

# The Heights Baptist Church

Christmas at Luke's \* We can be sure! \* Luke 1: 1-4 and John 5: 31-40 \* 11/7/2021

**MAIN POINT:** Luke researched and wrote an orderly account of the life of Christ, so that we "may have certainty concerning the things we have been taught" about Jesus.

## INTRODUCTION

“Where are you spending Christmas?” is a common question in the Holiday Season, and this season you can tell them, “At Luke’s.” At least if you are at The Heights you can tell them that. Starting November 7 . . . that’s right, three weeks before Thanksgiving we will begin a Christmas series. So often Christmas series, being tucked into a few Sundays in December are thematic and never look at the entire Christmas story. Well, this year we are going to walk verse by verse through the Christmas story as told by Luke in six messages. We are going to look at each part and why the Lord has it there for us to know. And I’ll give you a hint now, so “that you may have certainty.” It has been another challenging year as COVID-19 has lingered far beyond what we would have thought last Christmas. Our faith on many levels is being challenged in this world. How important this Christmas that we be certain about what we have been taught and we are faith-ready for 2022. So, join us as we head to Luke’s for Christmas.

**What Christmas tradition did you experience as a child, or currently take part in as an adult, that reinforces the Christmas story in your or your family’s life?**

## UNDERSTANDING

*Note to study leaders: Try to provide only a brief summary about the following introductory information prior to having the group read Luke 1: 1-4. The main intent of this study is to focus on Luke’s goal that we "may have certainty about the things taught" about Jesus.*

### 1. Introductory information:

Information about who Luke was.

- Luke was likely a Gentile Christian, perhaps led to Christ by Paul himself.
- He was a doctor, and a traveling companion of Paul (Colossians 4: 14).
- He wrote the books of Luke and Acts.

Information about to whom the book of Luke was written.

- Luke 1: 3 tells us Luke wrote his account of the life of Christ to a man named Theophilus.
- Theophilus means "Loved by God". Some think this is a pseudonym for Christians in general, but he was likely an actual person.
- Luke calls him "most excellent Theophilus", which is a title used for a person of standing. Paul used this title when addressing both Felix (Acts 23: 26) and Festus (Acts 26: 25), so Theophilus may have been a ranking Roman military or political official.

Information about when Luke was written.

- Luke describes obtaining his information from eyewitnesses.
- Luke traveled with Paul (Acts 21: 17), and Paul was in Jerusalem for about two years from AD 57-AD 59.
- It is likely Luke wrote the book of Luke prior to writing Acts (Acts 1: 1).
- Acts ends while Paul was under house arrest in Rome prior to the persecution that broke out in 64 AD under Nero.
- So, it is likely that Luke interviewed the eyewitnesses and wrote Luke between AD 57 and AD 60.

## **2. Have a volunteer read Luke 1: 1-4.**

**How did Luke come up with the information about the life of Christ that he used to write his book?**

He carefully investigated everything from the beginning. The information was handed down to him by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Based on the information recorded in Luke chapters 1 and 2, it is likely one of the eyewitnesses he interviewed was Jesus' human mother, Mary\*

**Why did he make the effort to write this book?**

"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of Jesus's life". Luke desired to write an orderly account, perhaps because it was becoming difficult to keep track of the "many" accounts, and separate reliable information from unreliable information. Also, so that we "may have certainty about the things taught" about Jesus.

1 Timothy 3: 16 tells us that all scripture is "God-breathed". 2 Peter 1: 20-21 tells us that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation, but rather they spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. God divinely breathed out the scriptures, sometimes through visions, sometimes through dreams, sometimes via angels, and here, through the research of a godly Christian.

The results of Luke's careful investigation, interview of eyewitnesses, and efforts to create an orderly account about the life of Christ can be seen in the details included in his book. Examples of this can be seen in Luke 1: 5-7; Luke 2: 1-3, and Luke 3: 1-2.

Other religions, such as those started by Buddha, Muhammed, and Joseph Smith, are based on the teachings of the founders. Christianity is different. It is based on much more than just the teachings of Jesus.

Think about how impossible it would be to get Christianity started if the detailed events about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ hadn't happened, with thousands of eyewitnesses still alive when Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written. Jesus' crucifixion occurred during Passover, in the city of Jerusalem. If this event had not actually happened, there is no way the imaginary story could have gotten off the ground.

## **3. Have a volunteer read John 5: 31-47.**

According to the Old Testament Law, the testimony of a single witness was not valid (Deut. 19: 15).

**What additional witnesses beyond just the teachings of Jesus are listed in John 5 that validate Jesus' testimony, demonstrating for us that we can know with certainty of the things we have been taught?**

- The testimony of John the Baptist (verses 33-35) (Matthew 3: 11; John 1: 36).
- Jesus' works (This includes his miracles, and his sinless life (verse 36) (John 8: 46).
- The Father (This may include his voice at Jesus' baptism, and based on the verses that follow, likely refers to the Scriptures) (verse 37) (Matt. 3: 17)
- The testimony of the Scriptures (verse 39) (Isaiah 35: 4-6, and many more).

The example of J. Warner Wallace.

J. Warner Wallace\*\* was a homicide detective who specialized in cold - cases. This often involved reviewing written testimonies from witnesses who were no longer available to be interviewed. He became an expert at looking for evidence of a witness lying, or other inconsistencies such as collusion between witnesses. His friends knew him as “an angry atheist, a skeptic who thoughtfully dissected Christians and the Christian worldview...”. One day he chose to take it upon himself to review the testimonies about the life of Christ in the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), since this fell within his area of expertise. His goal was to determine if the gospels were reliable “eyewitness accounts... or were they filled with untrustworthy supernatural absurdities?”

Here is how he described coming to his conclusion, one that led him to becoming a Christian. “I was lying in bed, staring at the ceiling. ‘I think it may be true,’ I said to my wife. ‘What may be true?’ she asked. ‘Christianity.... The more I look at the Gospels, the more I think they look like real eyewitness accounts.... And the writers seem to have believed what they were writing about.’”

\*See the commentary from Wordpress.com in the Commentary section below.

\*\*J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado Springs, CO, David C Cook, 2013) pages 18, 20, and 157

## APPLICATION

**Why, despite all these extremely credible witnesses, did the religious leaders choose to reject Jesus?**

- They didn't have the love of God in their hearts (verse 42).
- They preferred praise from people over praise from God (verse 44).
- They didn't believe Moses, who wrote about the messiah (verses 45-47).

**How can I apply these issues to my life during this Christmas season?**

## PRAYER

God we are grateful for the fact that you sent Jesus to live a perfect life and then to die in my place, rise from the dead, and ascend to heaven. And we thank you that you sent us your Holy Spirit and provided us with written testimony in your Word about the life of Christ. Thank you that we don't have a blind faith, but rather a reasonable faith about which we can believe with certainty. We pray that during this Christmas season, we would focus on Jesus!

## COMMENTARY

Luke 1: 1-4

The Greek word for "fulfilled" ("plerophoreo") in Luke 1: 1 can be translated several ways.

- "the things that have been fulfilled among us" NIV
- "the things that are most surely believed among us" KJV
- "the things that have been accomplished among us" ESV

Bible dictionaries define "plerophoreo" as follows:

- To make full
- To carry through to the end
- To be persuaded

"Why St. Luke wrote this gospel. It is certain that he was moved by the Holy Ghost, not only to the writing, but in the writing of it; but in both he was moved as a reasonable creature, and not as a mere machine; and he was made to consider, 1. That the things he wrote of were things that were most surely believed among all Christians, and therefore things which they ought to be instructed in, that they may know what they believe, and things which ought to be transmitted to posterity (who are as much concerned in them as we are); and, in order to that, to be committed to writing, which is the surest way of conveyance to the ages to come. He will not write about things of doubtful disputation, things about which Christians may safely differ from one another and hesitate within themselves; but the things which are, and ought to be, most surely believed..." Matthew Henry's Commentary on Luke

"It appears from the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apostolic Epistles, that the earliest preaching of the Gospel consisted of a brief summary of the facts of our Lord's earthly history, with a few words of pointed application to the parties addressed. Of these astonishing facts, notes would naturally be taken and digests put into circulation. It is to such that Luke here refers; and in terms of studied respect, as narratives of what was "believed surely," or "on sure grounds" among Christians, and drawn up from the testimony of "eye-witnesses and ministering servants of the word." Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary on Luke

"Great and remarkable characters have always many biographers. So it appears it was with our Lord: but as most of these accounts were inaccurate, recording as *facts* things which had not happened; and through *ignorance* or *design mistaking* others, especially in the *place* where St. Luke wrote; it seemed good to the Holy Spirit to inspire this holy man with the most correct knowledge of the whole history of our Lord's birth, preaching, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension, that the sincere, upright followers of God might have a sure foundation, on which they might safely build their faith." Adam Clark's Commentary on Luke

"Facts confirmed by the fullest evidence.... Every thing that had been done or said by Jesus Christ was so *public*, so *plain*, and so *accredited* by thousands of witnesses, who could have had

no interest in supporting an imposture, as to carry the *fullest conviction*, to the hearts of those who heard and saw him, of the *divinity* of his *doctrine*, and the *truth* of his *miracles*.” Adam Clark’s Commentary on Luke

“When it comes to his gospel Luke undoubtedly borrowed a good deal from Mark (whom tradition asserts wrote for Peter), and possibly Matthew. Early events surrounding the birth of John and Jesus which are not recorded by either of these writers was probably received from Mary (Luke 2:51b), while the early history of the church in Jerusalem probably came from Philip, Cornelius, and other Judean saints whom Luke contacted during his extended stay in Caesarea during the time of Paul’s imprisonment.” *Where did Luke get the information for his Writings?* Wordpress.com, March 4, 2012.

John 5: 31-47

Verses 33-36. “Observe, Though the witness of John was a less cogent and less considerable witness, yet our Lord was pleased to make use of it. We must be glad of all the supports that offer themselves for the confirmation of our faith, though they may not amount to a demonstration, and we must not invalidate any, under pretense that there are others more conclusive; we have occasion for them all. Now this greater testimony was that of the works which his Father had given him to finish. That is, (1.) In general the whole course of his life and ministry— his revealing God and his will to us, setting up his kingdom among men, reforming the world, destroying Satan’s kingdom, restoring fallen man to his primitive purity and felicity, and shedding abroad in men’s hearts the love of God and of one another—all that work of which he said when he died, It is finished, it was all, from first to last, opus Deo dignum—a work worthy of God; all he said and did was holy and heavenly, and a divine purity, power, and grace shone in it, proving abundantly that he was sent of God. (2.) In particular. The miracles he wrought for the proof of his divine mission witnessed of him. Now it is here said, [1.] That these works were given him by the Father, that is, he was both appointed and empowered to work them; for, as Mediator, he derived both commission and strength from his Father.” Matthew Henry’s Commentary on John

Verses 36-39. Jesus’ miraculous works harmonize perfectly with the Scriptures that testify about him. See Isaiah 35: 5-6.

“Verse 38. ***Ye have not his word abiding in you*** — Though ye believe the Scriptures to be of God, yet ye do not let them take hold of your hearts-his word is in your mouth, but not in your mind. What a miserable lot! to read the Scriptures as the true sayings of God, and yet to get no salvation from them! *Thy word*, says David, (Psalm 119: 11) *have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee*. This, these Jews had not done. Reader, hast *thou*?” Adam Clark’s Commentary on John

Verse 44. “If I understand this correctly, Christ taught here the alarming doctrine that the desire for honor among men made belief impossible.” A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*