

Sunday October 2, 2022

Luke 1:1-25 (preaching through Luke wk1)

This morning we begin our adventure in Luke's gospel.

Luke is the only gospel with a sequel – the book of Acts.

The gospel of Luke is part of a 2 volume set, the second volume being The Acts of the Apostles.

Luke accompanied The Apostle Paul, and Paul speaks of Luke as the beloved physician, with other Greek companions.

The Gospel is dedicated to “Most Excellent Theophilus”.

Luke indicates that Theophilus has been instructed in Christian faith, and Luke is now writing an orderly account, so that Theophilus, and all of us, will have certainty concerning the things he has been taught.

Luke has investigated everything closely, followed the eye witnesses, he accompanied Paul on his journeys, so now he is giving an orderly account, first of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and then in volume 2, he writes of the Acts of the Apostles and the early church that continued in Jesus' footsteps.

Luke begins his account situating it in a specific time and place.

It is the days of Herod, king of Judea.

These are not easy days in Israel's history.

Israel has a puppet king on the throne, Rome is the real authority.

They live in an occupied country as an oppressed people.

The first person on the scene is a priest name Zechariah, of the division of Abijah.

If you looked up Abijah you would learn that his division was that of the faithful priests who stood against corruption and were faithful to God.

Zechariah is from the line of faithful priests, and his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, the priestly line chosen by God, and her name was Elizabeth.

Not only were they both from great lines of faithful families, both were counted as righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the statutes and commandments of the Lord.

That doesn't mean they were perfect, but they were living their faith, living as God's faithful covenant people.

Luke, at the very beginning of this account, wants to make it clear that this is a continuation of God's covenant story.

And just like the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel's past, Elizabeth was barren.

If something is going to happen in that day, at that time in Israel's history, with a puppet king on the throne, and a childless couple beginning the story, it will have to be God who acts.

In verse 8 the account tells of God's actions. Zechariah was in worship, doing his work in the Temple of the Lord, and the messenger of God stands before him by the altar of incense.

I hope you find that a little unnerving. God's messenger shows up in the middle of the service, with a direct word from God.

The word from God is that Zechariah's prayers have been answered, and his wife is going to have a son, and they were to call him John.

Can you imagine being the old priest Zechariah? I wonder how long it had been since he had prayed that prayer?

Zechariah and Elizabeth will be given joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at this birth, for this child will be great before the Lord.

John will be like the Nazarite's of old, those especially dedicated to serving God, he must not drink wine or strong drink and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from before he is born.

John will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, he will be like Elijah, the great prophet of old.

He will make for the Lord a people prepared.

The hope of all the years is going to be fulfilled! God is acting in a mighty way, as God acted from of old.

Who does this story remind you of?

Who is old and his wife is old and barren, who did God make the covenant promise to at the beginning?

Abraham and Sarah

Zechariah is like Abraham, and his son John is like the great prophet Elijah, according to the angel.

A whole new day is coming.  
It is a day like the days of old.

When God called Abraham, God's promises included giving God's people a land, making them a great nation, and through God's chosen people all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

God's people received the land in the days of Moses and Joshua.

Israel became a great nation under King David, but God's people turned away from God.

They worshipped other gods, they trusted themselves and their own ways, rather than trusting God and God's ways.

The prophets of old Elijah, Jeremiah, Micah and the others told the people that there would be consequences for their sin.

When you choose the way of death and destruction, and turn away from life and justice, and God, there are consequences.

But sin and rebellion and death, do not have the last word.

God has the last word.

And so God shows up in worship, and stuns an old faithful priest in silence, and tells him his faithful wife, who was old and had never been able to have a child, is going to have a son.

John will be great and is going to turn many towards God.

And he is going to present to God a people prepared for God.

A couple of things you might think about as you dwell on and in this scripture – God’s word to us.

First, how God speaks in unexpected ways, when it seems that there is little hope...

How God uses unexpected people- God begins with people who are quietly faithful...

God can show up in worship and surprise everyone...

God answers prayers at the most unexpected time.

God has the last word... our sin, our rebellion, our bad choices, don’t overthrow God or God’s plans.

God partners with people.  
God partnered with an old man and woman  
Zechariah and Elizabeth.  
God raised up John.

God used Luke, the beloved physician,  
companion to Paul, to faithfully give us an  
orderly account, so our faith might be on secure  
foundations.

And here we are 2000 years or more, later,  
remembering God's faithfulness, and  
remembering Jesus, the long promised Messiah  
who lived and died for us.

God's work, God's plan continues through us, in  
this unlikely day, through unlikely people like us,  
who seek to follow Jesus.

Thanks be to God.