

Congregational Study: Luke's Epiphany

Luke 1:1-4

Wednesday Class (1/8/24)



Read 1:1-4

Is Luke's name mentioned? Whose name is mentioned?

So let's start by talking about how did Luke's name got to be associated with this Gospel, and about who this person Theophilus is.

- We can't be 100% sure who the author is, as it's not named in the text. The title we see in our Bibles, "The Gospel According to Luke," was added later.
- Title first seen on a papyrus Greek copy of this gospel, dating from AD 175-225 (one of the oldest manuscripts that we have).

But many Christian writers, in the earliest centuries of Christianity, refer to Luke as the **author** of this gospel; and there's been almost universal agreement re: Luke's authorship through the centuries. Why?

Luke's named three times in the NT, all in letters of Paul.

- Philemon 24 -- named with three other "fellow workers."
- Colossians 4:14 – Paul sends greetings to the church from "Luke, the beloved physician"
- 2 Timothy 4:11 – "Luke alone is with me"
- So Luke obviously worked closely with Paul.

Also have to take into account the writing of the NT's 5th book, Acts of Apostles.

- Read Acts 1:1
- Both of these writings are addressed to this man, Theophilus – and the writer refers to a previous book, which we assume is this gospel.
- So we assume (and virtually all Christians assume) these two writings are linked by the same author.
- Furthermore, in Acts, as the work of the missionary apostle Paul is described, the author uses the second person a number of times as he includes himself in the story.
- Read Acts 16:10-17
- Read Acts 27:1 and 28:16
- Here an eyewitness is reporting what he personally experienced with the apostle Paul.

But what did the person who wrote these words in Luke 1:1-4 say? Was he an eyewitness to the events in Christ's life?

- Read Luke 1:2 again.
- He couldn't have been one of the 12 apostles.
- His reports come as a result of his having followed things closely, sorting things out from the very beginning, and doing research by talking with those who were eyewitnesses.

Putting all this together, and accepting the unanimous agreement of the early church, it's almost certain that Luke is indeed the author of the gospel that bear his name in our Bibles.

So who was this man Luke?

- It seems likely that Luke was a Gentile.
- His writing suggests that he was a learned, educated person; and Paul tells us that he was a physician by profession.

Who do you think was the **audience** of Luke's writings?

- Most obvious audience, according to v. 3, is this man Theophilus.
- Name means "lover of God" (some scholars think this was a generic name for all believers; but was likely a specific person).
- Could have been a wealthy Christian, who financially sponsored the work Luke was doing – or one who paid for the parchments on which Luke wrote.
- Best suggestion comes from v. 4 (read again).
- Luke is writing his narrative so that Theophilus may have "certainty concerning the things you have been *taught*."
- Greek word is *katechaythays*, from which our English word *catechesis* ("instruction, informing") is drawn.
- Back in Luke's day, Theophilus was very likely a convert to the Christian faith.
- He would have gone through a period of instruction prior to his baptism, learning the basic tenets of the faith.
- Additionally, he might have gone through another period of instruction prior to receiving the Lord's Supper.
- Luke didn't want Theo to be in any doubt about Jesus Christ.
- Luke assures Theo that he has investigated everything from the beginning and now provides this orderly account of the truth.
- So Luke was certainly writing his Gospel for Theophilus, and by extension others like Theophilus, the people whom Paul had reached on his missionary journeys.
- Essentially, in these verses, Luke is saying, "The purpose of my narrative is to instill greater confidence and assurance in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Luke 1:1-4 details

In v. 1, Luke calls this writing a "narrative" (literally, "a written composition that leads through to an end"). This is exactly what Luke is doing – beginning with birth of Jesus, he leads through to the end, to death and resurrection.

Luke says that his narrative is written of “the things that have been *accomplished* among us” One of the strong themes of Luke’s Gospel is to show how the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah have been accomplished, or fulfilled, in Jesus.

Notice that Luke mentions that “many” (v. 1) have undertaken similar projects. He’s continuing the tradition in the early decades of Christianity to gather oral and written information, and he’s shaping it for a particular audience – like Theophilus, a community of catechumens.

And from whom did Luke get his source material? In v. 2: “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us.” Luke seems to be referring not to two separate groups of people (eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word); but one.

- Those who were there with Jesus before his crucifixion and resurrection, and then who afterwards (empowered by the Holy Spirit) became church leaders and missionary apostles.
- Who might some of these folks have been?

In v. 3 Luke says that he’s “*followed* all things closely for some time past” The word is sometimes translated as “investigated,” and that’s pretty much what Luke says he’s been doing. But a more literal translation would be that Luke has “followed with the mind.” In other words, he’s stating that he has thoroughly understood everything that the eyewitnesses have passed along to him. He has an “informed familiarity,” and that’s his qualification for writing a history based on these eyewitness accounts.

Later in v. 3, he says he’s writing “an *orderly* account.” He’s suggesting that the “order” in the narrative is not just chronological, but that it’s structured in a teaching way, to reinforce its catechetical message.

In v. 4, he wants Theophilus to “have certainty concerning the things you’ve been taught. This seems to be main point of his introductory sentence. He’s saying, “Theophilus, I want you to set aside any of your doubts. This is the real deal.”

Let’s go back to that word we read in v. 4, “the things you have been *taught*.” The Greek root word here, *kataykayo*, a verb, (“to catechize, instruct, inform”) occurs four times in Luke-Acts, and three times in Paul.

- Luke 1:4
- Acts 18:25 same meaning as Lk. 1:1-4, “Apollos had been catechized in the way of the Lord”
- 1 Corinthians 14:19 Paul prefers for rational words, not speaking in tongues, to be used in worship, so that he may “catechize” those present.
- Galatians 6:6 – verb used twice: refers to one who is “catechized” by a “catechist”
- Romans 2:18 – speaking of Jewish catechesis, or a Jew’s instruction in Torah
- Acts 21:21, 24 – the verb has the more general meaning of “report, inform”

Luke's gospel, then, can be seen as a teaching narrative intended to complete or flesh out Theo's earlier catechesis. The goal of Luke's gospel is certainty of faith. That was important in Luke's day. Is it equally important still today? Why or why not?

Hopefully, our little congregational study in this new year will be a help in strengthening the foundations of your faith ...

Distinctive features of Luke's Gospel

- written for a mission church
- includes many statements of Jesus about the responsibilities of those who will carry on his work
- filled with stories found nowhere else in Bible (Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, Pharisee and Tax Collector, Zacchaeus, etc.)
- makes special note of the importance of women in the story of Jesus (Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, Mary and Martha, widow of Nain, etc.)
- opening chapters filled with songs the church has continued to sing (Magnificat, Benedictus, Gloria in Excelsis, Nunc Dimittis)

Thanks to the following volume for assistance with the above notes.

Concordia Commentary, Luke 1:1-9:50, Arthur A. Just, Jr., Concordia Publishing House, 1996