Luke's Infancy Narrative

Chapter 1

The Gospel of Luke

- Written before 66 AD? Maybe around 70-80 AD?
- Luke, follower of Paul; only Gentile author in the NT
- Largely Gentile audience
- Masterful command of the Greek language; probably his native tounge

Themes in the Infancy Narrative

- The Superiority of Jesus over John
- God's Reversal of Normal Expectations
- Prophecy/ Fulfillment
- Mary: Full of Grace and Ark of the New Covenant
- The Response to God's Promises
- Relation of OT to NT

Luke Chapter 1

- Dedication to Theophilus
- **Birth of JBap foretold**
- **Annunciation**
- Visitation/Magnificat
- Birth of JBap/Benedictus

Dedication to Theophilus

- Could have been Luke's patron ($) in writing, so the Gospel was meant for a wider audience
- "many have undertaken to compile…"
- "accomplished among us"
- "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word"
- "followed all things closely"
- "orderly account"

Verse 5

- “Herod” – the same Herod the great we encountered in Mt. Luke situations the narrative within history
- Zechariah – ““Yahweh has remembered”
- “division of Abijah” – one of 24 divisions of priests (1 Chron 24:7-19)
- “daughters of Aaron” – also from a priestly family
- Elizabeth – “God of the oath”

Verses 6-7

- Righteous before God…but barren – The couple is pictured as faithful to the mosaic law. They are immersed in the world of the OT and serve as a bridge to the New.
- Here, barrenness is shown not to be a curse for sin. Like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah – Elizabeth is barren until blessed by God.
- So John's birth is in line with those like Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Samuel.

Zachariah and Elizabeth

- St. Bede said that these two represent the priesthood and law of the OT. Both were good, but were unable to bear children for God or bring forth the grace found in Jesus Christ.
- The couple thus signifies the aging Old Covenant awaiting the blessings of the New.

Verse 8-10

- “While he was serving as priest…” – probably a once in a lifetime happening for each priest.
- “Hour of incense” – Priests burned incense 2x daily in the Temple, morning and evening (Ex 30:7-8). This was done in the Holy Place, not the Holy of Holies. He would then emerge to bless the people.

Verse 13

- “Do not be afraid” – reminiscent of other OT encounters with Angels (Abram in Gen 15:1; Daniel in Daniel 10:12)

Verse 15

- “No wine…” – The vows of a Nazarite (See Samson as another example)
- “When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazarite, to separate himself for the Lord, he shall separate himself from wine ad strong drink…no razor shall come upon his head…he shall not go near a dead body” (Num 6:2-6).

Verse 15

- “He shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb”
- “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5)

Verse 17

- “Spirit and power of Elijah”
- “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6)
- “..but I tell you that Elijah has aready come and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they please” (Matthew 17:12).

Verse 19 - Gabriel

- “God is mighty”
- One of seven angels that ministers “in the presence of God.” See Tobit 12:15 and Revelation 8:2)
- In the OT, Gabriel interprets visions (Dan 8:15-16) and explains to Daniel events that will accompany the Messiah’s coming (Daniel 9:21-27).

Verse 25

- “…to take away my reproach among men.”
- “God has taken away my reproach” (Genesis 30:23 – Rachel who gives birth to Joseph).

Verse 28

- “Hail” – or “rejoice!” The call to rejoice echoes OT passages that address Daughter Zion.
- Some prophets refer to Mother Jerusalem, whose faithful children will rejoice in the messianic age because God has Chosen to dwell in their midst.
- Mary is greeted similarly because she is the embodiment of the faithful Israel and the most privileged recipient of God’s blessings.
- For instance Zach 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, you king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass.”

Verse 28 – "Full of Grace" or "Highly Favored One?"

- Translates the Greek perfect passive participle *kecharitomene*.
- Perfect passive participles usually translated in English like "*Having seen the dog,* I didn't open the door."
- It's a verb (like "to bake," used as an adjective like "*baked bread,"* but something done **to** the subject in the past: "The bread, having been baked."

Full of grace

- In Greek, it also has the connotation of something that occurred in the past that has continuing effects in the present.
- Here, the verb is from *charitoo* whose root is the noun *charis* = grace
- “Full of grace” (Latin *gratiae plena)* follows St. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation of the NT.
- But the most accurate translation to render Luke’s Greek is probably “Rejoice, you who have been graced in the past and who continue to be graced!”

Full of Grace

- So Mary's favor before God is not a *result* of the angel's visit or her conception of Christ, but a favor she had already had with God.
- This does not *prove* the Immaculate Conception of Mary, but is fully consistent with the Church's teaching about Mary's unique reception of God's grace.

Verse 33

- “the house of Jacob” – the kingdom of Israel
- 8th cen. BC northern tribes were scattered among the Gentiles and 6th cen. BC the southern tribes were exiled by the Babylonians.
- The prophets lamented this disintegration of God’s people and announced a coming Davidic Messiah that would reunite the 12 tribes (significance of 12 apostles?). Cf. Is 11:12; Ezek 37:15-14; **Hos 1:10-11**; Amos 9:9-12.

Verse 34

- “How can this be since I have no husband?” – literally “I do not know man”
- This refers to Mary’s virginal status, not her marital status.
- Certain Church fathers like St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine taught that Mary had previously taken a vow of lifelong virginity.

Verse 35

- “Overshadow” – the same as the Greek version of Ex. 40:35 to describe how Yahweh “overshadowed” the Tabernacle, making his dwelling place in Israel.
- This is the first hint of Mary has the Ark of the New Covenant. More to come!

The Visitation; verse 41

- “leaped in her womb” – parallels Rebekah’s experience in Gen 25:22-23.
- Both Luke and Genesis use the same Greek word (*skirtao)* to describe the infants’ movement in the womb.
- For Rebekah, this was a sign that Jacob would hold preeminence over his older brother Esau.
- Jesus would hold a place of preeminence over his older relative John.

Jesus and John

- There are so many parallels in these births, our attention should be drawn to their differences.
- John will be great before the Lord (15), but Jesus will be great and Son of the Most High (32).
- John will prepare a people (17), Jesus will rule the people (33).
- John's role is temporary (17), Jesus' kingdom will have no end (33).
- John will be a prophet (15), Jesus is Son of God (35).
- John will be filled with the Holy Spirit as a prophet (15), Jesus will be "the Holy one" by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (35).

Verse 42

- Elizabeth “Exclaimed…”
- This precise verb is found only here in the NT.
- Only five times in the Greek OT.
- Every time it is used in the OT, it is part of a story of surrounding the Ark of the Covenant, usually the exulting of Levitical musicians playing before the Ark in procession.
- Another hint that Mary is the New Ark of the Covenant (More in a bit….)

Verse 42

- “Blessed are you…” – Elizabeth blesses Mary with these words once addressed to Jael (Judg 5:24-27) and Judith (Jud 13:18)
- Both these women assassinated the opposing military commanders with a mortal blow to the head.
- Gen 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”
- Some translations from the Greek OT read “**she shall crush thy head.”**
- Think of statues of Mary with her foot on the head of the serpent!

Verse 43

- “mother of my Lord”
- In the immediate contexts, “Lord” always refers to God.
- In 431, the Council of Ephesus declared the first of the Church’s Marian Dogmas: Mary is truly Mother of God (*theotokos).*

Verses 46-55 – The Magnificat

- Mars song of thanks and praise follows closely Hannah's song in 1 Sam 2:1-10 when Hannah was found to be pregnant with Samuel.
- Mary extols humility,
- Rejoices in God's blessing upon the poor and lowly,
- Introduces the theme of mercy

Mary: Ark of the New Covenant

- The Ark was made of acacia wood covered with gold. Within the Ark was placed a golden jar holding the manna, Aaron's rod which budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant (Heb 9:14).
- The Ark was covered with the mercy seat and with two golden images of the magnificent cherubim who dwell in heaven (Ex 25:10-22).

The Ark

- After Moses died, Joshua led the people into the Promised Land. Joshua established the Ark in Shiloh where it stayed for over two hundred years. Later the Israelites were fighting the Philistines and removed the Ark from the temple and carried it into battle. The Philistines stole the Ark. Eventually, they sent it back to Israel (1 Sam 5:1—6:12).
- The Ark had arrived in the hill country of Judea and David arose and went to retrieve it and bring it to Jerusalem.
- Read 1 Sam 6:1-12

Mary the Ark as Revealed in Mary's Visit to Elizabeth	
Golden Box: Ark of the Old Covenant	**Mary: Ark of the New Covenant**
Traveled to House of Obed-Edom in the hill country of Judea (2 Sam 6:1-11)	Traveled to house of Elizabeth and Zechariah in the hill country of Judea (Lk 1:39)
Dressed as a priest, David danced and leapt in front of the Ark (2 Sam 6:14)	John the Baptist of priestly lineage leapt in his mother's womb at the approach of Mary (Lk 1:41)

David asks “Who am I that the Ark of my Lord should come to me?” (2 Sam 6:9)	Elizabeth asks “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43)
David was shouting in the presence of the Ark (2 Sam 6:15)	Elizabeth “cried out” in the presence of the Mary (Lk 1:42)
The Ark remained in the house of Obed-edom for three months (2 Sam 6:11)	Mary remained in the house of Elizabeth for three months (Lk 1:56)

The house of Obed-edom was blessed by the presence of the Ark (2 Sam 6:11)	The word “blessed” used three times and surely the house was blessed by God (Lk 1:39-45)
The Ark returns to its home and ends up in Jerusalem where God’s presence and glory is revealed in the Temple (2 Sam 6:12; 1 Ki 8:9-11)	Mary returns home and eventually ends up in Jerusalem where she presents God enfleshed in the Temple (Lk 1:56; 2:21-22)

Mary as the Ark Revealed by the Items inside the Ark

Inside Ark of the Old Covenant	Inside Mary, Ark of the New Covenant
The stone tablets of the Law—the word of God inscribed on stone	The body of Jesus Christ—the word of God in the flesh.
The urn filled with manna from the wilderness—the miraculous bread come down from heaven.	The womb containing Jesus, the bread of life come down from heaven (Jn 6:41)
The rod of Aaron which budded to prove and defend the true High Priest	The actual and eternal High Priest

So what?

- God was very careful about every detail of the Ark (Ex 25-30). God wanted a place to dwell (Ex 25:8). God made it very clear that the word of God inscribed on stone should be housed in a perfect container covered with pure gold within and without.
- How much *more* would God prepare a very special woman to carry his holy and only begotten Son. Soon the Word of God in flesh would take

Verses 68-70 – The Benedictus

- Song of praise for God's faithfulness and all he has done in salvation history.
- The climax of God's plan is Jesus who's coming fulfills God's oaths to
  1. Establish David's throne forever and
  2. Bless all nations through Abraham's descendants
- The Benedictus teaches that true liberation is not political, but from the domination of sin

Verse 68

- “Blessed be…” – follows the pattern of a Jewish blessing prayer (*berakah*)
- An initial statement of praise is followed by the reasons for the praise.
- Where is there a *berakahi* in our mass…?

Verse 69 and 73

- Literally “raised a horn for our salvation”
- Horn means here a symbol of power like a scepter like in the Greek version of Psalm 17:3
- “oath to Abraham” – covenant appealed to is not through Moses, but through Abraham through the covenant flows. Makes Gentile Christians “seeds of Abraham.”

Verse 78

- “Dawning from on high” – tough to translate a dense poetic phrase.
- From on high = from God
- Dawn has three occurrences in Greek OT and always has connotations of the coming Messiah.

Verse 79

- “Those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death”
- Almost straight from Greek version of Psalm 106:10, 14.
- A thanksgiving psalm extolling the reversal worked by God.