

**Second Baptist Church of Doylestown**  
**Bible Study Notes**  
**12-11-24**

**Luke 1**

**Introduction & Prior Accounts Of The Life Of Jesus – Verses 1-4**

**<sup>1</sup> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.**

**1:1-2** Luke tells Jesus' story from the unique perspective of a Gentile, a physician, and the first historian of the early church. Though not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, Luke nevertheless was concerned that eyewitness accounts be preserved accurately and that the foundations of Christian belief be transmitted intact to the next generation. In Luke's Gospel are many of Jesus' parables. In addition, more than any other Gospel, it gives specific instances of Jesus' concern for women.

**1:1-4** There was a lot of interest in Jesus, and many people had written firsthand accounts about him. Luke may have used these accounts and all other available resources as material for an accurate and complete account of Jesus' life, teachings, and ministry. Because truth was important to Luke, he relied heavily on eyewitness accounts. Christianity doesn't say, "Close your eyes and believe," but rather, "Check it out for yourself." The Bible encourages you to investigate its claims thoroughly because your conclusion about Jesus is a life-and-death matter.

**1:1-4** Theophilus means "one who loves God." The book of Acts, also written by Luke, is likewise addressed to Theophilus. This preface may be a general dedication to all Christian readers. Theophilus may have been Luke's patron who helped to finance the book's writing. More likely, Theophilus was a Roman acquaintance of Luke's with a strong interest in the new Christian religion.

**1:3-4** As a medical doctor, Luke knew the importance of being thorough. He used his skills in observation and analysis to thoroughly investigate the stories about Jesus. His diagnosis: The gospel of Jesus Christ is true! You can read Luke's account of Jesus' life with confidence that it was written by a clear thinker and a thoughtful researcher. Because the gospel is founded on historical truth, our spiritual growth must involve careful, disciplined, and thorough investigation of God's Word so that we can understand how God has acted in history. If this kind of study is not part of your life, find a pastor, teacher, or even a book to help you get started and to guide you in this important part of Christian growth.

**The Birth Of John The Baptist Foretold – Verses 5-7**

**<sup>5</sup> In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. <sup>6</sup> Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. <sup>7</sup> But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.**

**1:5** This was Herod the Great, confirmed by the Roman Senate as king of the Jews. Only half Jewish himself and eager to please his Roman superiors, Herod expanded and beautified the Jerusalem temple— but he placed a Roman eagle over the entrance. When he helped the Jews, it was for political purposes and not because he cared about their God. Later, Herod the Great would order a massacre of infants in a futile attempt to kill the infant Jesus, whom some were calling the new “king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2).

**1:5** A Jewish priest was a minister of God who worked at the temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services. At this time there were about 20,000 priests throughout the country— far too many to minister in the temple at one time. Therefore the priests were divided into 24 separate groups of about 1,000 each, according to David’s instructions (1 Chronicles 24:3-19). Zechariah was a member of the division of Abijah, on duty this particular week. Each morning a priest was to enter the Holy Place in the temple and burn incense. The priests would cast lots to decide who would enter the inner sanctuary, and one day the lot fell to Zechariah. But it was not by chance that Zechariah was on duty and that he was chosen that day to enter the Holy Place— perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. God was guiding the events of history to prepare the way for Jesus to come to earth.

**1:6** Zechariah and Elizabeth didn’t merely go through the motions in following God’s laws; they backed up their outward compliance with inward obedience. Unlike the religious leaders whom Jesus called hypocrites, Zechariah and Elizabeth did not stop with the letter of the law. Their obedience was from the heart, and that is why they are called “righteous in the sight of God.”

**1:7** God answers prayer in his own way and in his own time. He worked in an “impossible” situation— Elizabeth’s age and barrenness— to bring about the fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning the Messiah. If you want to have your prayers answered, you must be open to what God can do in impossible situations. And you must wait for God to work in his way and in his time.

### **Zacharias’ Temple Service – Verses 8-10**

**<sup>8</sup>Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup>he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup>And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.**

**1:8-10** Incense was burned in the temple twice daily (Exodus 30: 7-10). When the people saw the smoke from the burning incense, they prayed. The smoke drifting heavenward symbolized their prayers ascending to God’s throne.

### **The Angel’s Announcement To Zacharias – Verses 11-17**

**<sup>11</sup>Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. <sup>14</sup>He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup>for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. <sup>16</sup>He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”**

**1:11-12** Angels are spirit beings who live in God's presence and do his will. Only two angels are mentioned by name in Scripture—Michael and Gabriel— but there are many who act as God's messengers. Here, Gabriel (1:19) delivered a special message to Zechariah. This was not a dream or a vision. The angel appeared in visible form and spoke audible words to the priest.

**1:13** While burning incense on the altar, Zechariah was also praying, most likely for the coming of the Messiah to his people. How odd it must have seemed that the angel would say that his prayer was answered and Zechariah would soon have a son. Yet the greatest desire of Zechariah's heart— to have a son— would come true. At the same time, the answer to the nation's prayer for the Messiah would also come true. Zechariah's son would grow up to prepare the way for the Messiah.

**1:13** John means "the LORD is gracious," and Jesus means "the LORD saves." Both names were prescribed by God, not chosen by human parents. Throughout the Gospels, God acts graciously and saves his people. He will not withhold salvation from anyone who sincerely comes to him.

**1:15** John was set apart for special service to God. He may have been forbidden to drink wine as part of the Nazirite vow, an ancient vow of consecration to God (see Numbers 6:1-8). Samson (Judges 13) was under the Nazirite vow, and Samuel may have been also (1 Samuel 1: 11).

**1:15** This is Luke's first mention of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity; Luke refers to the Holy Spirit more than any other Gospel writer. Because Luke also wrote the book of Acts, we know he was thoroughly informed about the work of the Holy Spirit. Luke recognized and emphasized the Holy Spirit's work in directing the beginnings of Christianity and in guiding the early church. The presence of the Spirit was God's gift to the entire church at Pentecost. Prior to that, God's Spirit was given to the faithful for special tasks. We need the Holy Spirit's help to do God's work effectively.

**1:17** John's role was to be almost identical to that of an Old Testament prophet: to encourage people to turn away from sin and back to God. John is often compared to the great prophet Elijah, who was known for standing up to evil rulers (Malachi 4: 5; Matthew 11: 14; 17: 10-13).

### **Zacharias' Doubt And Muteness – Verses 18-20**

**18** Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." **19** The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. **20** And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

**1:18-20** When told he would have a son, Zechariah doubted the angel's word. From Zechariah's human perspective, his doubts were understandable— but with God, anything is possible. What God promises, he delivers. And God delivers on time! You can have complete confidence that God will keep his promises. Their fulfillment may not be the next day, but they will be "at their appointed time." If you are waiting for God to answer some request or to fill some need, remain patient. No matter how impossible God's promises may seem, what he has said in his Word will come true at the right time.

### **Zacharias Appears To The Multitude – Verses 21-23**

**21** Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. **22** When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak. **23** When his time of service was completed, he returned home.

**1:21-23** After the incense priest finished, he came out of the holy place through the great doors of the temple and met the other two priests right outside the doors. Then the incense priest raised his hands and blessed the people with the blessing from Numbers 6:24-26. The hundreds of gathered worshippers knew what to do; they responded by saying, “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.”

### **Elizabeth’s Conception And Joy – Verses 24-25**

**24** After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. **25** “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

**1:24- 25** Zechariah and Elizabeth were both godly people, yet they were suffering. Some Jews at that time did not believe in a bodily resurrection, so their hope of immortality was in their children. In addition, children cared for their parents in their old age and added to the family’s financial security and social status. Children were considered a blessing, and childlessness was seen as a curse. Zechariah and Elizabeth had been childless for many years, and at this time they were too old to expect any change in their situation. They felt humiliated and hopeless. But God was waiting for the right time to encourage them and take away their disgrace.

### **The Birth Of Jesus Foretold – Verses 26-33**

**26** In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, **27** to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. **28** The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” **29** Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. **30** But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. **31** You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

**1:26** Gabriel appeared not only to Zechariah and to Mary but also to the prophet Daniel more than 500 years earlier (Daniel 8: 15-17; 9: 21). Each time Gabriel appeared, he brought important messages from God.

**1:26** Nazareth, Joseph and Mary’s hometown, was a long way from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life and worship. Located on a major trade route, Nazareth was frequently visited by Gentile merchants and Roman soldiers. It was known for its independent and aloof attitude. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but grew up in Nazareth. Nevertheless, the people of Nazareth would reject him as the Messiah (4:22-30).

**1:27-28** Mary was young, poor, female— all characteristics that, to the people of her day, would make her seem unusable by God for any major task. But God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience he has ever demanded of anyone. You may feel that your ability, experience, or education makes you an unlikely candidate for God’s service. Don’t limit God’s choices. He can use you if you trust him.

**1:30-31** God’s favor does not automatically bring instant success or fame. His blessing on Mary, the honor of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain: her peers would ridicule her; her fiancé would come close to leaving her; her son would be rejected and murdered. But through her

son would come the world's only hope, and this is why Mary has been praised by countless generations. Her submission was part of God's plan to bring about our salvation. If sorrow weighs you down and dims your hope, think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out his plan.

**1:31** Jesus, a Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, was a common name meaning "the LORD saves." Just as Joshua had led Israel into the Promised Land (see Joshua 1: 1-2), so Jesus would lead his people into eternal life. The symbolism of his name was not lost on the people of his day, who took names seriously and saw them as a source of power. In Jesus' name, people were healed, demons were banished, and sins were forgiven.

**1:32-33** Centuries earlier, God had promised David that David's kingdom would last forever (2 Samuel 7: 16). This promise was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, a direct descendant of David, whose kingdom will never end.

### **Mary's question and Gabriel's response – Verses 34-38**

<sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail." <sup>38</sup> "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

**1: 34** The birth of Jesus to a virgin is a miracle that many people find hard to believe. These three facts can aid our faith: (1) Luke was a medical doctor, and he knew perfectly well how babies are made. It would have been just as hard for him to believe in a virgin birth as it is for us, yet he reports it as fact. (2) Luke was a painstaking researcher who based his Gospel on eyewitness accounts. Tradition holds that he talked with Mary about the events he recorded in the first two chapters. This is Mary's story, not a fictional invention. (3) Christians and Jews, who worship God as the Creator of the universe, should have no doubts that God has the power to create a child in a virgin's womb.

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**1:35** Why is the Virgin Birth important to the Christian faith? Jesus was born without the sin that entered the world through Adam. He was born holy, just as Adam was created sinless. In contrast to Adam, who disobeyed God, Jesus obeyed God and was thus able to face sin's consequences in our place and make us acceptable to God (Romans 5:14-19). Jesus Christ, God's Son, had to be free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings by Adam. Because Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without any trace of human sin. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. Because Jesus lived as a man, human beings know that he fully understands their experiences and struggles (Hebrews 4:15-16). Because he is God, he has the power and authority to deliver people from sin (Colossians 2:13-15). People can tell Jesus all their thoughts, feelings, and needs. He has been where they are, and he has the ability to help.

**1:38** A young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster. Unless the father of the child agreed to marry her, she would probably remain unmarried for life. If her own father rejected her, she could be forced into begging or prostitution in order to earn her living. And Mary, with her story about becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit, risked being considered crazy as well. Still Mary said, despite the possible risks, “May your word to me be fulfilled.” When Mary said that, she didn’t know about the tremendous opportunity she would have. She only knew that God was asking her to serve him, and she willingly obeyed. Don’t wait to see the bottom line before offering your life to God. Offer yourself willingly, even when the outcome seems disastrous.

**1:38** God’s announcement of the birth of a special child was met with various responses throughout Scripture. Sarah, Abraham’s wife, laughed (Genesis 18: 9-15). Zechariah doubted (Luke 1: 18). By contrast, Mary graciously submitted. She believed the angel’s words and agreed to bear the child, even under humanly impossible circumstances. God is able to do the impossible. Our response to his demands should not be laughter or doubt, but willing acceptance.

### **Mary Visits Elizabeth – Verses 39-45**

**39** At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, **40** where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. **41** When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. **42** In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! **43** But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? **44** As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. **45** Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

**1:41-43** Apparently the Holy Spirit told Elizabeth that Mary’s child was the Messiah because Elizabeth called her young relative “the mother of my Lord” as she greeted her. As Mary rushed off to visit her relative, she must have been wondering if the events of the last few days had been real. Elizabeth’s greeting must have strengthened her faith. Mary’s pregnancy may have seemed impossible, but her wise relative believed in the Lord’s faithfulness and rejoiced in Mary’s blessed condition.

**1:42-43** Even though she herself was pregnant with a long-awaited son, Elizabeth could have envied Mary, whose son would be even greater than her own. Instead, she was filled with joy that the mother of her Lord would visit her. Have you ever envied people whom God has apparently singled out for special blessing? A cure for jealousy is to rejoice with those individuals, realizing that God uses his people in ways best suited to his purpose.

### **Mary’s Song – Verses 46-56**

**46** And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord **47** and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, **48** for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, **49** for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. **50** His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. **51** He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. **52** He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. **53** He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. **54** He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful **55** to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.” **56** Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

**1:46-55** This song is often called the Magnificat, the first word in the Latin translation of this passage. Mary’s song has often been used as the basis for choral music and hymns. Like Hannah, the mother

of Samuel (1 Samuel 2: 1-10), Mary glorified God in song for what he was going to do for the world through her. Notice that in both songs, God is pictured as a champion of the poor, the oppressed, and the despised.

**1:48** When Mary said, “From now on all generations will call me blessed,” was she being proud? No, she was recognizing and accepting the gift God had given her. Pride is refusing to accept God’s gifts or taking credit for what God has done; humility is accepting the gifts and using them to praise and serve God. Don’t deny, belittle, or ignore your gifts. Thank God for them and use them to his glory.

**1:54-55** God kept his promise to Abraham to be merciful to God’s people forever (Genesis 22: 16-18). Christ’s birth fulfilled the promise, and Mary understood this. She was not surprised when her special son eventually announced that he was the Messiah. She had known Jesus’ mission from before his birth. Some of God’s promises to Israel are found in 2 Samuel 22: 50-51; Psalms 89:2-4; 103:17-18; Micah 7:18-20.

### **The Birth Of John The Baptist – Verses 57-66**

**57** When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. **58** Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. **59** On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, **60** but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” **61** They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.” **62** Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. **63** He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” **64** Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. **65** All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. **66** Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

**1:59** The circumcision ceremony was an important event to the family of a Jewish baby boy. God commanded circumcision when he was beginning to form his holy nation (Genesis 17: 4-14), and he had reaffirmed it through Moses (Leviticus 12: 1-3). This ceremony was a time of joy when friends and family members would celebrate the baby’s becoming part of God’s covenant nation.

**1:59** Family lines and family names were important to the Jews. The people naturally assumed the child would receive Zechariah’s name or at least a family name. They were surprised, therefore, that both Elizabeth and Zechariah wanted to name the boy John. This was the name the angel had given them.

**1:62** Zechariah’s relatives talked to him by gestures because he was apparently deaf as well as speechless and had not heard what his wife had said.

### **Zechariah’s Song – Verses 67-80**

**67** His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: **68** “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. **69** He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David **70** (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), **71** salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— **72** to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, **73** the oath he swore to our father Abraham: **74** to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear **75** in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. **76** And you, my child,

will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, <sup>77</sup> to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven <sup>79</sup> to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” <sup>80</sup> And the child grew and became strong in spirit and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

**1:67-79** Zechariah praised God with his first words after months of silence. In a song that is often called the Benedictus after the first words in the Latin translation of this passage, Zechariah prophesied the coming of a Savior who would redeem his people and predicted that his son, John, would prepare the Messiah's way. All the Old Testament prophecies were coming true— no wonder Zechariah praised God! The Messiah would come in Zechariah's lifetime, and his son had been chosen to pave the way.

**1:72-73** This was God's promise to Abraham to bless all peoples through him (see Genesis 12: 3). It would be fulfilled through the Messiah, Abraham's descendant.

**1:76** Zechariah had just recalled hundreds of years of God's sovereign work in history, beginning with Abraham and going on into eternity. Then, in tender contrast, he personalized the story. His son had been chosen for a key role in the drama of the ages. Although God has unlimited power, he chooses to work through frail humans who begin as helpless babies. Don't minimize what God can do through those who are faithful to him.

**1:80** Why did John live out in the wilderness? Prophets used the isolation of the uninhabited wilderness to enhance their spiritual growth and to focus their message on God. By being in the wilderness, John remained separate from the economic and political powers so that he could aim his message against them. He also remained separate from the hypocritical religious leaders of his day. His message was different from theirs, and his life proved it.