



l uke's introduction to his gospel

luke 1.<sup>5</sup>-2.<sup>52</sup>

part 3

l eap for joy

luke 1.<sup>39-45</sup>

## i n t r o d u c t i o n

---

We have previously suggested that Luke 1 and 2—composed of 8 narratives, each containing an oracle—constitute a kind of introduction to Luke's Gospel. We have previously examined the first two narratives—1.<sup>5-25</sup> and 1.<sup>26-38</sup>. In these, we found that Luke introduces us to the subject and intent of his work through the individuals we meet, the life experiences they have, and the inspired utterances they speak or hear.

Through these individuals, their experiences, and the inspired utterances, Luke informs us that God, having made promises, is about to fulfill those promises. Among these divine promises ready for fulfillment, God is inaugurating a wondrous dispensation of mercy, particularly toward those who are lowly, spiritually barren in so many ways. He is inaugurating an unparalleled bestowal of the Holy Spirit. He is bringing about a much-needed deliverance from all enemies. The fulfillment of these promises is made possible by the arrival of a victory-bearing Savior, who will be both Son of David and, more importantly, Son of God. Such fulfilled promises and direct actions of God will bring about a unity, a connectedness, an at-one-ment between men and their God, and between man and man that will make a whole new life and whole new existence possible. Finally, the fulfillment of these promises will inaugurate the Kingdom of God.

As we turn to the third of our eight narratives, we accompany Mary, whom we met in the second narrative, as she visits Elisabeth, whom we met in the first narrative. As we watch their interaction and listen to their words, we will want to look for any further elaboration on the Lucian themes that we have already encountered. In addition, we will want to see if Luke adds any new themes that we will want to be attentive to as we read the remainder of his work.

### filled with the holy spirit

In Luke's first narrative (1.<sup>5-25</sup>), we were informed that John would "be filled with the Holy Ghost" while in his mother's womb. In this narrative, we see that promise fulfilled:

"The babe [John] leaped in her [Elisabeth's] womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost."

We should understand the babe's leaping as a sign that he has been enlivened by the Holy Spirit and that he recognizes the presence of Jesus, the Christ. We should also see in his leaping his very first testimony of the Son of God, born to his faithful mother. Now, this reception of the Holy Spirit *in utero* is pretty unusual. This act of testifying from the womb is extraordinary. So, we could easily become focused on John the Baptist and his greatness. However, it seems that John would not be pleased to find our attention so focused.

The Gospel of John tells us that "the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him [the Baptist], 'Who art thou?'" His answer is a bit curious: "I am not the Christ."<sup>1</sup> They hadn't asked him who he wasn't! What would someone think if I, upon entering a room and being asked my name (it is Scott, by the way), answered, "I am not Herman!" Such an answer would draw the listeners mind as much to Herman as Scott. "Who the heck is Herman, and what does he have to do with you?"

Clever man, the Baptist, for it seems that this is the very purpose of John's rather odd answer

---

<sup>1</sup> John 1.<sup>19-20</sup>

to the question. He hopes to deflect his inquirers' thoughts away from himself and toward another—the Christ. It is as if he is saying, “Don't worry yourselves about me! I am not the point. Think on another. Think upon Messiah.”

Before reporting the Baptist's clever repartee, Saint John had already introduced his readers to the Baptist:

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. *He was not that Light*, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.”<sup>2</sup>

The Baptist's “I am not the Christ” takes on added significance when it is combined with Saint John's seemingly unnecessary “he was not that Light.” The significance of both of these “deflections” grows when we read, again in John, the thrice repeated testimony that there is another who is “preferred” to John.<sup>3</sup> One wonders, is the text trying to correct some misdirection? Perhaps. It is so easy to forget that “his [God's] name alone is excellent.”<sup>4</sup>

In the midst of these deflections away from John and toward Jesus, we find this.

“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

Now, I don't know which is the greater, Moses or John. They are both pretty impressive. But, both pale in comparison to the Son of God. Moses, representative of all prophets, gives law. Prophets inform us as to what we should and shouldn't do. This is part of the prophetic ministry. We appreciate their service very much. But this is the limit of their capacities. They cannot bestow grace, not upon a single, solitary soul. Nor can they act with the truth or the faithfulness or the steadiness that Jesus possesses. Prophets are *messengers*, not *the message*. To confuse this is to turn them into the substance of an idol. The Jews were known for such substitutions and diversions. Such substitutions and diversions are not strangers to modern

---

<sup>2</sup> John 1.<sup>6-8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John 1.<sup>15, 27, 30</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 148.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>5</sup> John 1.<sup>17</sup>

religion.

I remember years ago being present in the BYU Marriott center as President Kimball entered. We all stood and sang “We Thank Thee, Oh God, for a Prophet.” I don’t know about anyone else, but as I sang it with tears in my eyes, I was singing an “Anthem to the Prophet.” It was only many years later that I realized that this entire hymn was an “Anthem to God;” that the hymn was careful to proclaim that every blessing named and every wonder proclaimed had as their source, not the prophet of God, by God Himself. The hymn really isn’t about a prophet at all! The prophet, in fact, is the object of a prepositional phrase. The hymn is about God.

So, if, when we read of John the Baptist’s having experienced the Holy Spirit while in the womb, we are not to become infatuated with him, what are we to learn and feel? “The babe leaped” and the woman “was filled with the Holy Ghost” with “the salutation of Mary.” It came with the presence of “the mother of my Lord.” In other words, it was Jesus, even though still *in utero*, himself, who was responsible for this unparalleled event. It was his presence that brought about this extraordinary bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

We have, elsewhere, quoted a portion of John the Baptist’s testimony concerning Jesus,

“I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose...”<sup>6</sup>

Now, let us point out that the passage goes on to explain at least one reason that the second is mightier than the first: “he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” Jesus’ baptism is superior to that of the Baptist’s. The writer of the Gospel of John adds to the Baptist’s testimony as it relates to Jesus’ role in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. The Baptist informed his disciples that he has seen “the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove” upon Jesus, and that “it abode upon him.” He then informs them that this sign has great significance.

---

<sup>6</sup> Luke 3.<sup>16</sup>

“He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, ‘Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.’ And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.”<sup>7</sup>

“John the Baptist” is really “John the *Water* Baptist.” But Jesus is the superior “Spirit Baptist.” Whenever one receives the Spirit, it is the result of their having been baptized by Jesus. He it is who sends the Holy Spirit. A human agent is sufficient for a water baptism, but it requires a divine agent to bring about Spirit baptism.

Let us here remark, too, on how very appropriate the symbolism is. We see the Savior, while still *in utero*, bestowing the Holy Spirit upon John, *in utero*. Both water and Spirit baptism are in similitude of natural birth. Just as we come from the watery womb at birth and have our spirit enter permanently into our bodies, so too, at baptism we enter the watery womb, and, upon coming forth, have our lives taken possession of by a new spirit—the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Holiness. We are born again.

### **t**he third oracle

---

Our first two oracles were uttered by an angel. But humans, too, can be inspired, and utter incredible words. So, our 3<sup>rd</sup> oracle is pronounced by Elisabeth.

Just as we might have become focused on the Baptist, we might here be tempted to focus on Mary. To be sure, “good things will be spoken of her.” Luke and the other Gospel writers would be pleased to have us know that Mary was pious and faithful. But none of them go into any details concerning her piety or faithfulness. Rather, they portray her as being somewhat out of her depth when it comes to the meaning of God’s unparalleled activities. While it is true that one could read Mary’s earlier, “be it unto me according to thy word,” as faithful submission to God’s will, this passive voice and all that follows leads us to believe that Mary was often more passive-and-mystified-observer than active doer in all that happens with and around her.

---

<sup>7</sup> John 1.<sup>32-34</sup>

When Simeon utters his blessing upon the babe, Jesus, Mary, with her husband, can only “marvel.” Upon finding her son in the temple and hearing his inspired statement of purpose, along with his gentle rebuke, “How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” Mary “understood not the saying which he spake.”<sup>8</sup> “When, at the marriage in Cana, his mother demonstrates a continuing lack of understanding about her son, his rebuke is no less gentle, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?”<sup>9</sup>

The fact is, whatever her level of piety, the world would never have known Mary if not for the child she bore. Many in Israel, including Mary, would “rise or fall”<sup>10</sup> because of the son she bore. We do not, in all of this, demean Mary. All of us “rise or fall” depending upon our acceptance and following of the Son of God. We are, all of us, out of depths as we seek to understand him who is not only the “fruit of [Mary’s] womb,” but is the Greatest of all.

The Israelites lived, survived on manna for forty years. Fourteen thousand and 600 days, that’s 1460 days that they lived without having one single solitary day of understanding concerning that blessed life-giving manna; that “which [they] knewest not.”<sup>11</sup> I have no doubt that the same will be written of us in eternities when it comes to our understanding and appreciation of the Savior and the redemption he bestows so willingly, so universally.

the babe leaped for joy

---

Gabriel promised Zacharias “joy and gladness” through the birth of John. He announced further that “*many* shall rejoice at his birth.” Now, as Mary visits Elisabeth, the babe that will be such a source of joy leaps, himself, for joy at the presence of another babe who is an even greater source of joy. This growing circle of joy will expand well beyond this nuclear family and friends. Soon, another angel will announce to simple shepherds, “Fear not: for, behold, I

---

<sup>8</sup> Luke 2.<sup>49-50</sup>

<sup>9</sup> John 2.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Luke 2.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See Deuteronomy 8.<sup>3 & 16</sup>

bring you good tidings of great joy, *which shall be to all people.*<sup>12</sup> This joy flows from the unparalleled grace bestowed by the Son of God. But, even this expansive joy, “which shall be to all people,” is too little. Because of the Son of God and the effects of his grace, “*joy shall be in heaven .*”<sup>13</sup>

As I think and ponder on this, my mind is taken to another angel who delivers a similar message with the hope that it will have a similar joyful effect. This un-named angel wakes the sleeping King Benjamin and declares, “I am come to declare unto you the glad tidings of great joy.”<sup>14</sup> But these glad tidings are not to remain private. “The Lord... hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy.”<sup>15</sup> The angel’s ardent desires do not go unfulfilled. “The Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy.”<sup>16</sup>

We call to mind another angel. This one visited the rebellious Alma the younger. While his message may not seem to contain the element of “glad tidings,” it caused the young Alma to reflect upon the words his father had spoken “concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.”<sup>17</sup> It was this angelic induced reflection that brought young Alma to cry out, “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me.”<sup>18</sup> And it was this act of faithful repentance that allowed Alma to experience and declare: “Oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! Yea, I say unto you.... there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.”<sup>19</sup>

“Happiness,” said the prophet Joseph Smith, “is the object and design of our existence.”<sup>20</sup>  
The Savior is our gateway into this happiness.

---

<sup>12</sup> Luke 2.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Luke 15.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Mosiah 3.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Mosiah 3.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Mosiah 4:3

<sup>17</sup> Alma 36:17

<sup>18</sup> Alma 36:18

<sup>19</sup> Alma 36:20 and 21

<sup>20</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 255.

## Conclusion

---

This introductory narrative adds to our understanding of Luke's overall message and what it means. Just as the child in Mary's womb miraculously bestows the Spirit and produces unheard of joy in John and his mother by his presence, so he will, in the course of Luke's work have a similar effect upon many of those to whom he ministers. And, of course, his presence in our lives bears the same Spirit and the same joy into our souls. "Wherefore, says Lehi to his son, Jacob, "thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh; for the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever."<sup>21</sup> Though we sing these words at Christmas, they are appropriate to every one of the 365 days a year. Indeed they are appropriate to every minute of our eternal existence.

"Oh, Come, all ye faithful... Joyful and triumphant.  
Come and behold him... Born the king of angels.  
Oh, Come let us adore him... Christ the Lord."<sup>22</sup>

Little wonder, then, that it requires a choir of "ten thousand times ten thousands and thousands of thousands;" indeed, a choir constituting "every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth" to adequately glorify Father and Son. One suspects that, even still, one has not heard a thousandth part of the Divine greatness.

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power,  
and riches, and wisdom, and strength,  
and honour, and glory, and blessing."

"Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,  
be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,  
and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> 2 Nephi 2:4

<sup>22</sup> "Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful," LDS Hymnal, #202.

<sup>23</sup> Revelation 5.<sup>11-13</sup>



Even so, come, Lord Jesus!