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Introduction
The Gospel of Luke contains much of the same material that is found in Matthew, Mark, and John along with some additional information that is not found in the other Gospels. It is this additional content, found only in Luke, that often fills in details from Jesus’ life that would be otherwise unknown.

In this study we will be looking at some of the material that is unique to the Gospel of Luke. We will also be noticing some special features and major themes of Luke’s account to help us have a better understanding of Jesus and the life that He lived.

About the Author
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Key Verse

The angel answered and said to him,
“I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God,
and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.
(Luke 1:19)

WARM UP

Luke was a physician, a fellow worker with the apostle Paul, and a companion with Paul during his imprisonment. Although he may not have been a disciple of Jesus during Jesus’ lifetime, Luke had become a faithful follower and careful student of Jesus’ life and ministry. Luke was probably a Gentile and the only writer in the New Testament who did not come from a Jewish background. How he himself came to hear about Jesus, we just don’t know. All that we do know is that Luke wanted to share the story of Jesus with others, not just with some select group, but with everyone. We see this especially in Luke’s interest in marginal people like Gentiles, Samaritans, women, children, the poor, tax collectors, and even those considered as “sinners.”

Because he was a Gentile, Luke’s account often gives us a different perspective from the other Gospels. Sometimes, Luke gives us
details that are not found in the other Gospels such as the birth of John the Baptist and the story of the men on the road to Emmaus. At other times, Luke gives us a glimpse into the lives of individuals like Zechariah and Elizabeth, Jesus’ mother Mary, Simeon, Anna, the sisters Mary and Martha, Zacchaeus, and others such as the widow of Nain and the sinful woman who anointed Jesus, who remain unnamed. Luke’s account of the life of Jesus and those who encountered Him is vivid and filled with timeless stories that can touch us today as much as they did those who first heard them.

WORK OUT

The first verses of Luke are introduction or preface written in the style of the Greek writers of the time. This introduction shows us some things about Luke. First of all, the style and form of the writing shows that he was well educated. It also shows us that he was a skilled writer who carefully gathered his information.

Luke dedicated this work to a person named Theophilus. Theophilus means “loved by God, “one who loves God,” or “friend of God.” Theophilus was a common name in Luke’s day. The title “most excellent” suggests that Theophilus was a wealthy, prominent citizen, perhaps even a Roman official. Some have suggested that Theophilus was a patron of Luke and sponsored the writing of his Gospel. Others have suggested it is a name taken after Theophilus became a Christian, or perhaps a name representing all believers. It seems most likely that Theophilus was simply a person whom Luke wanted to know more about Jesus.

As Luke pointed out, others had also written accounts of Jesus’ life. Even so, he wanted to prepare his own complete account and carefully investigated the information and accurately and truthful-
ly recorded for Theophilus the events in the life of Jesus. Many of his sources were the apostles and other disciples of Jesus who were eyewitnesses of those events.

Theophilus must have known something about Jesus and the Christian faith, but Luke wanted to give him a more complete account. We today are fortunate that this special book was preserved so that we also can read Luke’s account of the life of Jesus.

The birth of a special child is announced (Luke 1:5-25)

Luke began his account not with Jesus, but with a couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was a priest and Elizabeth was also from the priestly family of Aaron. They were both upright in God’s eyes and faithful to his commandments. Sadly, Zechariah and Elizabeth had no children and were getting along in years. In those days childlessness was considered a tragedy and often seen as some sort of punishment from God, so they probably also felt some shame and social isolation as well. Even though some may have looked down on Zechariah and Elizabeth because of their childlessness, as the story unfolds, we see that God had not forgotten them.

One day Zechariah was serving in the temple. This was a very special occasion for him. Because of the large number of priests at the time, it was perhaps the only time in his life that Zechariah was able to serve in this way. He must have been excited as he went into God’s house to burn the incense. The altar of incense was in the Holy Place, just outside of the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant was located. It must have been awe inspiring, even eerie, to have been so close to the very presence of God.

Then suddenly, something happened that must have thoroughly shaken Zechariah. An angel appeared to him and told him that he and Elizabeth were to have a son. Zechariah was afraid and did not believe the angel at first, and because of his unbelief, Zechariah was unable to speak for a time.
Zechariah later returned home and Elizabeth became pregnant with the child that the angel had announced. God had a special plan for this son born to Zechariah and Elizabeth. We know him as John the Baptist who served in a special way as he brought God’s word to his people.

When the angel announced the birth of their child to Zechariah, he described it as “good news” (v. 19). This is the first time that Luke used the term and sets the stage for the rest of his account. This comes from a Greek word that is sometimes translated as “gospel.” It means literally “good news.” It was originally used to describe the news of a military victory brought by a messenger to the commander of the army. It is interesting that the early Christians and writers of the New Testament chose this word to describe the story of Jesus.

Mark began his Gospel by calling it the “good news” about Jesus (Mark 1:1). Jesus’ teaching and message were often called the “good news” (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:15; Luke 3:18). The word for “good news” must have also been a favorite of Luke. We find the word translated as “gospel” or “good news” ten times in Luke and about fifteen times in Acts, the other book that was written by Luke.

The angel also told Zechariah several things about the son that was going to be born to them. First of all, the angel told him that their son would be “great in the sight of the Lord” and be filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth (v. 15). In the Old Testament, we read that individuals were sometimes temporarily filled with the Holy Spirit, but the angel told Zechariah that the entire life of this child was to be guided by the Holy Spirit. He was also to have the spirit and power of Elijah, the great prophet and hero of the Jewish people (v. 17).

Perhaps the most important thing that the angel mentioned was that John the Baptist was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (v. 17). As we will see later, this was the main mission and purpose of this special child and the reason for his coming.
The voice of the prophets had been silent for centuries and the Jewish people had been waiting for a long time to hear again from God. Zechariah and Elizabeth had been waiting for what must have seemed to them a long time for a child. It is interesting that both of these events would come together in the birth of this special child.

We think of John the Baptist as the one who prepared the way for Jesus, and this is certainly important. But there is another lesson here in the lives of his parents that shows us God’s faithfulness for those who love and obey him. Zechariah and Elizabeth served God, and must have been at times discouraged, but in the end God blessed them with a child that he had chosen for a special purpose.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Read the first verses of the other Gospels. How are they different from each other and from Luke?
2. What were Luke’s sources? Where did he get his information?
3. What was Luke’s main goal in writing to Theophilus?
4. Put yourself in Zechariah’s place for a moment. How would you feel in this situation?
5. How does the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth illustrate God’s power and goodness? (See especially verse 25).
6. The son that was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth was a link between the Old Testament and New Testament. What do we see in the words of the angel that illustrate this (vv. 13-17)? (Compare Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6).