

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

This book was written by Luke, an evangelist. It is thought that his name is a contraction of the Latin, *Lucilius*. A Greco-Syrian, he was possibly converted to Christ in his native city of Antioch, by Paul, and later was his constant companion on his 'missionary' journeys, acting as writer of his journal, known to us as the Book of Acts. The Gospel of Luke is written in an excellent form of Greek, showing Luke's intellectual ability. Luke was also a doctor of his day – Paul refers to him as *"Luke, the beloved physician"* (Colossians 4:14).

According to some, before his conversion he was thought to have been a Jewish proselyte, so went from pagan to Jew, and then to Christian! (Many today follow a similar pattern, converting to several religions and non-religions, before finally being saved).

Others see him as a born-Jew, and one of the seventy disciples who accompanied Jesus on His preaching journeys... if that were so, then he would have been a witness to the ministry of Christ. And some believe he wrote this epistle whilst travelling with Paul and documenting his journey, while others think he wrote it at Rome. Who knows! If written at Rome, then it was done about 27 years after Christ died and arose, which makes it about the 4th year of the reign of Nero. According to Jerome, Luke died at age 84, which would be roughly when John wrote The Revelation.

Though the Gospel of Luke is attributed to him, he appears not to have witnessed Jesus' ministry, but was certainly with Paul during his journeys. Thus, he would have access to Paul's recollections and preaching – Paul having been personally saved by Jesus on the Damascus road, and known well by the other Apostles. So, there was no lack of authentic material on which to base his Gospel.

It is deduced from his writing style, vocabulary, etc., that Luke was well educated, which made him a worthy companion to Paul, who was also highly literate and educated. Luke is regarded as historical in style; modern historians (who are not believers) say he is accurate in his observations. Thus, Sir William Ramsay said *"Luke is a historian of the first rank..."* Professor E M Blaiklock says something similar. Some argue against one or two sections, saying that Luke got certain facts wrong... something that always amuses me – modern men arguing facts with a man who lived at the time! We can be assured that he got nothing wrong!

Verses 1-4

1.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

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.

In a very long-winded but very careful way, Luke says he is writing to Theophilus ('friend of God') about the Gospel. We do not know who this man was. In the very first sentence we see his accurate use of words, which he "*set forth in order*". His aim was to present the Gospel to Theophilus and, if he copied Paul's idea, this was to ensure that Theophilus passed on what is said to the local church.

For Luke, and Theophilus, what he wrote about was already well-known amongst Christians, many of whom witnessed the work and preaching of Christ, knew the Apostles, and were more than aware of the words of Christ. They learnt from the Apostles, as we see in verse 2, and those who saw Christ, disciples who later preached far and wide, even as far as Britain.

Luke says he had a "*perfect understanding*" of these things. This is not a boast, but a simple statement of fact. 'Perfect' in this text only means to be accurate and exact in what he says, by having the eye-witness accounts before him. With this mind he wrote to Theophilus... thus promising that what he wrote was correct in every detail.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

This being so, Theophilus could be very sure (verse 4) that what he read in the book or letter was 100% accurate. He already knew the foundational facts of Christ and what he taught, because every church was instructed with the same teachings, so Luke was only repeating them, and adding further information gleaned from eye-witnesses. This is how all Christian writers should work – not give their own opinions but base everything on God's word. Only then can it be accurate. Note how every church knew the same facts and truth! Not like today, where every local church thinks it is autonomously separated from God by its own human thoughts and twisted traditional beliefs.

Verses 5-7

1.

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

2.

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

3.

And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

The dating of this text is precise – 'during the days of Herod, king of Judaea'. He ruled from 37 BC, appointed by the Romans, and reigned over a very large area, including parts of Jordan, plus Lebanon, Israel and Syria. He was actually of Arab stock, but a practising Jew. This Herod was known as *Herodes Magnus* – Herod the Great – because of his vast structural ventures.

Perhaps more interesting is that he was also called 'King of the Jews'. It is also the same king who, thwarted by the Magi, slaughtered babies of two years old and under. It is probable that the title given to Jesus above his cross was a reference to the official title of the kings of Judaea, used as a mocking joke.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

There was a Levite priest named Zacharias ('known of Jehovah') "of the course of Abia" ('my father is Ja/Jehovah'). A 'course' was a family or class of people. King David organised 24 families or classes of priests (1 Chronicles 23:1-19). Zacharias belonged to family number eight, named Abias. This family was one of only four that returned from the Babylonian exile, so his position was rare and historical. Each priest served at the Temple in Jerusalem for just one week, from Sabbath to Sabbath, twice a year. For this reason Zacharias went to the Temple to perform his duties, where he lived for the week, in a room at the side of the Temple grounds.

His wife, Elisabeth ('oath of God'), was of the family of Aaron (brother of Moses), and was named after Aaron's wife, 'Eliysheba'. She was cousin to Jesus' mother, Mary (Miriam). Both husband and wife were righteous people, obeying the commandments and Temple requirements to the letter, such was their holiness. Thus, before God, they were blameless, or free of known moral and other defects (*amemptos*).

Elizabeth was barren and so had no children. Neither expected to have children, for they were into their old age, Elizabeth being very much older than her cousin, Mary, who was at that time only about 14-16. The verse implies that, in human terms, Elizabeth was well beyond the age of conception.

Verses 8-10

1.

And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

2.

According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

3.

And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

As he had done many times throughout his adult life, Zacharias went to the Temple to gladly

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

fulfil his role as priest. The offering of incense was a solemn rite enacted every day during the sacrifices, but each priest could have only one opportunity to have this honour, so they drew lots to see who would carry out the function. It was now elderly Zacharias' time to have the honour as the lot fell to him... as we see, this was arranged by God so that He could speak to Zacharias. When he was behind the veil in the holy of holies, the people were outside praying.

Verses 11-17

1.

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

2.

And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

3.

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.

4.

And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

5.

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.

6.

And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

7.

And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

As Zacharias stood by the altar, an angel suddenly appeared “on the right side”. The old man was terrified. The angel, Gabriel the archangel, told him not to be afraid. Obviously, Zacharias had long been praying for his wife to have a child. Gabriel told him *“thy prayer is heard”*. Furthermore, Gabriel said that the child would be a son, who would be called John (‘Jehovah is a gracious giver’). In this way the couple would know “joy and gladness” because Jehovah had shown such mercy towards them.

More than that, *“many shall rejoice at his birth”* (that is, the son who became known as John the Baptist), mainly through what he would later accomplish, by ushering in the New Testament of Jesus Christ. Being the herald of the Gospel age he was much loved by God. As a man he would not drink alcohol or wine. As a young man I no doubt made many other younger people yawn, when I used to say that I refused to drink alcohol because I wanted to keep a clear head. Perhaps this is why John also refused strong drink (probably this refers to spirits, seeing as wine is mentioned separately)... even one glass alters perception, speech and thinking.

The most remarkable thing about John, was that he was *“filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.”* Normally, this is only possible when the Spirit regenerates a person who is old enough to understand the Gospel. But, here, John has the indwelling Spirit from before birth, such was his coming part in preparation for the Christ. Only God can transcend His own laws; that is, bring about His will by divine decree through miracles.

Gabriel prophesied that John would cause thousands of his fellow Jews to turn back to God in repentance, thus making them ready for the coming of Christ’s ministry. This was a reference to the old religion of Judaism, which was still in force until Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice. John would preach *“in the spirit and power of Elias”*... the presence of God in John was so strong and unique that he was indistinguishable from Elijah and his power whilst on this earth. It was almost as if Elijah had returned, as so many Jews believed would happen, such was his ministry.

The people who heard him were convinced he was the returned Elijah, and followed him devotedly, repenting in their thousands. But, amazing though this was, it was only the prelude to something far greater, for John was to *“make ready a people prepared for the Lord”*. His whole work was to point to the coming Messiah, Who, unknown to the people, was already on this

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

earth thirty years before John spoke of him and anyone heard of Him and His ministry.

Verses 18-20

1.

And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

2.

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.

3.

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.

So, think about it... Zacharias was in the Temple on his own; then an angel suddenly appeared in the same room and spoke to him; surely that was enough proof that it was an angel and, because of that, anything he said was truthful and from God? No.

Zacharias made a very big error! He asked the angel – ‘How do I know this is true? After all, I am old and so is my wife!’ Like many today, he faltered in his belief because human reasoning took over! He did not think that God could do whatever He liked! It does not matter what the situation is – God can change it.

The angel gave him his name: *“I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God”* It was he whom God sent with important messages to people like Daniel and Mary.
“I am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.”

But, after declaring good news, Gabriel spoke in judgment – he would make the priest dumb, and his inability to speak would last for nine months; he would only be released from the

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

judgment when John was born. It was a judgment given because Zacharias did not believe Gabriel... but, in time (nine months), he would see that the message was perfect and true. It was a 'gentle punishment' applied so that Zacharias and others could see it was all of the Lord.

It is an awful thing to disbelieve anything from God. And if God gives us a personal message, we must obey, and not question, otherwise there might be consequences. For Zacharias, thankfully, the judgment was only for nine months, but for others it might be for life. In my own life I have sometimes wondered if I have literally looked past God to see only what I wanted to see, by making my own decisions. In particular, choices of work, etc. I wonder, because if a man avoids or does not think about it, he can miss the opportunity given by God, and might never receive the same divine message again. I have shared before, how I decided to take jobs rather than build up the ministry, and how I felt it was an error (of which I repented).

I should think that once Zacharias was struck dumb, he immediately realised his mistake in doubting the angel, thus filling him with fear, and yet joy because of the message!

Verses 21-23

1.

And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.

2.

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.

3.

And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

The priest's work with the incense usually took a certain amount of time. The people would wait patiently for that length of time until the priest left the holy room. But, Zacharias was taking an unusually long time to do his duty and the people waiting were wondering what was happening.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

Zacharias finally left the holy place and stood before the people, unable to speak. Though Zacharias beckoned with his hand for the people to come closer, he could not speak. So, the people were excited, believing he must have seen a vision. In truth he had seen something far better than a vision – he had actually seen the archangel, Gabriel, and spoken with him!

Zacharias continued for the rest of his official week, still dumb, and he still performed his priestly duties. At the end of his week, he began his way back home again, unable to speak.

Verses 24-25

1.

And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,

2.

Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

Soon after Zacharias got home from his duties, Elizabeth realised she was pregnant. For the first five months, she stayed indoors, not wanting to see anyone. Yet, she was delighted, for God heard her prayers and treated her so kindly and *“(took) away (her) reproach among men.”* In those days women felt ashamed for not being able to conceive, and others looked upon them with shame. Perhaps Elizabeth was afraid to tell everyone just in case the pregnancy did not go full term, and people would think she was lying. Who knows!

Verses 26-29

1.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

2.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

3.

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.

4.

And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

Here, we see that John the Baptist was six months older than his cousin, Jesus, for six months after Elizabeth became pregnant, God sent Gabriel to Nazareth to speak to Mary (or Miriam). Mary was espoused to Joseph, a descendant of King David, just as she was. She was a virgin, a maiden. She was "*espoused*" or betrothed – promised to Joseph and then to be married. In our day it would be called 'engaged', though in those days the term was far more complex, for no espoused girl could meet with her future husband without having a female companion/chaperone with her.

Mary lived in a region known as the 'Galilee of the Gentiles' because of its closeness to being heathen in character, but she herself was righteous. Mary was roughly aged 14-16. Gabriel entered the room where Mary was and gave her the news: 'Greetings! You have been highly favoured by God, Who is with you: you are extremely blessed above all other women.' Obviously Mary was startled and amazed, and became afraid; After all, it is not often that a young girl suddenly finds herself confronted by an angel, just as Zacharias was!

Verses 30-33

1.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

2.

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

JESUS.

3.

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:

4.

And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Afraid as she was at first, Mary was even more afraid when he gave her the message from God! The next part of Gabriel's message must have shocked her to the very core! She was to become pregnant, as a single girl, when such a thing would bring social censure and shame! So, Mary was very afraid, and wondered what was going on. Why had the angel singled her out? And why make her pregnant when she was still single? The reason for the latter was that in this way no man could say she was pregnant by her betrothed or by any other man.

She was even given the name of her baby, which would be male: Jesus ('Jehovah is salvation': from the Hebrew, Joshua), or God incarnate. To emphasise that this would be otherwise a normal pregnancy, she was told she would conceive in her womb. Mary had "*found favour*" with God, so her personal state must have been just as righteous as that of Elizabeth. Mary would be "*blessed... above (other) women*" (verse 28). That is, praised, because she would give birth to the Saviour. There is no other honour ascribed to Mary, and certainly nothing like the heretical Roman Catholic ideas of her.

Gabriel then told Mary what her Son would be like. He would be known as the "*Son of the Highest*", or Son of God. In Hebrew terms, this meant to BE God Himself. Jesus would be given the throne of David. That is, He would be King. This is qualified by another statement, that Jesus would be King over Jacob's descendants forever, because His kingdom would be eternal. This means that Jesus was not to be an earthly king, but a Heavenly King of all Who belong to Him. Immediately, this rules out a millennial reign on this earth.

Verses 34-37

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

1.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

For with God nothing shall be impossible.

5.

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Shocked Mary asked the obvious question: 'How can I become pregnant, seeing as how I have never known any man?' She was not querying the statement itself, but only how it was to happen, because she had no relationship with a man at such a young age. You might wonder why she was not struck dumb, when Zacharias was. The difference is that Zacharias doubted, whereas Mary accepted the message and merely asked a normal question, as to 'how?'

Gabriel answered – God will do so. He would make her pregnant simply by His divine command over her body. For that reason – that the child would not have an human father, Jesus would be the "*Son of God*", or God Himself, for He would be an "*holy thing*" (already holy and acceptable) conceived without sexual means. This was very important, for sin is passed on via human conception, in a way we do not understand.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

Then, Mary was told that her much older cousin, Elizabeth, had also conceived six months earlier. Though she was barren and old, "*with God nothing shall be impossible*".

Then, Mary proved her utter compliance and reliance on God: 'Here I am Lord, your handmaiden/servant/slave. Let it happen just as you said'. Upon which, Gabriel left. Mary gave the best response any believer could utter. She believed and accepted whatever God wanted of her. Today, many Christians, especially younger ones, live just like their wicked or unsaved peers, being no better than heathen. And if told by God to do this or that, their first thought would be to check their own desires.

Verses 39-43

1.

And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

2.

And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

3.

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:

4.

And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

5.

And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier

Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

Soon after the angelic visitation, Mary travelled to the hills, to see Elizabeth, at her home in the city of Juda (Judah). This was probably Hebron according to Hebraic history; the city was lived in by priests and their families. Mary wanted to tell Elizabeth of her visit and also to ask of her own pregnancy. If it was indeed Hebron, it meant a distance of about 70 miles along a rough but well-known route, one that she was unlikely to have undertaken alone. Her family would have been involved by this time. (The distance covered the area approximately from the Sea of Galilee to half-way down the western side of the Dead Sea).

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Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47



Verses 44&45

1.

For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

2.

And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Elizabeth, full of excitement, told Mary what had happened – ‘As soon as you came into the room and greeted me, my baby jumped in my womb!’ She continued – ‘Because you believed what God said, you are blessed, and what God said will happen, will come about.’ (Are WE just as convinced that whatever God promises WILL come about? Then where is our joy?)

This is because whatever God says He will do, He will do, regardless of circumstances or our sin, or any other influence. Notice how this parallels the promise of Christ? *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”* (John 15:7). This text is plain. It is telling us that when we are righteous we can ask God for anything and it will be given.

Now, if we are righteous, what we ask will always be consistent with God’s guidance in our heart, and we will ask for whatever God has already prompted us to ask for. Because what we ask for comes from God, the outcome MUST be positive! Elizabeth was telling Mary the same thing... her faith meant God would indeed work a miracle in her, because the faith itself was a gift from God.

Few Christians today understand this truth, and even fewer live by it. So, few see God working in their lives, even though He certainly is! They only see their problems and fears. The trouble with this is that fear robs us of joy, and causes us to concentrate on ourselves instead of on God. That is why everything seems to go wrong. It goes wrong because we do not keep our eyes on Christ. We only see the failures of human nature... ours and everyone else’s.

Elizabeth’s baby, John, was filled with the Holy Spirit from conception. That is why his tiny body in the womb jumped for joy when the even tinier body of Christ within Mary entered the room! As believers we claim to love the Lord, but if we really loved Him we would do His bidding and obey His commands. Few of us do so, and that is why the world cannot see Christ in us. Where is our spiritual vivacity? Why do we not jump for joy when in the presence of our God? Look at

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

yourself and ask why.

Verses 46-50

1.

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

2.

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

3.

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

4.

For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

5.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

Mary was filled with joy and immediately began to pray out loud to God. Some call what she says here: 'The Magnificat' (because her soul magnifies God) or 'Song of Mary'. Sadly, it is often used to glorify Mary, especially by Rome. But, the song or prayer is all about praising God, not Mary. We should respect Mary for the role she played, and that God chose her above all women, to bear His Son on earth. She must have been righteous, just like Elizabeth... but, other than that, she is not to be praised, except by God, if He so wishes. Mary is just a normal woman, given a special task by God. Even so, her prayer displays remarkable spiritual maturity in one so young. (We should expect to see a similar godliness in young Christians today).

Mary/Maria (from the Hebrew, Miriam) 'magnified' the Lord (kyrios – master, owner and sovereign) said that her very psyche (everything within her, including her 'vital force' given by

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier

Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

God) magnified God. This means she made God great in her words, declared it to others with praise, and glorified His name. In verse 46 she did this with her 'soul' – psyche; in verse 47 she says her 'spirit' rejoiced in "God my Saviour". That is, her pneuma.

There is often debate as to whether or not humans are three-part or two-part. As I have shown in an article, in scripture the use of both soul and spirit is fifty-fifty in favour of two-part and fifty-fifty in favour of three-part. And in many places both words are used interchangeably to mean the same thing. So, what does Mary mean by saying she praises God with both her soul and spirit? The soul is everything that makes us human.

The spirit? This can mean that which animates the body – the breath of God. It can be another word for soul. But, here, Mary uses both words in the same statement. Thus, she could be referring to that which was within her from God, and so was not bound by her human or earthly frame. In this sense, she was saying that her spirit was made alive by God and communed with Him, as His spirit communed with her.

She called God her 'Saviour', soter. Now, remember that at that time she was still firmly in the era or testament of the Old era, covered by Jewish religion and faith. She was certainly one of the most righteous women, albeit young, in the land. Yet, the Saviour as Christians know Him had not yet been born, and salvation came through obeying the rites and sacrifices of the old testament days PLUS living righteously. So, what did she mean by calling God her 'Saviour'?

She meant it in the same way as King David meant it. God was her deliverer; He preserved her life through all things. In particular, she meant that God was her sustainer and heavenly King, as the Greek word implies. It was Mary's way of saying that God gave her everything and she owed her very life to Him. It is not used of Jesus, because He was yet to usher in the New Testament age, but the meaning was very similar. David continually called God his saviour or the One Who delivered him from his enemies and fed him spiritually. Mary meant it in the same way, and was repeating a Jewish sentiment from the heart, because her heart was filled with gladness, agalliao.

In verse 46 she praised the 'Lord'; in verse 47 she praised 'God' – theos, the Godhead. Normally this was the trinity, but, she is probably unaware of the existence of the trinity at this time, and so was praising the God known to Judaism, the Father, Jehovah. I say this because theos is the Greek equivalent of Jehovah/Elohim.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

Mary praised God because though she was of the royal line of David, she, like her betrothed, Joseph, was poor and of little social consequence, and yet God chose her for the highest honour given to any woman in history; for which reason every generation would call her blessed. (Not in the Roman sense).

The word, makarizo, simply means she was immensely happy. No more should be read into the word. Mary herself says this – God had done mighty things to her, so holy was His name – not hers. Furthermore, God shows mercy on all who fear Him, throughout the course of human history. The fear she refers to is the same as fear in the Old Testament (because she was still in the Old era) – struck with amazement and awe. It can mean to be terrified, but it would not have been the case here, given Mary's utter joy.

Her joy should be OUR state daily! And when we display the happiness of God in our lives, even the unsaved know our lives are different, and respect our faith. If we do not show it, but are just as morose and uncertain as the unsaved, they have no respect for our claims to salvation or beliefs.

Verses 51-55

1.

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

2.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

3.

He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

4.

He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

5.

As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

Mary's prayer is very like the Psalms of David in content and praise. She blesses God for His strength over enemies, and those who had proud hearts, who imagined themselves to be better than they were. God brought down those who thought themselves to be great, and instead raised up those who were counted to be nothing. The hungry (including those who were spiritually hungry) were given everything that was good, but the rich, who lived only for their wealth and self, He made poor.

We must approach the Lord with humility and He will give us everything we desire. We cannot slave to gain, hoping that our hard work is what gives us what we want! When we do that, we show a distinct lack of trust in God and the frantic nature of our struggle is the just reward for not trusting. If something is of God it will come with ease of soul, not anxiety of spirit... the very anxiety being proof that all is not well and that our work is of self and not of God.

The thrust of Mary's prayer is plainly Old Testament, for she speaks then of God helping Israel with mercy, as was exemplified in the way He helped the ancestors of Israel, Abraham, and all those who followed. Most Christians read this as if it were mere history, and only concerning the Jews. But, we who have come two thousand years later, are just as much Abraham's seed as was David or Mary. What Mary praised God for in her day, is as relevant to us in our day. Do we see it this way? Or, are we spiritually blind? Is God your strength and helper? Or, do you deny him this truth by relying on yourself and your own activities?

Verses 56&57

1.

And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

2.

Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

3.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months, such was the bond. It may also have been to keep Mary away from prying eyes until they had become used to the idea she was pregnant. Then, three months pregnant herself, Mary returned to Nazareth. We are not told Mary stayed until the birth of Elizabeth's baby, but the construction of the text suggests Mary left just before the birth.

Elizabeth delivered a healthy baby boy at full term, as prophesied by Gabriel. Everyone around heard the news with great joy. More so because the conception and birth were of God. Her cousins, also heard of the birth – and one of these was probably Mary, who had just returned home. The Lord had shown Elizabeth great mercy, removing her barrenness and giving her a son after many years of prayer, a son whose place in history was, and still is, unique.

None of us knows if our life is unique in God's eyes. That is why each of us must live as if God requires much of us... because He does! There is no excuse for sitting in a pew silently and returning home again untouched and unmoved! We all have a ministry and when we start to use it, God shows us what He requires.

Verses 59-64

1.

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.

2.

And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

3.

And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

4.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

5.

And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

6.

And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

God commanded circumcision of male babies on the eighth day after birth. Many preachers mistakenly teach that the baby was taken to the Temple for this rite, but the text tells us that the relevant elders went to Zacharias' house to perform it. During the rite they automatically went to name the child formally, after his father, Zacharias, because this was the usual tradition. But, Elizabeth refused: "*Not so!*"

She firmly told them that the baby was to be named John, as God commanded. The elders were perplexed by this, as they knew of no man in the family records called by that name. (In this we see that all families held a formal list of ancestors and descendants. Even today, traditional Jews are very proud of their lineage).

Typically, they felt perhaps the woman was confused, so they called on the father to clarify the situation! They gesticulated to Zacharias, to find out what he wanted the child to be named. At this time he was still dumb.

Zacharias indicated for them to bring him a *pinakidion* – a small writing tablet of clay. (A larger one was a *pinakis*). Using a stylus, he wrote out the name – John. The elders were amazed by this social deviation from tradition, but, as soon as Zacharias had done so, he was suddenly able to speak again. Immediately, he praised God, for his ability to speak came about precisely as Gabriel had prophesied.

Verses 65&66

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

1.

And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea.

2.

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.

Most Jews of that day, with a few exceptions such as Zacharias, were just nominal in their faith, and little spiritual greatness had been witnessed for centuries (like today!). So, this miracle, coupled to the day he was made dumb nine months earlier, caused the elders to be struck with holy awe and a rightful fear of God. News of what happened quickly spread around the area and the whole of Judaea. Within days the family - Elizabeth, Zacharias and John - were household names!

They were the talk of the region... something that happens when a true miracle occurs. Everyone wondered what made the child so special as to warrant an intervention by God, and the angelic dumbing and restoration of the father. And, while everyone talked amongst themselves, John grew in age and spiritual stature: *"the hand of the Lord was with him"*.

Today, many thousands of people, under the pretence of a false gospel, think they have the hand of God upon them. They have fallen for the satanic lie known as charismaticism, a lie so strong, it binds its followers as if in a prison. These followers claim countless miracles and even more gifts. But, one sign that they are all false is that no-one else knows about them! If a true miracle occurs, it will surprise everyone – not just zealots in the churches. And it will cause much wonder and awe.

We do not see this in the charismatic fold, because only charismatics think they see a miracle around every corner. Others? They see nothing at all, except for excitable people doing silly things and convincing themselves God is doing wondrous works in their midst. Do not be a dupe! Charismatics argue that we do not see the miracles they claim because we are 'spiritually blind'. Friends! A miracle is a miracle. It either happens or it does not! It WILL be witnessed by many... whether or not others are 'spiritually blind'!! So, if we do not see the claimed supposed

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

miracles – it is likely they have not occurred. It is very simple.

Verses 67-75

1.

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

2.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

3.

And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

4.

As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

5.

That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

6.

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

7.

The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

8.

That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

9.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

During John's growing-up period, his father, Zacharias, was "*filled with the Holy Ghost*". He prophesied, repeating the words of the prophets of Judaism, who also, along with David, began their preaching with praise for God.

Charismatics would point to this portion of the text and say "*See – we receive the Holy Ghost only after we are saved, as a second experience!*"

But, this is not what the text tells us. Such a charismatic claim would be erroneous. From the beginning, we see that Zacharias and Elizabeth were specially known for their righteousness. They certainly knew the Lord and, just like all who came later, called 'Christians', those who believed and obeyed had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit from the moment of their salvation. What, then, does it mean, when we are told that he was "*filled with the Holy Ghost*"

? As usual, the answer is in scripture itself... not in personalised interpretations based on a humanly-devised theology.

To be "filled" is *pimplemi*. It literally means to 'fill', and can also mean to be fulfilled, or to accomplish. It can mean to have the mind fully possessed by the Spirit. The word also means that an event has come to pass and so the prophecy confirms it. If I have a jug with water in it, and then pour in more to bring it to the very brim, I can say it is 'filled'. It does not mean there was no water in it to begin with, only that by adding more, I filled it to the top. Thus, Zacharias already was indwelt with the Holy Spirit. The text simply says that more work of the Spirit was accomplished, by causing Zacharias to prophesy.

For this reason, he began to utter the words given to him by the Spirit, blessing the God of Israel, *kyrios theos* (These are Greek titles based on the Hebrew). A blessing is a *eulogetos*, or eulogy to the one being praised, which is the meaning of the word – to praise. His first words are prophetic because they foretell the work of both his own son, John, and the Christ to come.

Zacharias was still in the Old Testament era, so he praised God for redeeming Israel. That is, paying a ransom for them, delivering them from sin. Outwardly, he was referring to the ransom required of God in the Temple – sacrifice. Yet, he prophesied also of Christ, his own nephew, whom he yet had to hear with his own ears.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

This Christ, born of the line of David, was the *“horn of salvation”* for Israel. In Hebrew terms, the *“horn”* in this context was the One Who was a mighty and valiant helper, the One Who delivers – the Messiah. All the prophets, from the earliest of days, spoke of this Messiah, Who would save Israel from its enemies, from those who hated the people of God, thus bringing about the promise, made by an holy covenant to the forefathers. Only His salvation was spiritual, not nationalistic or military.

The covenant or promise was given as a solemn oath by God to Abraham. It was a promise that if the people obeyed the Lord, their enemies would be vanquished, so that Israel could at last serve God without fear of death (verse 74). Note that all this was *“granted”* by God as a free gift of grace. It was a gift that enabled those who obeyed (for not all did so) to live in *“holiness and righteousness before him”* every day that they lived.

Verses 76-80

1.

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;

2.

To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

3.

Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

4.

To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

5.

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

Zacharias appears at this point to be speaking directly to his son, John. He told him that he would be the *“prophet of the Highest”* (Jehovah), and would go out preaching the pre-gospel message of hope, that the Messiah was coming in their day. Here the Messiah is named *“the Lord”*, *kyrios*. This is important, because he used the same title as he used for God, thus making the Messiah equal to God. It would be John’s task to *“prepare his ways”*; that is, to clear the path of the people’s hearts and minds, for the Messiah.

John would preach the remission of sins in preparation for salvation. Of course, John, being the last of the great Old Testament prophets, would preach Judaistically. Therefore, those who repented under his message were accepted by God. This was part of the Old Testament promise. This was the knowledge Zacharias spoke of, though it is prophetic of the replacement knowledge of salvation to be given by Christ when He began His work.

But, even then, under the Old promise, salvation was given by the *“tender mercy”* of God, as a free gift, and not by works done by the Jews, or even their sacrifices. As their Saviour, God was the *“dayspring from on high”* who visited Israel for their redemption. The *“dayspring”* means the rising of the sun and stars in the East, and the One Who causes it.

Should not ALL of us who claim the name of ‘Christian’ live righteous, holy lives? Should not ALL of us expect God to work mighty things in and through us? Or, do we just attend our churches dutifully, sit in a pew, and walk out again, untouched and without further thought? The proof of our faith is not mere sound words, but accompanying holy behaviour, which is just as holy as our words! Without the words, the behaviour is just a silly mystery; without the behaviour, our words are empty.

John was to preach that God was amongst us, giving light to those who sat in darkness “and in the shadow of death”. The majority in churches worldwide, no matter how sincere or how well they talk, are living close to death, the spiritual death they think is salvation! They willingly sit in the darkness of their own unsaved souls, listening intently, or even with a secret yawn, at

Luke 1

Written by K B Napier

Saturday, 16 March 2013 16:47

whoever happens to be in the pulpit on Sundays; they might even attend prayer meetings, and join in whatever program of 'being good' is current at the time. But, their 24 hour behaviour does not match their thoughts, and their thoughts do not match scripture, except in parrot-fashion. Yes, the majority in churches are like this – carcasses that have yet to realise they are spiritually dead, a stench in the nostrils of Almighty God. Yet, they firmly believe in their own deception, telling others how to live and how to be saved, yet knowing none of it themselves.

The Jews at the time of John were like this. They did the minimum necessary to retain respectability, but their hearts were dead to God. John came to give them a sudden heart-shock, leading them to repentance under the old order. And these, with renewed spiritual vigour, would be the first of Christ's followers. John, then, was the forerunner of Christ, the one who would blaze a trail throughout Israel, preparing the hearts and minds of the chosen people. They were to be led in the "*way of peace*" – peace with God through salvation by the Lord Christ.

And so John grew, filled with the Spirit from conception, and filled with the Spirit throughout his growing years. The same Spirit-filled young man became spiritually stronger by the day, and, before he began his vital ministry, he went out to live in the deserts, to be alone with God. His ministry was unlike the ministry of any Old Testament prophet. On his shoulders alone was the burden to tell everyone of his day that the Christ had now come!

The waiting was over. Eternal redemption was nigh! And so he lived, without the encumbrance of a fine wardrobe or fine foods, eating what grew and flew, drinking the dew. And, for all that time he communed with God and waited until the day appointed, when he would go forth preaching the most mighty words ever heard... until Christ eventually began His own ministry.

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