the following way. If we count backward from Jesus' birth in the spring, (1) Mary becomes pregnant when Elisabeth is in her sixth month, about five and one-half months along (see 1:26); (2) Elisabeth does not conceive until some time after Zacharias has returned home from his duties at the temple, presumably fourteen and one-half months or so before Jesus' birth, adding Mary's full term of nine months to the five and one-half months of Elisabeth's pregnancy (see 1:24); and (3) Zacharias remains in Jerusalem for a short period—a few days at most—after he himself ministers at the incense altar (see 1:23). Naturally, Mary will travel in the company of others for the sake of safety (see the Notes on 2:44 and 10:30).

***the hill country*:** The reference points to the hilly region that lies both north and south of Jerusalem. But this broad term does not help in locating the specific residence of Elisabeth and Zacharias.

88. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

a city of Judah: Because the name Judaea appears in 2:4, we wonder why Luke writes two names within a few lines of one another for essentially the same geographical region. In response, he may have been influenced by his source. Some suggest that in 1:39 Luke is referring to the town of Jutta or Yutta which lies to the south of Hebron, or generally to the territory of Judea.⁸⁹ To be sure, Hebron is one of the cities assigned to priests and Levites for their inheritance, which makes this possibility intriguing as a potential hometown for Zacharias and Elisabeth (see Josh. 21:11–13). Morris suggests that the name Judah merely emphasizes Jesus' family tie to the territory of Judah.⁹⁰ Others see a possible connection to the region of Hebron as unlikely.⁹¹

1:40 entered into the house: How does Mary know the location of the home? She either knows it from an earlier visit, probably with one or both of her parents, or she is traveling with a relative who knows the home. Whichever the case, we must agree that the blood relationship of Mary's family with Elisabeth and Zacharias is close for Mary to travel far and seek Elisabeth's company. Luke's notation that Mary enters the home emphasizes that all the spiritual manifestations that follow occur in a home setting (see the Note on 1:28).

1:41 when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary: The remarkable sequence of this day, noted in succeeding verses, begins with words, words that come from the young woman who is carrying God's son. There is no reason to believe that in this initial greeting, Mary blurts out news about her pregnancy, for Elisabeth will say, "as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears," indicating no extended conversation before the Holy Ghost rushes upon her (1:44). It is the Spirit that will reveal this fact to Elisabeth as well as its future divine blessings.⁹²

the babe leaped in her womb: We should not think of this sudden movement in Elisabeth's womb as the first detectable stirrings of a fetus within a mother, which normally occur much earlier in pregnancy. Rather, this movement is heaven-induced, bringing God's Spirit into Elisabeth's home.

Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: It is intriguing to think that, from this moment, the unborn John enjoys the companionship of the Holy Ghost. The language from a modern revelation implies that he

89. References in Marshall, *Luke*, 80; also Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:362–63.

90. Morris, *Luke*, 82.

91. Plummer, *Luke*, 28; Edersheim, *Temple*, 157, n.5.

92. *TDNT*, 6:835.

receives the Holy Ghost before his birth: “John . . . being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb,” a remarkable statement about his mother’s worthiness (D&C 84:27). As the next four verses illustrate, the Holy Ghost inspires Elisabeth to speak about matters of which she has no prior knowledge.

1:42 *she spake out with a loud voice:* The force of the verb (Greek *anaphōneō*) suggests that Elisabeth cries out in an outburst of emotion, intensified by the coming of the Holy Ghost (see 1:41).⁹³

Blessed art thou: Here, the Greek term for “blessed” (from *eulogeō*) properly refers to a prayerful blessing addressed to God: “May God bless thee.” But Elisabeth speaks the word as if Mary has already received a blessing from above (see Deut. 28:4; Judg. 5:24), thus recalling the meaning of the adjective “blessed” (Greek *makarios*), which appears in 1:45 and 1:48.⁹⁴

blessed is the fruit of thy womb: This and other declarations illustrate that at this moment Elisabeth enjoys the spirit of prophecy by which she learns matters which she cannot otherwise know. In addition, by declaring grand things about the Messiah, though unborn, she stands at this instant as her son will stand, as the Messiah’s herald.

1:43 *the mother of my Lord:* This expression also demonstrates that Elisabeth lies under a prophetic spirit, learning on the spot the freshly framed future of her young cousin. Of course, the term “Lord” (Greek *kyrios*), points to the unborn Jesus’ lofty status as Lord of the Old Testament.⁹⁵

1:44 *as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded:* Elisabeth’s words eliminate any possibility that, as they meet, Mary has earlier disclosed anything about her recent experience with the angel.

1:45 *blessed:* This term, *makarios*, differs from that in 1:42 (see the Notes on 1:42 and 1:48) and tells us that Mary already resides within a protective cloud of God’s blessings.⁹⁶

she that believed: Elisabeth’s statement underscores the difference between her husband’s response to the angel and Mary’s (see 1:20, 38; the Note on 1:18).

there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord: It becomes clear that, with these words, Elisabeth stands as the

93. Plummer, *Luke*, 28–29; Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 126; BAGD, 62.

94. BAGD, 322, 487–88; *TDNT*, 2:762; Brown, *Birth*, 333.

95. BAGD, 459–61; *TDNT*, 3:1058–62, 1086–93; *TLNT*, 2:347–50.

96. BAGD, 487–88; *TLNT*, 2:432–41.

first witness of the virgin birth.⁹⁷ She now becomes the co-possessor of God’s grand secret about how the mother of the Messiah will give birth.

1:46 *Mary said:* A few Latin manuscripts from the fourth century AD and later, and one Armenian translation of Irenaeus’s long work from the fourth century,⁹⁸ read “Elisabeth said,” leading a few commentators to conclude that the following song comes from Elisabeth. But the massive weight of the manuscript evidence reads “Mary” as the one who sings.⁹⁹

My soul doth magnify the Lord: These immortal words open the song that has come to be known as “The Magnificat” (1:46–55) because of the first word in the Vulgate, Jerome’s Latin translation. This hymn shares a number of elements with the song of Hannah (see 1 Sam. 2:1–10).¹⁰⁰

soul: In this passage, the terms for soul (*psychē*) and spirit (*pneuma*) stand in close proximity. In the context of Mary’s words, there seems to be no difference between them, both simply pointing to herself, though they often differ in meaning.¹⁰¹

1:48 *the low estate of his handmaiden:* The expression is very similar to the Septuagint version of the prayer of Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:11, “the humiliation of thy handmaid.” Mary’s words become prophetic, in effect, and find fulfillment in the experience of the widow of Nain (see the Analysis on 7:11–17).

handmaiden: The term (Greek *doulē*) also comes to Mary’s lips in 1:38, where it bears the sense of bondservant.¹⁰²

from henceforth: This is a characteristic expression of Luke’s (see 12:52; 22:18, 69; Acts 18:6). In most of these passages, we discover references to Jesus’ redemptive act.¹⁰³

all generations shall call me blessed: Echoes of Leah’s words at the birth of Asher in the Septuagint version of Genesis 30:13 stand here: “the women will pronounce me blessed.” But Mary’s words are prophetic in tone and carry the sweep of all generations to come as well as all generations past.

blessed: The sense is that Mary already enjoys a halo of blessedness bestowed by God. See the Notes on 1:42 and 1:45.

97. Brown, *Birth*, 301.

98. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.7.1

99. Brown, *Birth*, 334–35.

100. Plummer, *Luke*, 30–31.

101. BAGD, 680–85, 901–2; Richard N. Williams, “Soul,” in *EM*, 3:1392; Jay E. Jensen, “Spirit,” in *EM*, 3:1403–5.

102. BAGD, 204–5.

103. Brown, *Birth*, 336.

1:49 to me: The meaning is probably “through me,” with an underlying sense of service. The dative (Greek *moi*) is to be understood as an instrument or means.¹⁰⁴

great things: In the Septuagint, the word *megala* often refers to God’s actions during the Exodus on behalf of the children of Israel, thus carrying the sense of redemption (see LXX Deut. 10:21; 11:7; Judg. 2:7).¹⁰⁵

1:50 his mercy: God’s mercy, which links to God’s deliverance here and elsewhere and is based on a relationship of faithfulness between God and the recipient, frames the stories of the visit of Mary to Elisabeth and the birth of John (see 1:54, 58, 72, 78; also D&C 54:6).¹⁰⁶

1:51 He hath shewed strength: The series of past tenses in Luke 1:51–54 may also carry a prophetic, future sense. That is, what God has done for his people in the past he will continue into the future.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Mary’s words look to assurances from the past and to a hope that begins with her pregnancy.

with his arm: This phrase recalls the “stretched out arm” by which God mercifully delivers his people from slavery (see Ex. 6:6; Deut. 4:34).

in the imagination of their hearts: The dative (Greek *dianoia*), translated “in the imagination,” is to be taken as a causal dative, meaning “because of.”¹⁰⁸

1:53 He hath filled the hungry with good things: The hunger may refer both to physical and spiritual needs; the “good things” will therefore consist of divine gifts that meet both types of needs.

1:54 He hath holpen his servant Israel: This assistance comes to God’s people when they are acting as his servants or, more properly, as his obedient children, rather than when they are rebellious. So it will be in the future. Incidentally, the term *holpen* is the archaic English past participle of the verb “to help.”

1:55 to Abraham, and to his seed for ever: This expression identifies the object of God’s merciful “remembrance” noted in verse 54. Hence, Mary’s song embraces all generations since the days of God’s merciful acts toward Abraham.¹⁰⁹

104. Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. Gordon M. Messing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), §1507b; see also Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §191.

105. BAGD, 498–99.

106. Marshall, *Luke*, 83.

107. Plummer, *Luke*, 32–33.

108. Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §196.

109. Plummer, *Luke*, 34; for a different view, see Brown, *Birth*, 338.

1:56 *Mary abode with her about three months:* This note means that Elisabeth is approaching the birth of her son (see 1:36). It is evidently October when Mary departs, near the Feast of Tabernacles when Jews celebrate God’s deliverance during the Exodus (see the Note on 1:39). It is important to ask why Mary stays only until just before Elisabeth gives birth. Luke does not say. It is possible that Mary is concerned about her pregnancy being exposed during the fuss that neighbors and relatives will make at the birth of Elisabeth’s child. It is also possible that Luke simply rounds off his story about Mary’s stay before she actually departs.¹¹⁰

Mary . . . returned: We can only imagine what Mary thinks when contemplating her return to Nazareth and the public disclosure of her pregnancy. It becomes evident from Matthew’s report that initially Joseph does not believe her story about the angelic messenger (see Matt. 1:19).

Analysis

In these verses, we discover no hint that Mary shares her secret with anyone in her family. It seems apparent, therefore, that the angel’s news about Elisabeth offers an opportunity for Mary to spend the early months of her pregnancy with someone who will be supportive and nonjudgmental. How Mary manages to convince her parents that she should make the daunting trip, and then reaches Elisabeth’s home, we are not told.

What is engaging is the elegance of this story about the meeting of two women who have taken very different routes in their lives to arrive at this moment. Luke’s superb skill is evident—holding the story together not by action but by spiritually compelling words from these women. But the material is already in place—a lofty yet earthly exchange between two of God’s noble daughters, in Elisabeth’s home environment where spiritual power is already flowing. In a warm and down-to-earth mixture, Elisabeth’s words welcome Mary, reveal God’s enlightenment, speak of her own unborn child, and prophesy about the younger woman’s future. Mary’s response holds the focus on God’s mercy to her and, in words dressed in prophecy, to all generations “that fear him” (1:50).

These verses also disclose much about Elisabeth. Because of the unimpeded flow of God’s spirit into her, it is evident that she has been laboring in spiritual preparation for mothering a child of promise (see the Note on 1:24). Moreover, we can safely presume that these intense efforts do not

110. Green, *Luke*, 105–6.

differ much from her past actions, but rather show her to be a person of long-standing spiritual character. Her efforts to set her life squarely onto God's path also open her to the spirit of prophecy wherein she both learns what she cannot know about Mary and her special child, and predicts what is yet in store for her young cousin (see 1:42–45). In fact, in speaking about Mary, “the mother of my Lord,” Elisabeth acts as her own son will act—as the herald of the Messiah. Moreover, her unswerving worthiness, hinted at in these verses, will bring to her unborn son an unparalleled blessing—he will be “filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb” (1:15; also D&C 84:27).

Of these eighteen verses, ten are devoted to Mary's song (see 1:46–55). Besides the obvious similarities to Hannah's prayer, which commentators often point to (see 1 Sam. 2:1–10), Mary's Magnificat is borne along by vivid contrasts and by exalted language which connects directly to her son.¹¹¹

Concerning contrasts, Mary's words first highlight God's unexpected mercy to her, even regarding her “low estate,” and doing “to [her] great things.” But as an individual she is not the only recipient of divine, tender care. God's ancient people, his “servant Israel,” have received, and will yet benefit from, his generous gifts. Further, continuing the contrasts, Mary sings that God on the one hand “hath scattered the proud” and “hath put down the mighty” and “the rich he hath sent empty away.” On the other hand, he has “exalted them of low degree” and “hath filled the hungry” and “hath holpen his servant Israel” (1:48–49, 51–54).

Mary's majestic language also binds her son to God himself. She speaks of God as “Lord” and “Saviour” and “holy.” Each of these titles appears elsewhere in the inspired words of an angel or of Elisabeth, all linked to Mary's son. In the earliest instance, the angel declares the child “holy” (1:35). In Elisabeth's later words, she calls Mary “the mother of my Lord” (1:43). The angel who appears to the shepherds announces “a Saviour” who is born “in the city of David” (2:11). The connections of Mary's son to the divine thus receive important emphases.

In another vein, Mary's song sets the awe-inspiring tone for the whole of Luke's Gospel. For it will be a story of God's mercy, first and foremost—a mercy that will succor the poor and downtrodden and will be withdrawn from those who do not fear God. In a word, within Luke's record, Mary's son will bring down “the proud” and “the mighty” while lifting “them of low degree” and “the hungry.” To “his servant Israel,” and to others on

111. Brown, *Birth*, 360–65; Johnson, *Luke*, 43–44.

the outside, Mary's child will extend "his arm" of strength and support (1:51–54).

In the end, Luke leaves us with an ennobling view of the two women around whom his narrative here rotates. In a quiet corner of the muscular Roman Empire, two women embrace. Safely entrusted to them by God is the secret of the ages: Whom the mother of the Messiah will be.

BIRTH AND NAMING OF JOHN (1:57–80)

King James Translation

57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. 58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. 59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. 60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. 62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. 63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God. 65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa. 66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

New Rendition

57 And the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they rejoiced with her. 59 And it came to pass on the eighth day that they came to circumcise the child, and they called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. 60 And his mother replied and said, "No! Rather he will be called John."

61 And they said to her, "No one among your relatives is called by that name." 62 So they gestured to his father as to what he would call him. 63 And after asking for a writing tablet, he wrote, saying, "John will be his name." And everyone was amazed.

64 And immediately his mouth was opened, and he spoke, praising God. 65 And fear came upon all his neighbors, and all these things were discussed throughout the whole hill-country of Judea. 66 And everyone who heard pondered in their hearts, saying, "What sort of child, then, will this be," and "Indeed, the hand of the Lord is with him."

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, ¶
 68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; ¶ for he hath visited and redeemed his people, ¶
 69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us ¶ in the house of his servant David; ¶
 70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, ¶ which have been since the world began: ¶
 71 That we should be saved from our enemies, ¶ and from the hand of all that hate us; ¶
 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, ¶ and to remember his holy covenant; ¶
 73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, ¶
 74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies ¶ might serve him without fear, ¶
 75 In holiness and righteousness before him, ¶ all the days of our life. ¶
 76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: ¶ for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; ¶
 77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, ¶
 78 Through the tender mercy of our God; ¶ whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, ¶
 79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, ¶ to guide our feet into the way of peace. ¶
 80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

67 And Zacharias, his father, was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied, saying, ¶
 68 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, ¶ for he has looked after and prepared a redemption for his people. ¶
 69 And he has lifted up a horn of salvation for us ¶ in the house of David his son. ¶
 70 So he has spoken through the mouth of his holy prophets, ¶ who have been forever: ¶
 71 Salvation from our enemies, ¶ and from the hand of all who hate us. ¶
 72 To extend mercy to our fathers, ¶ and remember his holy covenant, ¶
 73 which oath he swore to Abraham our father to give him, ¶
 74 that, having been delivered from the hand of our enemies, ¶ he would allow us to serve him without fear ¶
 75 in his presence with holiness and righteousness ¶ all our days. ¶
 76 And so you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest, ¶ for you will go before the Lord to prepare his paths. ¶
 77 To give to his people knowledge of salvation ¶ by remission of their sins ¶
 78 because of the compassionate heart of our God, ¶ by which the rising star will visit us from heaven, ¶
 79 to show himself unto them who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, ¶ and to direct our feet in the path of peace." ¶
 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit and was in the wilderness until the days of his mission to Israel.

Notes

1:58 *cousins*: The term is the same that is translated “cousin” in 1:36 (see the Note thereon).

***mercy*:** The theme of God’s mercy, which frames much in this story, arises within Mary’s words in 1:50, 54, and persists in 1:72, 78.

***they rejoiced with her*:** It is possible that some of Elisabeth’s “neighbors” and “cousins” are unaware until now of her miraculous pregnancy because she “hid herself” early on, effectively keeping out of sight (1:24).

1:59 *the eighth day they came to circumcise*: In accord with God’s commandment to Abraham, male infants are circumcised at eight days of age (see Gen. 17:12; 21:4). But more happens to this infant. For modern scripture adds that John “was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old . . . to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, and . . . to prepare [his people] for the coming of the Lord” (D&C 84:28).

***they called him*:** Although there are no contemporary accounts of circumcising and naming on the same day, both this passage and the same activities ascribed for the infant Jesus point to such a custom, though children in earlier ages have been named at birth (see 2:21; Gen. 4:1; 21:3; 25:25–26).¹¹²

***after the name of his father*:** Although it is usual to name a male child after his grandfather, as with Josephus the Jewish historian,¹¹³ it is common for an infant boy to be named for his father, as the second-century AD texts from Wadi Murrabba‘at demonstrate: Eleazar son of Eleazar, Judah son of Judah.¹¹⁴

1:60 *he shall be called John*: The fact that Elisabeth knows the angel’s name for her son, which means “Jehovah has been gracious” (see 1:13; the introduction to this chapter, section G), signals that, despite his difficulties, Zacharias communicates all of his vision to his wife, though she is probably illiterate and is not able to read any message from her husband.

1:61 *none of thy kindred . . . is called by this name*: Those in Elisabeth’s home for the celebration include “cousins” (1:58)—the same word which underlies the term “kindred” in this passage—who are fully aware of the names that characterize the family’s identity.

1:62 *they made signs*: This action plainly demonstrates that Zacharias cannot hear. This disability is not permanent, nor is it preexisting, for he hears the voice of the angel (see 1:13–20). Rather, Zacharias’s lack of

112. Marshall, *Luke*, 88; Brown, *Birth*, 369.

113. Josephus, *Life* 1.

114. Brown, *Birth*, 369.

hearing must be a part of the angel's curse for his disbelief, though not mentioned in the report of the angel's words: "thou shalt be dumb" (1:20).

1:63 *he asked*: The Greek verb here (*aiteō*) almost always points to verbal requests. But here it refers to a request made by some kind of gesture.¹¹⁵

***a writing table*:** The tablet (Greek *pinakis*) consists of a smoothed piece of wood covered by a wax surface whereon Zacharias can inscribe his note.¹¹⁶

***His name is John*:** Zacharias cannot hear the conversation wherein Elisabeth repeats the name of the child (see 1:60). Zacharias's act also underscores the fact that, though he is unable to speak, he has communicated with her by some means (see the Note on 1:60).¹¹⁷

1:64 *his mouth was opened immediately*: The passive construction leads us to conclude that a divine power outside Zacharias opens his mouth and loosens his tongue.¹¹⁸ Notably, the healing of Zacharias does not simply take the form of a return of speech and hearing. A physical manipulation of Zacharias's mouth seems to take place so that he knows unequivocally divine power is intervening at that moment.

***he spake, and praised God*:** One wonders what Zacharias has been thinking during the days since the birth of the infant. Has he thought that the words of the angel about the birth of the child have been fulfilled (see 1:20), and yet his curse is not lifted? A careful review of the angel's words indicates that Zacharias is the one to name the child ("thou shall call his name John"—1:13). Might he have thought that he would be freed of the curse right after the birth so that he could do so? Whatever the case, his first effort after gaining his speech is to praise God, a response that should not surprise us.

1:65 *all these sayings were noised abroad*: What is the result of the news? Does it bring people to deeper faith? Luke does not tell us anything beyond his remark, "all they that heard them [the sayings] laid them up in their hearts" (1:66). Plainly, the events in the home of Zacharias and Elisabeth create a pool of witnesses who potentially will respond positively to John's message (see the Note on 1:21). One suspects that some of these people and their children were in "the multitude that came forth to be baptized of [John]" (3:7). It is also possible that Luke is pointing to one of his sources for learning about John and the events that lead up to his birth. Certain local people remember.

115. BAGD, 25.

116. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1405; André Lemaire, "Writing and Writing Materials," in *ABD*, 6:1002–3.

117. Brown, *Mary and Elisabeth*, 23–24.

118. Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§130(1), 313.

the hill country of Judaea: This is the closest we come to learning the place of residence for Zacharias and Elisabeth. The only other passage that points to their hometown is 1:39—“the hill country . . . a city of Juda” (see the Note on 1:39).

1:66 the hand of the Lord: This image is a natural extension of “his arm” in 1:51. It also ties to expressions found in the Old Testament; see, for example, Exodus 13:3 and 15:6.

1:67 Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied: We see plainly the results of this priest’s spiritual preparation during recent months. Obviously, the angel succeeds in gaining Zacharias’s attention and in making him a witness (see the Note on 1:11).

1:68 the Lord God . . . hath visited and redeemed: As in Mary’s song (see 1:50–54), Zacharias’s prophetic words carry both a past meaning and one that predicts the future. The verb “to visit” (Greek *episkeptomai*) carries the sense that, as God visits his people, so we are to imitate him by visiting others and, like him, show concern for them (see Matt. 25:46, 53; Acts 7:33; 15:36; Heb. 2:6; James 1:27; the Notes on 1:78; 7:16). This kind of visiting on our part later becomes part of the structuring of church service, which includes visits in homes and care of the needy (see Acts 6:3 where the verb is translated “look ye out”).¹¹⁹ The theme of redemption next appears in Anna’s actions after she visits the infant Jesus and his parents in the temple (see 2:38) and in the term “deep” (see the Notes on 5:4 and 24:21).

his people: The orientation of the song rests on the descendants of “our father Abraham” (1:73), that is, “his people” (1:77), matching the Israelite focus of Mary’s song on “Israel” and Abraham’s “seed” (1:54–55).

1:69 horn of salvation: A number of meanings may be envisioned here. First, the horn (Greek *keras*) may contain oil for anointing (see 1 Sam. 16:1, 13; 1 Kgs. 1:39 for anointing a king). Second, the horn may symbolize strength, such as a strong animal that grows a horn (see Ezek. 1:10; Rev. 4:7). Third, the horn may point to a horn blown to produce a warning or heralding sound (see Josh. 6:5). Fourth, the horn may exhibit obvious links to the raised corners of the altar of sacrifice and altar of incense at the temple.¹²⁰ Fifth, it may be, as R. E. Brown suggests, that the “horn of salvation” has been personalized to mean Jesus the Messiah.¹²¹

119. *TDNT*, 2:603–5.

120. *TDNT*, 2:472; 3:669–71; Eric Werner, “Musical Instruments,” in *IDB*, 3:472–74; Ivor H. Jones, “Musical Instruments,” in *ABD*, 4:936, 938–39.

121. Brown, *Birth*, 371.

in the house: This phrase includes all descendants of David, but more especially those who stand in the royal line. In this case, it includes Joseph (see 1:27) and, of course, Mary (see Acts 13:23; Rom. 1:3).

his servant David: The Greek term is child (*pais*), possibly a translation of the Hebrew *na'ar*.¹²² If so, here may stand a pointer to David as a youth who at the time is truly devoted to the Lord. A hint also exists that the one who carries the “horn” is the true servant, one descended from David, metaphorically referred to as “my servant David” (Ezek. 34:23).

1:70 *his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:* This observation, that from the beginning prophets have spoken of the Lord’s redemption, receives support in other scriptural passages. All prophets have spoken of Christ, whether their words are recorded or not (see JST John 3:18; 1 Ne. 10:5; Jacob 4:4; 7:11; Mosiah 3:13, 15; 13:33; 15:11; etc.; the Notes on 16:16 and 24:27).

1:72 *to remember his holy covenant:* God’s act of remembering his covenant exposes a rich vein in scripture (see Ex. 2:24; 6:5; Ps. 105:8; 106:45; 1 Ne. 19:15; 2 Ne. 10:22; 3 Ne. 20:29; Morm. 8:21).

his holy covenant: This reference must be to the covenant that in Abraham “shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3, repeated in Gen. 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; see also Abr. 2:11; Gal. 3:8; 1 Ne. 15:18; 22:9; 3 Ne. 20:25).

covenant: The juxtaposition here of the term “covenant” with the “oath” that God makes with “our father Abraham” in verse 73 recalls the scene of the near sacrifice of Isaac and the resulting oath and covenant that God extends to Abraham (see Gen. 22:16–18; also Heb. 6:13–18; D&C 84:34, 39–40).

1:73 *oath:* This oath sworn to Abraham is firmly linked to the covenant that God makes with Abraham at the time of the near sacrifice of Isaac (see Gen. 22:16–18). This scene evidently frames the historical referent embedded in the expressions “oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood” and “oath and covenant of my Father” (D&C 84:39–40).

1:74 *That he would grant:* The word translated here as “grant,” a form of the Greek verb *didōmi*, “to give,” recalls covenant making. We note that the Hebrew verb *nātan*, which means “give” or “grant,” appears in Genesis 9:12 and 17:2 with the sense of giving or granting a covenant (the KJV renders this verb as “make”). The Septuagint translates the Hebrew verb in Genesis 9:12 with a form of the Greek *didōmi*, matching Luke 1:74. See also Mosiah

122. *TDNT*, 5:637–38; *TDOT*, 9:475, 480–83.

19:15, 22 for a similar meaning of the term “grant,” one of several terms that describe ceremonies.¹²³

we being delivered . . . might serve him: Zacharias’s words clearly set out the expected result of God’s deliverance—service to him. In this case, the verb “to serve” ties chiefly to the service of priests in the temple (Greek *latreuō*), though the meaning has become broader to mean service in a general sense.¹²⁴

1:75 holiness and righteousness: The first term refers to one’s standing before God, as if officiating in the temple; the second has to do with one’s status among fellow human beings.¹²⁵

before him: The allusion is to the temple, specifically as one stands before the altar, which itself symbolizes the presence of God (see 8:47; 21:36; 24:19; the Note on 12:8). Compare the similar Greek phrase “before the Lord” in 1:76 (see also Gen. 19:27; 25:22–23; Ex. 20:3; Deut. 33:10; etc.).¹²⁶

1:76 thou, child: The subject of Zacharias’s song slides to his newborn son. His words expand the angel’s message about this child in 1:15–17.

the Highest: The title avoids the repetition of the sacred name “Lord God” which Zacharias utters at the beginning of his prophecy (1:68). This title is occasionally rendered “Most High” (see the Notes on 1:32 and 2:14).

before the face of the Lord: The Greek expression is simply “before the Lord,” mirroring “before him” in 1:75. The fundamental sense is that John will be in regular contact with holiness, whether that which characterizes the temple or the Lord himself. For this to be so, John himself must be holy.

to prepare his ways: Zacharias’s expression ties to Isaiah’s prophecy about the one who cries “in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,” which Luke will repeat as a prophecy about John (3:4; Isa. 40:3). People’s memory about John ties him to the wilderness and to the proper preparation of the Lord’s path (see the Notes on 3:5–6; also 7:24–27; Matt. 3:1–3; Mark 1:2–4).

1:77 To give knowledge of salvation: This knowledge (Greek *gnōsis*) consists of special, sacred truth that is grounded in submission to God (see the Note on 11:52).¹²⁷ The whole expression points to John’s future

123. Michael L. Barré, “Treaties in the ANE,” in *ABD*, 6:654.

124. BAGD, 468; *TDNT*, 4:59–65; Marshall, *Luke*, 92; Brown, *Birth*, 372.

125. Philo, *Abraham* 208; Marshall, *Luke*, 92.

126. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 155.

127. BAGD, 162–63; *TDNT*, 1:704–6.

preaching mission and ties directly to Jesus' name whose Hebrew form has to do with saving.¹²⁸

the remission of their sins: If the sense is that sins will be purged, and that meaning is evidently the case, then these words point to the one temple sacrifice that does so—the whole burnt offering—bringing forward another temple allusion in Zacharias's song, an expected aspect of a priest's words.¹²⁹ This expression also ties a thread back to the resulting "righteousness" as a characteristic of one's proper relationship to others (see the Note on 1:75).

1:78 *the dayspring from on high:* In a messianic reference, the word translated "dayspring" (Greek *anatolē*) means "rising," as of the sun or a star, to be found in the Septuagint readings of Numbers 24:17 and Malachi 4:2 where the verb form appears.¹³⁰ This seems to be the preferred sense. But in the Septuagint, the term also refers to a growing shoot of a plant (see LXX Jer. 23:5; Zech. 6:12). Hence, a radiant cloud of messianic meanings presents itself: "a star shall rise out of Jacob" (LXX Num. 24:17), the "Sun of Righteousness" (LXX Mal. 4:2), and "a righteous Branch" (LXX Jer. 23:5; also LXX Isa. 11:1). In a different vein, the prepositional phrase "from on high" effectively points to God's throne as the place of origin of these blessings.¹³¹ In addition, this unusual phrase appears in one other passage, at the end of Luke's Gospel, creating an *inclusio* that unites the whole of the account (see 24:49).¹³²

hath visited us: This same verb appears elsewhere and conveys the sense that we are to do as God does—visit those who need our assistance (see the Note on 1:68). More than this, it points to the expected coming of Christ.¹³³

1:79 *To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death:* The scriptural text that lies beneath these words is Isaiah 9:2, a passage that, in later Christian interpretation and in modern scripture, is said to anticipate the triumphal coming of Jesus into the spirit prison to free the spirits of the dead from darkness, and to bring the enlightening message of salvation (see D&C 138:30; the Notes on 4:18; 11:21–22; the Analysis on

128. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, corrected ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 221, 447 (hereafter cited as BDB); *TDNT*, 3:289–90; *TDOT*, 6:442–49.

129. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 149, 175–76; Edersheim is incorrect in pointing to the sin offering, *Temple*, 128–32.

130. BAGD, 61–62; *TDNT*, 1:351–53.

131. *TDNT*, 8:605.

132. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

133. *TDNT*, 2:603–5.

4:16–30).¹³⁴ The expression also points to the Gentiles, whose entry into the ranks of the believers is anticipated in the call of the Seventy disciples (see 10:1–12) and fulfilled in the reports of Acts 10–11 and 15 (see JST 3:5–7; the Notes on 10:1, 7–8).¹³⁵ Finally, it has to do with supporting “my [the Lord’s] saints” with material assistance “that my gospel may be preached” to those “in darkness” and in “the shadow of death” (D&C 57:10).

1:80 *the child grew*: Luke’s summary recalls the words written about the youthful Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:21 (“the child Samuel grew before the Lord”) and 3:19 (“Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him”). The tie to Samuel is evident and intended: John is to be seen as standing on the same spiritual footing as the revered prophet of old (see the Note on 2:52).

***waxed strong in spirit*:** Presumably, because of the lofty context set out by Luke, he means to say that John is blessed by God’s spirit, as the angel promises: “he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb” (1:15; also D&C 84:27).

***was in the deserts*:** It is not possible to say where exactly John spends this time, whether on the east bank or west bank of the Jordan River. It seems apparent that he leaves home long before he begins his ministry. Whether this situation arises because of the deaths of his parents we cannot know. It is evident that he does not follow in the footsteps of his father—he does not become a functioning priest who serves at the temple.

***his shewing*:** Here, the Greek noun *anadeixis* carries two meanings. First, it has to do with John’s commissioning, his formal “installation” as he begins his ministry. Second, it points to his future public appearance, his “manifestation,” as part of the revelation from God to his people.¹³⁶

Analysis

The birth, naming, and angelic ordaining of John mark a lofty point in the infant’s history, for now events become palpably real. First, they point to the predictive yet firm, almost concrete power of prophecy: John’s birth and naming are uttered beforehand in the words of the angel, and now he is physically here, safely inside his parents’ home (see 1:13). Second, they make tangible the miraculous actions of God in this world in the form of a child’s unexpected but real birth to aging parents—completing

134. *Gospel of Nicodemus* 18.1, in *NTA*, 1:471.

135. David L. Balch, *Luke*, in James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 1108.

136. BAGD, 53; *TDNT*, 2:31.

their family—and in the sudden, public healing of Zacharias. Third, they embody God’s mercy inside an infant who is both to influence his fellow citizens and “to prepare [the Messiah’s] ways” (1:76; see D&C 84:28).

One effect of the events during this miraculous day is to enliven a group of witnesses to God’s stirrings. Those at the temple who see Zacharias emerge with his speech and hearing curtailed know that something unusual is afoot (see 1:21–22). But Zacharias’s sudden inability to communicate will leave little that people can grasp except to know that something uncommon occurs that day in the temple. Instead, it is in Zacharias’s home, rather than at the temple, where God uncovers his powers, all in a single day. The numbers of witnesses will grow, of course, when God adds the shepherds, and Simeon and Anna (see 2:8–14, 25–38; the Note on 1:11).

Zacharias’s prophetic song bears the title *Benedictus* from the opening word in the Latin Vulgate translation. Unlike Mary’s hymn, whose topics move from her as an individual to God’s general kindnesses, the *Benedictus* takes up first a praise of the divine only to be followed by language that centers on an individual, Zacharias’s infant John. As with Mary’s words, those of Zacharias speak of God’s past actions on behalf of his people, but with an unimpeded sight of the future as well.

It is obvious that Zacharias’s hymn holds God’s covenant people, the Israelites, at center stage. References to “his [God’s] people,” “his servant David,” “his holy prophets,” and “our father Abraham” underpin this conclusion (1:68, 69, 70, 73, 77). As almost hidden companions stand both the Gentiles and the spirits in prison who appear in the words, “them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death” (1:79; see the Note thereon). It will be these Gentiles to whom Jesus will later go when he crosses to the east shore of the Sea of Galilee and heals the man possessed of a legion of devils (see 8:26–39). It will be these Gentiles to whom Jesus will send the Seventy disciples to preach and to heal and to share meals made of unclean foods (see 10:1–12). It will be these Gentiles, represented in the person of a military centurion, who will receive the healing influence of the Savior (see 7:1–10).

Temple connections run deep in Zacharias’s exalted words. Of course, we expect such language from a priest. And the fact that temple ties appear prominently in the *Benedictus* anchors this song historically to the priest Zacharias. The “horn of salvation” recalls vividly the raised corners of both the altar of sacrifice and the altar of incense.¹³⁷ The language that believers will “serve” God harks back to service performed specifically by priests

137. Ritmeyer and Ritmeyer, *Ritual of the Temple*, 39, 41.

at the temple. That the servant stands dressed in “holiness” draws up the image of the worthy priest. The notion that such service takes place “before him [God]” recalls priests serving at the temple altar. The act of remembering and recreating “his holy covenant” takes place formally at the temple.¹³⁸ The fact that the priest’s son John will lead people to a “remission of their sins” brings to mind the purpose of the whole burnt offering which is sacrificed twice daily (see 1:69, 72, 74–77).¹³⁹

Zacharias’s inspired concerns about God’s “holy covenant” and “the oath which he sware to our father Abraham,” pulls up the scene wherein God, in making a covenant with Abraham through his angel, swears an oath to secure it (1:72–73; see Gen. 22:15–18; Heb. 6:13–18). Such terms, “oath” and “covenant” (see D&C 84:39–40), link to priesthood matters, which are very much at home in the lives of priests. Moreover, Zacharias’s mention of Abraham, with whom God secures his covenant by an oath, also recalls—perhaps unwittingly on Zacharias’s part—the ancient view that the part of this covenant that promises blessings to “all the families of the earth,” involves and invokes priesthood powers (see Abr. 2:11).

At last, Zacharias’s words, pent up for about a year, now burst forth on the day of his son’s naming and circumcision. Those words not only confer a blessing on his son but also bring to completion his once-in-a-lifetime experience of leading the daily worship service while standing at the incense altar inside the temple’s sanctuary. The angel’s visit interrupts the service and prevents Zacharias from offering the priestly prayer. Now, in naming his son, he finally finishes the task of offering his prayer, making his home an extension of the temple and establishing it as a holy place where God’s spirit can dwell.

As a light perfume that graces the air, the fragrant promise of God’s mercy wafts almost effortlessly through these verses. Elisabeth’s “neighbors and her cousins” recognize the scent of God’s “mercy upon her” (1:58). Further, Zacharias’s words point back to “the mercy promised to our fathers” which will continue and become visible to the senses, even solid, in events yet to unfold (1:72). Lastly, Zacharias’s son will generously offer “the knowledge of salvation” to his people that will bring “the remission of their sins,” all springing out of, and resting on, “the tender mercy of our God.” In John’s birth, the day of God’s graciousness dawns, “the dayspring from on high hath visited us” (1:77–78).

138. Edersheim, *Temple*, 105–22.

139. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 149, 175–76.