

# Teen Lesson 5: Luke Sets the Scene

Covering Luke 1:1-55

*As you study this lesson, please take the time to read the highlighted scriptures at the beginning of paragraphs, as well as any scriptures that have been specifically indicated. These are part of the "story flow" and the lessons won't make sense otherwise! You may also like to read the other highlighted scriptures to increase your understanding and help you "prove all things".*

In this lesson we begin our study of Christ's life on this earth as a human being. But before we start, perhaps we should ask ourselves WHY we should study about Christ's life. How relevant is it to us? To discover the answer, let's begin by reading **John 3:16**.

We're told here that, "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life". In other words, none of us can have ETERNAL LIFE unless we believe in Jesus Christ. Next read **John 20:30-31**. This tells us that the story of Christ's life and the miracles He performed were written down so we could come to believe that Jesus is the Christ - the Son of God - and then through that belief - or *faith* - have eternal life. So studying Christ's life is important because it helps us to have faith and belief in Him - and that's essential if we want to live forever.

But can learning about Christ also help us in this life? I think all of us know that the answer to this question is yes! The only way to be truly happy is by living God's Way of Life (see **1 Peter 3:10-12** for example) - and Christ lived that way perfectly. So studying His life can also show us the best way to live now.

## Living God's Way Leads to Happiness

The Bible tells us that there is a way that seems right to men, but that it leads to death (**Proverbs 14:12**). And when we look around us at the world today, we see that even though there are many wonderful things in it, there are also lots of problems and many people are unhappy.<sup>1</sup> This is because most people don't know *how* to live the way that brings happiness. We all tend to think that happiness comes from "doing our own thing", but that's exactly what Adam and Eve thought when they disobeyed God - and they were dead wrong! Living our own way and doing our "own thing" doesn't work. *The only way that really works is man living God's way.*

When people don't live God's way it invariably leads to destruction and unhappiness. That's because God's way - the *Christian way* - is the way God has designed everything to work. It's the way that produces true happiness. Of course, living the world's way may make us happy too, but it's rarely a happiness that lasts! To have lasting happiness we

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Henry David Thoreau, a famous U.S. author who lived in the 1800's, wrote that "most people live lives of quiet desperation"!

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need to live God's way and there's no better way to do this than by following Christ's example.

So, in this series of lessons we'll be learning as much as we can about how Jesus lived and what He taught. And to do this we'll be reading extensively from the four "gospels". These are the books written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and they contain each man's account of Christ's life here on earth. Sometimes they write about the same things and at other times they cover different aspects - so we have to delve into all four books to get the whole story.

In Part 1 of this series we began in John - which starts by telling us about Christ's life before He became a human. In this lesson we'll begin in Luke and focus primarily on the events that led up to Christ's birth.<sup>2</sup>

### Luke Sets the Scene

**Luke 1:1-4** — Luke was a close friend and colleague of the apostle Paul. He was also a physician and a *Gentile*<sup>3</sup> who had become a Christian sometime after the death of Christ. This means that he wasn't an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry like Matthew, Mark and John were. So why did he write a book about Christ's life? Well, as he tells us, it's because he wanted to make an *orderly* record of the eyewitness accounts of Christ's life for someone called Theophilus. The Bible doesn't tell us who Theophilus was, but it does indicate that he was a man of high social standing.

As a doctor, Luke was used to being thorough, so he would have carefully examined all the information he gathered for this book in order to get it "right". He did this so - as it says in verse 4 - "you will know the full truth about everything you've been taught".

**Luke 1:5-25** — We're told here that Elizabeth (Zechariah's wife) became pregnant soon after her husband's time of service in the temple was completed. In the next few verses we'll discover that Mary conceived Jesus during Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy. This means that Elizabeth's son, John, was six months *older* than Jesus. This information might not seem important, but it is! Because if we can discover when John was born, we can also figure out when Jesus was born!

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<sup>2</sup> Information for this lesson was gathered from a number of sources, including the *Youth Bible*, *New Century Version*, the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, the *Life Application Bible*, & *The Interlinear Bible (Hebrew-Greek-English)*.

<sup>3</sup> As far as we know, Luke is the only *Gentile* writer to have his work recorded in the New Testament. He also wrote the book of Acts.

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However, we have to do a little digging to find this information, because the Bible doesn't tell us when John was born. But it does tell us *when* he was conceived - shortly after Zechariah finished his time of service in the temple. So if we can discover when Zechariah served in the temple, we can find out when John was conceived, and then figure out when he was born.

### Zechariah's Time of Service

So when did Zechariah serve in the temple? Verse 5 gives us a clue when it tells us that Zechariah was in the priestly division of Abijah. If you haven't heard of this before you might wonder what it means and how it tells us when Zechariah served. The answer is found in **1 Chronicles 24:1-19**, where it explains that the division of Abijah was one of 24 groups that the priests were divided into. Each group of priests served in the temple for a week at a time, so it took 24 weeks - or 6 months - for all of the groups to have their turn. After that they started the cycle all over again.

The 24 weeks of service started at the beginning of God's *first* month, which, based on the Hebrew calendar, began just before the Spring Holy Days. (This corresponds to our March/April.) Six months later, in God's *seventh* month (our September/October) all the priests served together during the Feast of Tabernacles, and then after that, their second cycle of weekly service began. Zechariah was in the 8<sup>th</sup> division or group (**1 Chronicles 24:10**), so his *first* week of service would have been 8 weeks after the beginning of the first cycle, which brings us to the end of God's *second* month (our May/June). His *second* week of service was 8 weeks after the second cycle began, which brings us to the beginning of God's *ninth* month (our November/December).

The Bible tells us that Elizabeth became pregnant shortly after Zechariah finished his week of service, but it doesn't tell us *which* cycle this was in. So we have two choices. If it was after his first cycle of service, then Elizabeth conceived sometime in May or June, and John would have been born 9 months later in February or March. If it was after Zechariah's second cycle of service, then she conceived sometime in November or December, and John would have been born in August or September.

To find out when Jesus was born, all we have to do is add on a further 6 months. This means that Jesus was born sometime around August/September OR February/March. Of course, we can't be 100% sure of this because we don't know *exactly* when Elizabeth conceived and John was born, but it gives us a rough idea. We'll discover more about the *time* of year when Jesus was born in our next lesson, but we can already see from the timing of Elizabeth's pregnancy that there is no way He could have been born in December!

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## Elizabeth's "Disgrace" Removed - Her Son to be Great Man

If we go back and read Luke 1:6, we discover that as far as God was concerned, Elizabeth and Zechariah were righteous. But in those days people often considered barrenness - the inability to have children - as a sign of God's displeasure and judgement. So because Elizabeth was unable to have children, she and Zechariah must have felt that God was not pleased with them in some way. This is why Elizabeth makes the comment that, by having a baby, God had taken away her reproach - or her public disgrace (see verse 25).

In verse 15 we read that Zechariah and Elizabeth's son was to be a great man, filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, and that he was not to drink any wine or strong drink. Similar things were said of Samson in the Old Testament (**Judges 13:2-7, 24-25**), who was a Nazirite.

A Nazirite was someone who was dedicated to God in a special way (**Numbers 6:1-21**) and it's possible that John was also a Nazirite like Samson was. Certainly, he had been set aside from before birth to do something very special for God. **Luke 1:16-17** explains what this was. John was to make peace between parents and children, and bring those who were not obeying God back to a right way of thinking. In this way he would make a people ready for the coming of the Lord. This is also what God is doing today - through the Church - in preparation for Christ's return.

## Angelic Beings - God's Servants

In verse 19 we find out that the angel who spoke to Zechariah was called Gabriel. The Bible tells us that there are many thousands of angels (**Revelation 5:11**) but we only know the names of three of them: Helel, Gabriel and Michael. Helel is more commonly known as Lucifer,<sup>4</sup> and he is the angel who rebelled against God and became Satan the devil (**Isaiah 14:12-15**).<sup>5</sup> Gabriel always appears as God's Messenger, as he was here to Zechariah (see also **Daniel 8:16** and **Daniel 9:21-23**). Michael is one of the chief angels (it's likely that Gabriel is too) and his role is one of guardian angel over the nation of Israel (**Daniel 10:5-13,21; Daniel 12:1**). Michael is also named as being the leader of a group of angels who fought against "the dragon" (Lucifer or Helel) at the time of his rebellion (**Revelation 12:7-9**).

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<sup>4</sup> Lucifer, meaning "light-bearer", is the Latin translation of the Hebrew word *Helel* in Isaiah 14:12. *Helel* means "shining one" or "shining star" and the original translation of this verse was: "O shining star, son of the morning, how you have fallen from the heavens!..." NO mention of Lucifer at all! "Shining star" was changed to "Lucifer" by Jerome (around the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century) when he translated the Bible into Latin. (This version is now known as the Vulgate.)

<sup>5</sup> This can be deduced from the context, what we read about this "person" in Ezekiel 28:12-17, and what Christ reveals in Luke 10:18.

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We don't often think about the invisible angelic world, but angels do exist and the Bible tells us that they are "spirits who serve God and are sent by him to help those who are to receive salvation" (Hebrews 1:13-14, *Good News Bible*). In other words, their job is to help us! And even though we aren't aware of it, they are often all around us, acting on our behalf in some way.

### Gabriel Sent to Mary

**Luke 1:26-38** — In this passage we see that Gabriel was also sent to tell Mary that she was to become the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. Many people have a confused picture of Mary in their minds - of a "Madonna" holding a baby, with a halo over her head, a beatific smile on her face, and angelic cherubs hovering around her! But Mary was really just an ordinary young Jewish girl from an Israeli village. And surprisingly, her name wasn't really Mary - it was *Miriam*. Some people believe it was translated as Mary in an attempt to disguise the fact that she was Jewish. This is because the Jewish origins of Jesus and His mother (as well as the early Christians) are something that most people would like to forget.<sup>6</sup>

Gabriel told Mary that her son was to be called Jesus (verse 31) - at least that's what most of our Bibles say. But when Jesus was alive on this earth, that's not what He was called! His name was *Yeshua*.<sup>7</sup> And with this in mind, it's rather interesting to read **Matthew 1:21**. You see, the Hebrew word for "he will save" is *Yoshia* - which has the same Hebrew root as *Yeshua*. So God actually gave His Son the name that described what He came to do: to save people from their sins.

So how did His name get changed to Jesus? Well, the ancient Greeks tried to pronounce *Yeshua* and it came out *Iesous* - and that's how it was translated in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Then, when English-speakers attempted to pronounce the name *Iesous*, it came out *Jesus*. So that's what we call Him, but His real name was *Yeshua*.

When Mary questioned how it was possible for her to be pregnant when she was a virgin, Gabriel explained that God would make it possible through the power of His Holy Spirit. And then to prove that nothing is impossible with God, he told her about the pregnancy of Elizabeth, her relative (verse 36). Mary knew that Elizabeth was barren and past child-bearing age, so would have realised right away that this was a miracle!

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<sup>6</sup> See note on "Miryam", Matthew 1:18, Jewish New Testament Commentary by David Stern.

<sup>7</sup> See note on Matthew 1:1, Jewish New Testament Commentary by David Stern.

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(We also learn from this verse that Elizabeth was Mary's relative, so their sons were related in some way - possibly cousins.)

Did you notice how Mary responded to the news that Gabriel brought her. She was totally submissive to God and His will for her life (verse 38). She didn't argue, even though she must have known that people - perhaps even Joseph, her fiancé - would assume that she had been promiscuous and unfaithful.

**Luke 1:39-45** — Elizabeth recognised that Mary was the mother of the "Lord" and said that Mary would be blessed because of her belief and acceptance of what was happening to her. But how did Elizabeth know this? Well it's because she was filled with the Holy Spirit (verse 41) - and God revealed it to her.

### Mary's "Song" of Praise

When Mary heard what Elizabeth said, she praised God (verses 46-55). Her words are often referred to as a "song" and the sentiments she expresses are similar to Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. So it appears that Mary was familiar with Hannah's prayer and followed her example of praising God for His greatness.

Mary's words show us that she realised giving birth to the Son of God was an incredible honour and that, as a result, people would remember her for all time (verses 48-49). But this didn't make Mary proud. Instead, she glorified God because of what *He was going to do through her!* Incredibly, Mary also understood that Christ's birth was a fulfilment of the promise that God had given to Abraham and his descendants (verses 54-55). You can read about this promise in **Genesis 12:2-3** and **Genesis 22:16-18**.

The amazing thing about Mary's song of praise is that she did NOT have a Bible to read like you and I do, yet she quoted or paraphrased many scriptures from the Old Testament. These are all scriptures that she must have been taught growing up and heard read in the synagogue on the Sabbath. But Mary's spontaneous use of them shows that she did *more* than hear - she listened and committed them to memory. She rehearsed them in her mind often. Mary clearly loved God and His Word, and this explains why she was so willing to submit to His will in her life. Perhaps it also begins to give you an idea of why God chose her to be the mother of the Saviour of mankind!

If you'd like to take a more in-depth look at Mary's song, then check out the Extra Study Activity Sheet included with this lesson.