



Approaching Luke's Gospel

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Luke – Acts: A single literary enterprise.

The Gospel of Luke is the first volume of the single two-volume writing that is Luke – Acts. Whilst the two volumes are separated in the New Testament canon, virtually all contemporary scholars agree think that the Gospel and Acts of the Apostles were conceived and executed as a single literary enterprise which they have come to call Luke –Acts.

Each volume is introduced by a prologue directed to the same reader, Theophilus, who is obviously a Christian and quite possibly the patron of the composition. The name 'Theophilus' literally means 'lover of God' and so it can also be interpreted as being written for all believers. In addition to the prologues, the volumes are joined by stylistic, structural and thematic elements which demonstrate convincingly that the same literary imagination was at work in both. Luke presents Jesus' story as a prophetic model for the activities of the early church. Accordingly, the author introduces themes and incidents into the Gospel that later characterize Acts' picture of the church's relationship with Rome. The author emphasizes specific parallels between Jesus' dual trials— before the Sanhedrin and before a Roman governor— and similar trials in Acts, where Paul is hauled before both priestly and Roman courts (cf. Luke 22:66 –23:25; Acts 22:25–23:19). Thus, Luke is the only Gospel writer to include in his Passion story an episode in which Jesus appears before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6 –12) - an incident that parallels and foreshadows Paul's similar hearing before another member of the Herodian dynasty, Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:13–26:32). Just as the Roman magistrates before whom Paul appears declare him guiltless of any crime against the government in Acts (Acts 25:25; 26:30–32), so Pilate exonerates Jesus from the political charge of sedition (Luke 23:13–15, 22) in Luke's gospel. Luke even changes Mark's report of the centurion's speech at the cross: instead of declaring that Jesus is truly the Son of God, in Luke he simply states that Jesus is "innocent" (cf. Mark 15:39; Matt. 27:54; Luke 23:47).

Luke-Acts must therefore be read as a *single* story. Acts not only continues the story of the Gospel but it provides Luke's own authoritative commentary on the first volume. Any discussion of Luke's purposes, or the development of his themes, must take into account his entire two volume work.

Luke: A Global Vision of History in three acts.

Luke's two-volume work places Jesus' life and ministry at the center of his vision of history, his life forming the connecting link between Israel's biblical past and the future age of a multinational Gentile church. Accordingly, Luke views John the Baptist, whose birth story he interweaves with that of Jesus, as both the last of Israel's prophets and the forerunner of the Messiah. By making Jesus' life the central act of a three-part drama that begins with Israel and continues with the Christian church, Luke offers a philosophy of history that is important to Christianity's later understanding of its mission. Instead of an apocalyptic end, Jesus' ministry represents a new beginning that establishes a heightened awareness of God's intentions for humanity. In both the Gospel and in Acts Luke ties Jesus' resurrection inextricably to the disciples' mission of evangelizing the world (24:44 –53; Acts 1:1– 8). He creatively modifies early Christianity's initial emphasis on eschatological expectations of Jesus' return to focus on the future work of the church. Acts thus portrays the disciples entering a new historical epoch, the age of the church that continues indefinitely into the future. Acts concludes not by drawing attention to the Parousia - the second coming of Christ, but rather by expressing Paul's resolve to concentrate on ministering to the Gentiles (28:27–28). For Luke, the mission of the Church is set to continue.

The Author : Who is Luke?

The prologue (Luke 1:1-4) makes it clear that the evangelist was not himself an eyewitness to the events he describes but instead relies on those who were with Jesus from the beginning. At several points in Acts (16:11-16; 20:5-16; 21:1-17; 27:1-28:16) the writer uses 'we' language, suggesting that accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys and, from the second century onwards, many commentators identified him as the 'Luke' identified in several Pauline letters, as the 'beloved physician in Col. 4:14; one of Paul's 'fellow workers' in Philemon 24; 2; and as Paul's 'faithful friend' in Tim. 4:11. Although some scholars accept the author's traditional identification as Paul's travel companion, a great many modern scholars question whether this is in fact so. The writer seems unaware of Paul's letters and never refers to his writing. Although Paul dominates the second half of Acts, Luke only twice

refers to him as an apostle, a title for which the historical Paul vigorously fought. Even though the author's identity is not conclusively settled, for convenience we refer to him as Luke.

There are however a number of points on which scholars generally agree concerning the writer whom we refer to as Luke:

- He is a Christian but was not an eyewitness to Jesus' earthly ministry and relies upon the tradition which has been carefully handed on to him.
- Because of his interest in the Gentile mission and his fluency in the Greek language (he has the largest vocabulary and most polished style of any Evangelist) and his use of Hellenistic rhetorical conventions, the writer is thought to have been a Gentile, the only non-Jewish writer of the Bible.
- The dense scriptural allusions and structure of the narrative manifest a wide knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. This suggests that the writer may have been a 'God fearer' (a Gentile associate member of a Jewish synagogue) who, perhaps under Paul's influence, came to believe in Jesus as the fulfilment of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- He almost certainly lived outside of Palestine, as evident in his imprecise knowledge about its geography (Luke 17:11).
- Above all else, he is a gifted storyteller who skilfully weaves together elements of the Jesus tradition into a coherent narrative of his life and ministry and the subsequent mission of the Church to continue his saving work.

Date of Composition

According to most scholars, Luke-Acts was written after 70 CE, when Titus demolished Jerusalem. Luke appears to have detailed knowledge of the Roman siege of Jerusalem (21:20 –24), that accords with contemporary sources that describe the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke-Acts apparently was composed at some point after the Jewish wars of 66–73 CE and before about 90–95 CE, when Paul's letters were first collected and published. Many scholars place the Gospel and its sequel in the mid-to-late 80s and favor Ephesus, a Hellenistic city in Asia Minor with a relatively large Christian population, as a likely place of composition.

Luke's audience

- The gospel is written for believers "*so that they may know the truth concerning the things about which they have been instructed*" (Luke 1:4) . The gospel is neither objective history nor detached reporting: it is an intentional document written by a believer for believers in order to strengthen their

- faith.
- By the time of its composition, we know that the Church is quickly becoming more Greek than Jewish in composition.
 - The early Christian communities had suffered under the first great persecution by Nero (64-66 C.E.) and even though the persecution had subsided by the time the gospel is written, Christianity remained an illegal religion. Both Jews and Christians began to be subject to persecution again in the reign of Domitian 81-96 C.E. and were anxious in this period to show the empire that they were no grounds for being suspicious of them or their intentions. This may account for the generally favourable characterisation of Roman characters in the gospel
 - The audience is obviously Greek speaking rather than Aramaic – notice how Luke explains the meaning of Aramaic terms for his readers.
 - By the time the Gospel is written, the early community is no longer consists predominantly of poor peasants in Palestine (as in the time of Jesus) but is made up largely of urban dwellers in the cities of the Roman Empire.

Luke: A master of story telling.

Luke the evangelist is by any measure a gifted storyteller. His composition is filled with short, sharply defined, vignettes. Each of these summons the reader into a rich imaginative world. Only in Luke's gospel do we find the parable of the rich fool (12:16-21), of Lazarus and Dives (16:19-31), the good Samaritan (10:25-37), and perhaps most memorably, the lost son (15:11-32). All of these parables are placed on the lips of Jesus, but much of the shaping may be due to Luke himself. Each of them stands as a small masterpiece of creative narration. Yet Luke is more than a collection of wonderful vignettes. He forges these stories into a single narrative and in the short space of the 52 chapters of Luke-Acts communicates an impressive sense of historical movement. Luke's original contribution to Christian literature was precisely this: to connect the events of the early Church to those of Jesus' ministry, and to the whole story of God's people, indeed all humanity, all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:38).

Luke states from the outset that he wishes to write an '*ordered account*' (1:3) of the traditions he has received. It appears therefore that the development of plot is an important dimension of the narrative and so we must seek Luke's meaning through the movement of the story. When reading Luke it is important to pay attention to where something occurs in the overall narrative.

The connections between individual vignettes are as important as their respective contents. The sequence itself communicates meaning.

The Prologue to the Gospel: The evangelist sets out his stall.

Luke is the only Gospel author to introduce his work with a formal statement of purpose. In this preface (1:1–4), he briefly refers to the methods used compiling his Gospel and addresses it to Theophilus, the same person to whom he dedicates the Book of Acts (Acts 1:1). Mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament, Theophilus, whose name means “lover of God,” may have been a Greek or Roman official, perhaps a well-to-do patron who underwrote the expenses publishing Luke’s work or may simply be representative of believers in general.

Luke states that he wishes to write “an ordered account” supplying readers with “accurate knowledge.” Luke’s use of the term translated as “connected narrative” or “ordered account” may not refer to an attempt create a chronologically accurate biography, for Luke generally follows Mark’s order of events. Luke’s use of phrase probably voices his intention to arrange his subject’s life in a proper literary form acceptable to a Greek-speaking Gentile audience.

As a Christian living two or three generations after Jesus’ time, Luke must rely on other persons’ information, including orally transmitted recollections about Jesus and traditional Christian preaching. Besides using memories of “eyewitnesses” and later missionary accounts, the author depends on his own research skills—the labor he expends going “over the whole course of these events in detail” (1:1–4). Luke is aware that “many” others before him produced Gospels (1:1). His resolve to create yet another suggests that somehow he was not completely satisfied with his predecessors’ efforts.

Luke’s Editing and Restructuring of Mark.

As in the case of the Gospel of Matthew, Luke uses Mark as his primary source, incorporating approximately 45 to 50 percent of Mark into his narrative. Editing Mark more extensively than Matthew did, Luke omits several large sections of Markan material (such as Mark 6:45–8:26 and 9:41–10:12), perhaps to make room for his own special additions. Adapting Mark to his creative purpose, Luke often rearranges the sequence of individual incidents to emphasize his particular themes: for example, whereas Mark placed Jesus’ rejection at Nazareth midway through the Galilean campaign, Luke sets it at the beginning (Luke 4:16–30) and adds a claim that the

residents of Nazareth attempted to kill Jesus, thereby foreshadowing his hero's later death in Jerusalem from the very beginning.

Luke's creative reshaping of Mark's narrative

Luke 1:1-4	PROLOGUE		
Luke 1:5-2:52	INFANCY NARRATIVE		
Luke 3:1- 6:19		Follows Mark	⇒Mark 1:1-3:3:19
Luke 6:20-8:3	LESSER INTERPOLATION		
Luke 8:4-9:17		Follows Mark	⇒Mark 4:1-6:44
		<i>Omits Mark</i>	⇒ <i>Mark 6:45– 8:26</i>
Luke 9:18-9:50		Follows Mark	⇒Mark 8:27-9:41.
Luke 9:51 -18:14	GREATER INTERPOLATION		
		<i>Omits Mark</i>	⇒ <i>Mark 9:41-10:12</i>
Luke 18:15-23:56		Follows Mark	⇒Mark 10:13-15:47
Luke 24:1:1-53	RESURRECTION APPEARANCES		

Schematic representation of how Luke edited and restructured the material from Mark's Gospel.

As we can see above, Luke frames Mark's central account of Jesus' adult career with his own unique stories of Jesus' infancy (chapters. 1 and 2) and resurrection (chapter 24). Luke further modifies the earlier Gospel by adding two large sections of teaching material. The first section inserted into the Markan framework—called the "**lesser interpolation**" (6:20 — 8:3)—includes Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, which the author transfers to level ground. Known as the Sermon on the Plain (6:20—49), this collection of Jesus' sayings apparently is drawn from the same source that Matthew used, the hypothetical Q document consisting primarily of sayings and teaching associated with Jesus. Instead of assembling Q material into long speeches as Matthew does, however, Luke scatters these sayings throughout his Gospel. Luke's second major insertion into the Markan narrative, the "**greater interpolation**," is nearly ten chapters long (9:51—18:14). A miscellaneous compilation of Jesus' parables and pronouncements, this material is presented as Jesus' teaching on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem. It is composed almost exclusively of Q material and Luke's special source, which scholars call L (Lukan). After this interpolation section, during which all narrative action

stops, Luke returns to Mark's account at 18:15 and then reproduces an edited version of the Passion story.

Like the other Synoptic writers, Luke presents Jesus' life in terms of images and themes from the Hebrew Bible, which thus constitutes another of the author's sources. In Luke's presentation, some of Jesus' miracles, such as his resuscitating a widow's dead son, are told in such a way that they closely resemble similar miracles in the Hebrew Scriptures. Many of Jesus' deeds clearly echo those of the prophets Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17–19; 2 Kings 1–6). Luke introduces the Elijah–Elisha theme early in the Gospel (4:23–28), indicating that for him these ancient men of God were prototypes of the Messiah.

Luke's editing of Mark as a window on the author's intentions.

Because we have one of Luke's main written sources, the Gospel of Mark, it is possible to learn something of Luke's authorial intentions by examining the way in which he characteristically revises the material he inherited. Although Luke is generally faithful to Mark, which constitutes about 35 per cent of his narrative, he makes a number of significant changes in the Markan text:

- He omits large sections of Mark's account (Mark 6:45–8:26 and 9:41–10:12), possibly to avoid repetitions, such as Mark's second version of the multiplication of loaves and fishes.
- Luke also typically deletes Markan passages that might reflect unfavorably on Jesus' family or disciples. Consistent with his exaltation of Mary in the birth stories (Ch. 2), he omits Mark's story of Jesus' "mother and brothers" trying to interfere in his ministry (Mark 3:21,33–34) and rewrites the Markan Jesus' statement about not being respected by his "family and kinsmen" (cf. Mark 6:4 and Luke 4:22, 24).
- Similarly, Luke excises Mark 8:22–26, an incident symbolic of the disciples' slowness to see or understand Jesus' identity, as well as Markan passages equating Peter with "Satan" (Mark 8:33) or dramatizing the disciples' ineptitude or cowardice (Mark 14:27, 40–41, 51–52) in keeping with the softening of the image of the apostles that is characteristic of Luke.
- In one of his most significant changes to the Markan sequence of events, Luke places Jesus' rejection in Nazareth at the outset of his ministry, rather than midway through it.
- Another distinctive feature of Luke's Gospel anticipates the narrative thrust in Acts: the journey motif. Whereas Mark only briefly refers to Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (Mark 10:17, 32–33), Luke repeatedly

- emphasizes the importance of Jesus' movements, devoting a full ten chapters to the journey (Luke 9:51–19:28). This restructuring of Mark's account prepares readers to see parallels to Paul's missionary travels in Acts, highlighting the continuity between Jesus' activities and those of his later followers. As Jesus resolves to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), so Paul similarly decides to travel to Rome (Acts 19:21), the city where a martyr's death, like that of Jesus, awaits him.
- Luke modifies Mark's narrative to express his theological view of Jesus. Besides deleting Mark's crucial statement about Jesus' dying sacrificially as a "ransom for many" (Mark 10:45) and emphasizing instead his example of service that will be a pattern for disciples later in Acts (Luke 22:27), Luke also deletes Markan passages that show Jesus as being humanly vulnerable. In the Gethsemane scene, Luke severely edits the Markan description of Jesus' desperate anguish, totally eliminating his prayer to be spared the cup of suffering (cf. Mark 14:32–42 and Luke 22:39–46). The famous verses that describe Jesus as "sweating blood" do not appear in some of the oldest and best Lukan manuscripts; later scribes may have inserted them to make Luke's account consistent with the other two Synoptics. The Lukan Jesus thus utters no final cry of abandonment but instead serenely commits his spirit to God (cf. Mark 15:33–37; Luke 23:46–47) and so presents a very picture of Jesus to the other evangelists as he approaches his death

Geography in Luke.

Luke also uses geography to structure his story and to advance his literary and theological goals. The centre of his story is the city of Jerusalem and the events that take place there. In the Gospel the narrative moves *towards* Jerusalem. The infancy narrative leads to the presentation of Jesus in the Temple (2:22) and his discovery there as a young boy (2:41-51). In the Lukan account of the temptations, the order of the last two temptations in Matthew is reversed, so that the climax is reached in Jerusalem (4:9). At the end of the Galilean ministry, the account of the transfiguration prepares for the journey to Jerusalem and Jesus' death there (9:31). The journey narrative is peppered with references to Jesus' destination (9:51, 13:22, 33-34; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28). Jerusalem is described as the only site appropriate for Jesus the prophet to die (13:33, a statement unique to Luke), and is the location of *all* of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (24:1–53). Whereas Mark explicitly states that the risen Jesus will appear in Galilee (Mark 14:28; 16:7), Luke not only locates Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven in or near Jerusalem (Luke 24;

Acts 1) but also makes it the center where Christianity first develops. As scholars have noted, in the Gospel, everything progresses toward Jerusalem, where the early church is born. Beginning with the second half of Acts, however, everything moves *away* from Jerusalem—culminating in Paul's arrival in Rome, the imperial capital where the new faith finds its natural audience.

CENTRAL THEMES TO WATCH OUT FOR IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

1. Christianity: A Truly Universal Faith.

From the outset Luke's Gospel seeks to present Christianity as a universal faith by assuring its gentile readers that they have been included from the very beginning in the salvation that God brings in Jesus. From its inception, Christianity is a religion that is intended for "all nations."

- The angels announce a message of "joy for all peoples" to the shepherds in Luke 2:11.
- Simeon speaks of the salvation that has been "prepared in the sight of all peoples" and that will be "a light of revelation to the Gentiles" in Luke 2:31-32.
- Luke traces Jesus' family tree all the way back to the first human, Adam, the father of all humanity (Luke 3:23-38).
- In Acts of the Apostles, Christ's final words commission his disciples to bear witness about him from Jerusalem "to the ends of the world" (Acts 1:8).
- A Roman centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10), a Gerasene demoniac (Luke 8:26-39) are beneficiaries of his healing ministry.
- He plans to visit a Samaritan village (Luke 8:51-56) and, even after their refusal to receive him, makes a Samaritan the paradigm for loving your neighbour in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- The only one of the ten lepers cleansed by Jesus to return to give thanks is a Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19)

Luke makes Jesus the central act in a three part drama that begins with the people of Israel and continues with the Christian Church. He wanted his readers to know that they had indeed been included in God's plan of salvation from the beginning, even though historically the people of Israel were the first to hear the message as the channel for others. Luke emphasises that the story of salvation had unravelled exactly according to God's plan by presenting Jesus' mission as the fulfilment of the promises of the Old

Testament and continuing after him in the Church to whom he hands on that mission of bringing the good news to the ends of the world.

2. The Holy Spirit

The Gospel of Luke emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit more often and more explicitly than any of the other synoptic gospels. He uses the term “Holy Spirit” – meaning the invisible power of God that guides human action and thought – a total of fourteen times, more than the gospels of Matthew and Mark taken together. Right from the beginning people are described as being filled with the Holy Spirit:

- Zechariah is promised that his son will be filled with the Holy Spirit in Luke 1:15
- Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit in the Visitation scene in Luke 1:41
- Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit in Luke 1:67 and pronounces the wonderful canticle of the Benedictus.

Jesus’ life and mission plays itself out in and through the power of the Spirit. He is:

- conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35, 67)
- anointed with the Spirit in his baptism (Luke 3:22)
- led into the wilderness by the Spirit (Luke 4:1)
- He begins his ministry by recognising that he has been empowered by the Spirit (Luke 4:14)
- He promises the gift of the Spirit to those who ask for it in prayer (Luke 11:13) and dies handing over his Spirit to God.

This emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit continues in the second volume of Luke’s work, the Acts of the Apostles, where the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost gives birth to and becomes the driving force of the early Church.

3. Prayer

Luke’s gospel lays heavy emphasis on worship and prayer.

- The Gospel begins (Luke 1:8) and ends (Luke 24:53) with scenes of worship.
- The opening announcement of salvation (Luke 1:10) occurs in the context of prayer and the infancy narrative in the opening two chapters is full of prayers and hymns of praise by virtually all the adult participants (Mary’s Magnificat, Zechariah’s Benedictus after the birth of John the Baptist, Simeon’s song of praise when the child Jesus is presented in the temple).
- Jesus prays more often in this Gospel and has more to say on the topic of

prayer than in the other three gospels combined. The evangelist reminds us time and time again that Jesus' ministry is steeped in prayer.

- In Luke's account of the baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus not at his baptism but afterwards while he is at prayer (Luke 3:21).
- He chooses his disciples after prayer (Luke 6:12)
- Jesus prays again before the decisive moment of asking them who they think he is (Luke 9:18)
- The transfiguration occurs while he is at prayer (Luke 9:29).
- As in the other gospels he prays to the Father (Luke 22:41) before his arrest and passion.
- Jesus not only teaches his disciples to pray as in the other gospels (Luke 11:2-4) but also repeatedly encourages them to pray, both directly (Luke 18:1; 21:36; 22:40) and through parables about prayer not found in any other gospel (Lk 11:5-8; 18:1-8; 18:9-14).
- Prayer also remains a central emphasis of the evangelist throughout Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:24; 2:32; 3:1).

4. Forgiveness and Mercy

While all the evangelists highlight mercy and forgiveness as an important part of Jesus' ministry and self-identity, Luke develops that emphasis and makes it central to his gospel.

- The mercy of God is the quality or attribute of God invoked by Mary in the Magnificat in Luke 1:50, 54 and by Zechariah in Luke 1:78 as the inspiration and source of this new thing that God is doing.
- Jesus calls on his followers to 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful' in Luke 6:36 thereby identifying mercy and forgiveness as central to divine nature. In the corresponding passage, Matthew speaks of being perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.
- The account of Jesus forgiving a sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50 is unique to this gospel and becomes the occasion for a teaching on forgiveness in the Parable of the Two Debtors.
- Several of the parables unique to Luke focus on the value and the nature of forgiveness: The Lost Coin and The Prodigal Son in Luke 15:8-32 and The Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:9-14

- Significantly only Luke narrates Jesus’ act of forgiving his persecutors and promising the ‘good thief’ entry into paradise in Luke 23:34 and Luke 23:39-43 respectively.
- Jesus speaks of his mission as having ‘come to save the lost’ Luke 19:10

5. Jesus’ affinity with and concern for the disadvantaged

Dante famously described Luke as “the scribe of Christ’s gentleness” – a tribute to the remarkably human and compassionate picture of Jesus that we find in this gospel. Nowhere is that compassion and humanity more evident than in his acceptance of those rejected and excluded by society. His enemies accuse him of being “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 7:34) – a catch-all phrase referring to the great mass of people in ancient Palestine who were regarded as socially and ritually unclean.

- Jesus accepts invitations to the homes of tax-collectors who were despised as collaborators with the Romans (the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10)
- He welcomes the sinful but penitent woman to the Pharisee’s meal (Luke 7:37-50). Such an example would undoubtedly have challenged the early Christian communities to be equally accepting in their own gatherings for table-fellowship.
- He not only conducts a brief ministry in Samaria in Luke 9:52-56

Samaria was traditionally viewed by the Jews of the time as a home to heretics and the centre of religious impurity) but goes further by presenting one of these “heretics” as a model of compassion that those who are listening should emulate (The Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37).

Jesus consistently ignores religious, social and racial barriers in reaching out in compassion to all. The parable commonly referred to as “The Prodigal Son” seeks to convey the unlimited quality of this affection that makes no distinction between the deserving and the undeserving.

6. The Role of Women in Luke

From the beginning of his account, Luke makes it clear that women play an indispensable part in fulfilling the divine plan of salvation.

- The infancy narrative focuses on Mary’s role rather than that of Joseph, who is the focus of attention in Matthew’s gospel.
- The stories of Zechariah and Simeon in the infancy narrative are carefully balanced by stories with female protagonists, Mary and Anna.

- Despite social conventions of that time that relegated women to the place of second class citizens Jesus befriends woman and visits them in their home (Martha & Mary in Luke 10:38-42).
- Women from Galilee not only follow Jesus on his ministry but also financially support him and his disciples (Luke 8:2-3). It is noteworthy that Luke gives the name of three of these women: Susanna, Joanna and Mary the Magdalene – in a culture where the recognition of a name represented a recognition of the dignity of the person.
- Jesus moreover takes special pity on women and repeatedly makes them the beneficiaries of his saving deeds (the widow of Nain in Luke 7:11-17; the woman with the haemorrhage and Jairus' daughter in Luke 8:40-56; the crippled woman in Luke 13:10-17).
- Women are presented as the only followers to remain faithful to him at the crucifixion and are the first witnesses to the resurrection, a detail that is preserved in all of the gospels.
- Luke alone relates a number of parables that centre on women characters to describe God's kingdom (the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8; the Lost Coin in Luke 15: 8-9).

7. The Poor

Jesus' own description of his ministry begins by proclaiming that he has come "to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18) and concern for the poor is a constant theme that reaches through the gospel.

- Joseph and Mary's offering of two turtledoves at the presentation of the child Jesus in the temple was the offering of the poor and firmly establishes an impoverished background to Jesus' own upbringing. cf. Lev 12:6-8.
- Luke's infancy narrative mentions the visit of humble shepherds rather than gift-bearing magi, as is the case in Matthew.
- Mary proclaims that God will provide the hungry will good things and send the rich away empty (Luke 1:53).

In his own ministry:

- Jesus proclaims that the poor are blessed (Luke 6:20-21) but the rich are doomed (Lk 6:24-25). Jesus illustrates this teaching graphically in parables where the rich are depicted as "fools" (Luke 12:16-21) or, worse, as persons destined to suffer eternal agony while the poor receive their comfort (Luke 16:19-31).

- In Luke’s version of the great banquet, the host’s doors are thrown open indiscriminately to “the poor, the crippled and the lame” (Luke 14:12-14), people who are incapable of returning such hospitality.
- To Luke, it is not the “poor in spirit” who are blessed, but simply “the poor;” the economically deprived for whom wealthy citizens appear to show little sympathy (Luke 6:20-21, 21-24). Luke establishes God’s special concern for the poor and the rejected precisely because it is they who need God’s help most.
- In this gospel Jesus warns against becoming enslaved by attachment to possessions (Luke 12:13, 43; 14:25-33) and urges Christians to imitate Christ’s example of genuine concern for the poor.

8. Yet open to all.

Yet one must be careful not to interpret Jesus’ clear affinity with the poor as signifying a blanket rejection of the wealthy and the established in society. The Jesus that Luke presents is remarkable in the inclusivity of his outreach. He accepts invitations to dine in the homes of socially respectable Pharisees (Luke 7:36-50) just as readily he will from tax collectors. He heals lepers (Luke 5:12-16; 17:11-19) but also saves a synagogue official’s daughter (Luke 8:40-56) and a Roman Centurion’s servant at the request of the Jewish elders (Luke 7:1-10). In short, while people who suffer genuine hardship may head the list of the disadvantaged for whom Jesus is concerned; ultimately his concern is broad-based and is open to all who turn to him for help.

9. Salvation

Salvation is another important theme in Luke’s gospel. This should come as no surprise, since concern for salvation stands at the heart of the Christian message and is addressed in most of the New Testament writings. Luke however is the only one of the Synoptic Gospels in which Jesus is called “Saviour” (Luke 2:11) and where Jesus specifically states that he has “come to seek out and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Whereas the gospels of Mark and Matthew link salvation to Jesus’ death on the cross, in Luke, Jesus saves people throughout the story.

Luke seems to have a different concept of salvation from the other synoptic writers. In Matthew’s gospel an angel announces that Jesus “*will* save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21); in Luke however, the angel announces “To you is born this day ... a Saviour” (Lk 2:11). Jesus is already a Saviour from the day of his birth. Jesus brings salvation to those he encounters during his life. This subtle distinction has important implications for the way we live our

faith. For many people today, the religious concept of salvation has an undeniably future orientation. To “be saved” may mean to be assured that you will receive a favourable review on the Day of Judgment. While it is true that in all of the gospels salvation has both present and future dimensions, in Luke the emphasis is on the former. Luke does affirm the Christian hope for eternal life in the “age to come” (Luke 18:30) but in general he lays more emphasis on the present consequences of God’s saving actions. We can see this in the several verses, unique to this gospel, that make use of the word *today*.

Salvation happens now.

- “*Today* a Saviour is born” (2:11)
- “*Today* this scripture is fulfilled” (4:21)
- “*Today* we have seen strange things” (5:26)
- “*Today* I must stay at your house” (19:5)
- “*Today* salvation has come to this house” (19:9)
- “*Today* You will be with me in paradise” (2:11)

In Luke, salvation can mean different things to different people. To a blind man, it means the gift of sight (18:42) and to a leper it means being made clean (17:19). To others it may mean receiving such blessings as peace (2:14) or forgiveness (7:48) or healing of their infirmities (6:10; 8:48). Salvation for Luke is essentially liberation. Jesus the Saviour proclaims that he has come to “proclaim release to captives” and to “let the oppressed go free.” In Luke’s story, Jesus saves people by liberating them from whatever it is that prevents them from living the lives God wishes them to live. Luke makes no distinction between what might be construed as physical, social or spiritual aspects of salvation. Forgiving sins, healing illness and feeding the hungry are all saving acts. God is concerned with all aspects of human life.

10. A Great Reversal Proclaimed and Enacted

In Luke’s Gospel a great reversal is proclaimed and enacted. The in-breaking of God’s kingdom turns worldly values on their head and causes a reversal of society’s accepted norms and conventions.

- Mary’s hymn of praise, the Magnificat, sets the tone as she proclaims in the opening chapter that God “has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52-53).
- Outcasts are welcomed by Jesus and even invited to become disciples (the

- call of Levi in Luke 5:27-32).
- The poor are described as “blessed” while the rich and the satisfied are warned that they have already had their consolation (Luke 6:20-25).
 - Jesus teaches that we are to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us. (Luke 6:27-28).
 - The faith of a Roman Centurion is praised over and above any faith found in Israel (Luke 11:9).
 - Death gives way to life in the raising of the widow of Nain’s son in Luke 7:11-17.
 - The “least” are proclaimed the greatest (Luke 9:46-48).
 - A Samaritan is held up as an example of compassion and caring to a Jewish audience (Luke 10:25-37).
 - In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, it is the destitute Lazarus who is honoured by being named while the rich man is anonymous (Luke 16:19-31).

All these texts, as well as many other parables, highlight that for Luke the kingdom is lived by a very different set of values, one that calls us to a new way of seeing and living in the world in this radically new moment in history that God has inaugurated in Jesus.