



## Introduction

Luke 1: 1 – 80

Preparations for the Advent of the Messiah

This is the first of a set of studies of the life of Jesus written by a man called Luke. The studies are in the form of sets of questions for a group, or an individual, to think over and discuss.

In his first 4 verses written in different, better Greek than the rest of the book, Luke announces what he is going to do.

Luke makes it clear he is writing history by emphasising the way in which he has researched the life of Jesus and the surrounding events. The other three Gospel writers write life stories more narrowly focused on Jesus. Luke was writing to a man called Theophilus who, judging by the formal way Luke addresses him, must have been someone rather important.

## Study 1

Reading: **(1: 1 – 4),**

Here is the first question:

Luke wants to give Theophilus 'certainty' about the things he has been taught by Christians (v 4). Where can we get certainty about the things we have been taught?

Theophilus's certainty was to come from what Luke wrote: facts of history. Our's comes from the same place: the record of how God related to his people and the world, told to us in the word of God, the Bible.

Luke starts off with background information about Jesus, explaining the story of his cousin, John the Baptist. This sort of information is the way Greeks wrote history. Luke is being careful to fit in with the expected ways to write history of his day.

## Study 2

First we get a description of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John In verses **5 –25.**

Reading.

Second question:

What were the good things about this couple that made them the right sort of people to be the parents of a prophet? There were also some things about them that were not so good. What were they? What are we meant to learn from these good and 'not so good' things?

Notice here: The good things are obvious; the not so good ones less so. Childlessness was a great disgrace in their culture. We shall see that Luke keeps on drawing attention to people who were poor, of low status and generally disadvantaged.

Luke, like Matthew, emphasises the very special and unique way Jesus was conceived

## Study 3

Reading: (**v 26 – 38**).

Question 3 .

What would the village gossips have said had happened? (note what was said in Jn 8: 41 which probably refers to this.

The village gossips will have concluded that Mary was not a virgin and Jesus was born illegitimately. The “no reputation” of some of the older English translations of Phil 2: 7 will have had a very literal practical meaning for Jesus and his mother.

Question 4:

Why was Jesus conceived this way? What difference did it make to who he was? Jesus had to be fully human so that he could share our humanity (Heb 2: 14) and to be fully God so that his sacrificial death could be effective for more than just himself. In the early church they said “Jesus was as we are and therefore he **will** help; in other ways he was not as we are and therefore he **can** help” Although the point is never made in the New Testament it is likely that only through the virgin birth (more accurately, the virgin conception) could he be both.

The angel said he was to be called the ‘son of God’ (v 35). That was a very special title in those days. The king of Judea was considered to be a ‘son of God’ (Ps 2: 7). So was the whole nation of Israel (Hos 11: 1). The Romans called their Emperor the son of a god. It does **not** mean that God had intercourse with Mary. That is a dreadful thing to suggest.

## Study 4

Read **39 – 56**.

Mary’s song is lovely.

What can Mary possibly have meant by v 51 – 53? (Herod was still alive and a very dangerous man, half crazy and vicious to anybody he thought might challenge his rule.)

Herod (the first Herod, Herod the Great) was a terrible man who killed many people including his favourite wife and his own sons on the merest suspicion of treason. Mary must have been speaking prophetically, going far beyond what could have been expected from the young village girl that she was.

## Study 5

Read **57 – 80**.

What happened (v 62,63) was very like the late change of name that seems to have been a frequent mark of someone having something very special to do. (Abram = Abraham; Simon = Peter, Saul = Paul etc.)

What would those who heard the prophecy of Zechariah have thought he meant by the first part of what he said where he praised the Lord (v 68 – 75)? And how would they have understood the second part where he spoke about the future of his baby (v 76 – 79)? Which part sounds like politics and which like preaching?

It is important to remember that the whole life of Jesus took place against a background of continual trouble between the people of that country and the occupying power of Rome. There were many attempted rebellions against the Romans. The Jews did not understand how they could be the Lord's people and not be in control of their own country. Even the ordinary Jewish people were desperately hoping a strong man would appear and lead them in a military campaign against the Romans. There were major rebellions against Roman rule both before and after the time of Jesus all of them unsuccessful. Those about 40 years and 120 years after the death of Jesus were particularly unsuccessful and eventually led to terrible revenge being taken by the Romans and the deaths of millions of people. This background is reflected in what Zechariah said. I hope that at the news of the coming Saviour your heart has leapt within you as the baby John leapt in Elizabeth!