**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #4**

**The Beginning of the New Covenant**

**John the Baptist and Jesus**

**Luke 1:57-80, 2:1-20**

**The Birth of John the Baptist**

**Luke 1: 57-80**

***57*** *The time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and to deliver a son.* ***58*** *Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.*

***59*** *On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father.* ***60*** *But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.”*

***61*** *They said to her, “None of your family has this name.”* ***62*** *Then they made signs to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him.* ***63*** *He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed.*

***64*** *Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.* ***65*** *Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea.* ***66*** *All who heard them pondered them and said, ‘What then will this child become?’ For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.*

**Zecharia’s Song (*The Benedictus)***

***67*** *Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophesies:*

***68 “****Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited his people and redeemed them.*

***69*** *He has raised up a mighty (horn) of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,*

***70*** *as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

***71*** *that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.*

***72*** *Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our fathers, and has remembered his holy covenant,*

***73*** *the oath that he swore to our father Abraham,*

***74*** *to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, that we might worship him without fear,*

***75*** *in holiness and uprightness before him all our days.*

***76*** *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

***77*** *to give knowledge of salvation to his people through the forgiveness of their sins.*

**(cont. …)**

**Luke 1 (cont.)**

***78*** *In merciful compassion of our God, the Dawn from on High will take note of us,*

***79*** *to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

***80*** *The child grew up, he became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he was manifested to Israel.*

**Study and Notes**

1. This part of the Gospel stresses three things:

* 1. Birth of John
  2. Circumcision and naming
  3. His manifestation to Israel

1. Circumcision marks John as having the “mark of the Covenant” (Gen 17:11), which incorporates John into the people of Israel (Jos 5:2-9).
2. John comes to witness to Christ not only as a Jew but also as a prophet.

1. Children were named at the time of their birth (Gen 4:1; 21:3, 25:25-26). But this custom may have changed. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, a son can take the name of his father, Josephus mentioned Joseph bar Joseph, *(Jewish Antiquities* 14:1, 3)

**The Song of Zachariah - Notes**

1. Zachariah opened his mouth and tongue was loosed.

2. Verse 68 “*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel”* is a common way of praising God (Ps 41:14; 72:18; 106:48).

3. Also verse 69 “*God has visited his people*.” This verb “visit” was used in the OT for “deliverance” (Exod 4:31; Ruth 1:6; Ps 80:14, 106:4).

4. Verse 69 “*raising [the] horn*” is rather unusual for the English ear. “Horn” is the best arm of a mighty Ox, and is the way to speak of salvation. It was used in Psalm 18:3 and 2 Samuel 22:3. The Horn was also used as a vessel filled with oil for anointing and there is an allusion to the anointing of David in Hannah’ song. Here it is a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, “*I shall cause a horn to sprout out of David,*” (Ezek 29:21 and Ps 132:17).

5. Also verse 69 “*the house of his servant David*” is a reference to the prophecy of Nathan the prophet (2 Sam 7:12-13). This title “servant” will be used to highlight the divinity of Jesus, for Jesus is the Lord of David (Luke 20:41).

6. Verse 70, “*the mouth of his holy prophets from of old*,” this is echoed in Luke 22:27-44-66 and Acts 1:16, 3:18) Please note:

a. That the OT prophesies were the testimony of the church at this early period of how Jesus is the fulfillment of the divine promises.

b. Christianity was and is a new message that was not fabricated by group of people, but rests on the divine promises that were told by the prophets.

7. Verse 71 “*we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us*.” Enemies are not necessarily the Romans but in the context of the new message, they are those who stand up against God’s plan. See the prayer of David in Psalm 18:18. The words of Zachariah are the same (see also Ps 106:10).

8. Verse 72-73 “*to show mercy*” mercy is part of God’s salvation and is integral part of the covenant. God delivers what he promised. Please notice also the “oath” that God swore to our father Abraham, (Gen 22:16-17; 26:3;Jer 11:5).

**Note on the use of “Oath”**

“God condensed to our level and use our language with all its shortcomings to assure us of the truth and that He is faithful to whatever He promises.”

**Worship**

9. Verse 74 “*We might worship him without fear*.” Worship in the NT is not ”***abodah***,” for the Greek noun “***latreia***” is a service to God. Worship by offering oneself as a living sacrifice to God in (Rom 12:1), is a sacrifice of love. The numerous uses of the verb ***latreuo*** throughout the NT does refer to a specific manner of worship, and whether this fact supports the “all of life is worship” doctrine is another issue separate from the study of this particular word.

The most common Greek word for worship is ***proskyneo***, “to kiss the hand” and “to prostrate oneself.” It had the most specific content of the verb “to worship” - to bow or fall down before an object of veneration. Since it could be done before a human being of higher rank from whom a benefit was desired, its frequent occurrences in the Gospels are in reference to Jesus by those who approached him in this way (Matt 8:2 and 9:18) as opposed praising the risen Jesus in Matthew 28:9, 17.

Note the mocking used in Mark 15:19. From the specific act came a general usage for “worship” or “acts of reverence” (John 12:20; Rev. 14:7). It could be directed toward human beings (Acts 10:25, in this case rejected), the idols of paganism (Acts 7:43), the devil or his agents (Matt. 4:9; Rev. 13:4), angels (Rev. 22:8, but rejected), or the true God (Rev. 7:11). Only in 1 Corinthians 14:25 is the term used in reference to a church meeting.

**Letter from Philemon:**

**Should we fear God?**

My dear brother,

May the peace and the love of God be with you always and forever.

Should we fear God? I myself have lived with a kind of a paralyzing fear for too many years. I was in hell, for I was afraid of any unholy idea, afraid of judgment. I nearly hit the base of despair. But our Beloved Jesus, who comes to rescue us at the last watch, came to save me. It was at the end of long fasting days. The stoning of the woman in the Gospel of John was my reading (John 8) before I was too tired. I had not eaten anything at all but I used to drink water every evening. Christ spoke to me and repeated the same words that he said to the woman, “*neither do I condemn you.*” A flood of peace overwhelmed me. Then the light of the Holy Spirit penetrated the darkness of my heart.

The Lord is the Savior, and throughout the NT there is no fear with salvation. There are many warnings about hell and judgment, but let us be aware that now it is a time of mercy. It is the time of salvation. Fear of the Day of Judgment must be seen as the judgment of those who have rejected love. Faith is our way to life of freedom. And St. John says there is no fear in love. I fear the coldness of my heart but not the Lord. I fear to act without love because this put me on the side of death.

The New covenant was not given by our consent but God made Jesus the Covenant, and here is my song:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “*Abba Father*” (Rom 8:15).

Live in this love that is our Lord Jesus the Savior.

Philemon a sinner

No date

10. Verse 76 “*The Prophet of the Most High*.” The God of the nations (see note on this title in previous handout – #3, Oct. 15, 2014, p3 bottom & p4 top).

11. Also verse 76 “*For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.*” This was also in Mark 1:2-3: the “Lord” here is Jesus. Luke wrote in Greek and he used the Greek work ***Kyrios*** which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew ***Yahweh***. The Lord is Jesus, as when with the Holy Spirit Elizabeth prophesizes and calls Mary “*the mother of my Lord*.” The identification of ***Kyrios*** with Jesus is certain here as the whole message is about the coming of the Messiah for salvation, which is called as such “*the Dawn from on High*” an idiom which mean the rising light from heaven where heaven is another name for God.

12. Verses 77-79. “*To give knowledge of salvation to his people through the forgiveness of their sins*” This is certainly about the Good News.

a. It is Salvation

b. Also fiorgiveness of sins.

**The Gospel: More than Forgiveness**

The Gospel is not about forgiveness only, but is also about salvation. This must be read with verses 78-79: “***78*** *In merciful compassion of our God, the Dawn from on High will take note of us,* ***78*** *to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*”

13. Mercy in Hebrew is ***rahamim***. The stem of the word is ***raham***, which means a mother’s “womb.”

14. Peace is coming, as John will be the one who will prepare the people and guide their feet into the way of peace, to the Good News.

**The Birth of Jesus**

**Luke 2:1-20**

**1** Now in those days a decree happened to be issued by Caesar Augustus, ordering the whole world to be registered 2. This was the first census taken when [Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all had to go to be registered, each to his own city.

**4** Joseph too went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, **5** in order to register along with Mary, who was his fiancée, who was pregnant with child.

**6** While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloth bands, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

**8** In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** When the angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of God shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. **10** But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; **11** for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloth bands and lying in a manger.”

**13** Then suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

**14** “Glory to God in the highest heaven; peace on earth among men with whom He is favored.”

**15** When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” **16** So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. **17** When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

**18** And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. **19** But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

**Notes and Studies**

1. Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus (27BC -14 AD). This lengthy period was known to be a long time of peace, to the extent that the doors to the temple of the god Janus were closed, because the doors were left open during time of war. An altar was erected to ***Pax Augusta*** (still standing in Rome).

2. Augustus was hailed as god and even as savior in many surviving Greek inscriptions, (See, A. H. M. Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, 1949,page 72).

3. The Gospel begins with two kings, one in Rome while the other in a poor unknown city in Judea.

4. The call to the shepherds to receive the good and great news is not accidental. David was a Shepherd, and the city of Bethlehem must have had shepherds around it in the countryside. David was a shepherd tending the flocks of Jesse his father (1 Sam 16:11) and there are more deeds of David as savior who saved the folks from a lion and bears (1 Sam 17:14-15, 20, 28, 34). Moreover according to Micah 5:1, the Ruler of Israel, just like David, will come from Bethlehem. Also “Bethlehem” means the “house of bread.” Later Jesus will call himself the Good Shepherd and Jesus describes his life as the Bread that comes down from heaven (both appear in the Gospel of John 10 and 6).

5. The manger evokes the memory to the words of Isaiah1:3, “*an ox knows its owner and the ass the manger of its lord, but Israel knows not me, and my people do not understand.*”

6. The Inn or rather the lodge (***katalyma***) alludes to Jeremiah 14:8, where God asks; why are you like an alien in the land, like a wayfarer who goes to a lodge for the night. Here the message becomes clearer:

a. Jesus is born in the Town of King David.

b. Not as a stranger but in the manger of the Lord, who sustains and provides for his people.

c. This old romantic picture of the poor Jesus must be balanced with the OT background and the expectation of the coming of the Shepherd.

**History**

1. Caesar Augustus was born on September 23rd, 63 BC (d. August 19, 14 AD).
2. Augustus is a title not a personal name, it means great or magnificent.
3. Quirinius was a Roman legate, his time in Syria as not completely recorded and was put at 4 B. C and 1 B.C.

**Doctrine**

1. Mary was “betrothed” or a fiancée, but she was pregnant and gave birth to her first born. The Greek ***prototokos*** does not mean necessarily “firstborn among many.” It is a legal title in the Law of Moses, who will inherit his father and rules over his brothers. He has the rights and authority of his father. Our Lord is the “firstborn” in several ways:

a. He is the One who has been appointed by God to be in authority over all things ([Colossians 1:13-23](javascript:%7B%7D); especially verses 15, 18).

b. The OT background is important for the title has also “son” (see [2 Sam 7:14](javascript:%7B%7D); [Ps 2:7-9](javascript:%7B%7D) and [Ps 110:1-3](javascript:%7B%7D)]; [Heb 1:5-14](javascript:%7B%7D)). The title “*You art My Son, Today I have begotten you*” ([Hebrews 1:5](javascript:%7B%7D)) and “*I will be a Father to Him, And He shall be a Son to Me*” seem to be synonymous. Our Lord has two births: one before time and the second in time. Before time from the Father and second from Mary, He is eternal (as [John 1:1-3](javascript:%7B%7D) indicates), but His Father made Him Heir and the King of the earth as the second Adam.

c. Israel is Yahweh’s firstborn among the nations ([Ex 4:22](javascript:%7B%7D); compare [Jer 31:9](javascript:%7B%7D)). The Messianic King is God’s firstborn Septuagint ***prototokos***, “*the highest of the kings of the earth*” ([Ps 89:27](javascript:%7B%7D)). Christ is “the firstborn of all creation” ([Col 1:15](javascript:%7B%7D)), which is not only prior to it in time, but above it in power and authority. “*All things have been created through him, and unto him*” ([Col 1:16](javascript:%7B%7D)). He is sovereign Lord over all creation by virtue of primo-geniture. It denotes His status and character and not His origin; the context does not admit the idea that He is a part of the created universe. So in His incarnation He is brought into the world as “firstborn,” and God summons all His angels to worship Him ([Heb 1:6](javascript:%7B%7D)). Jehovah Witnesses don’t have an answer to this. In His resurrection He is “*firstborn from the dead*” ([Col 1:18](javascript:%7B%7D)) or “*of the dead*” ([Rev 1:5](javascript:%7B%7D)), the origin and prince of life. And finally He is “*firstborn among many brethren*” (Rom 8:29) and all are called to inherit what the firstborn has in His possession for this is the purpose of grace. We all are not only the brothers of the Heir that is our Lord but also He is our Prototype. The Son has many who are “*foreordained to be conformed to his image*” ([Rom 8:29](javascript:%7B%7D)). Therefore the saints themselves, are called to grow up toward His likeness, and as possessing all the privileges of the Firstborn, including the kingdom and the priesthood, may be called the “*church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*” ([Heb 12:23](javascript:%7B%7D))

**A Letter from Philemon**

My dear brother,

May the Lord Jesus our Firstborn brother give you the courage of His love and the daring power of His grace.

It is good to say that we are sinners. But more important is to hang on our true identity as brothers of the Lord Jesus. So, I pray Lord Jesus have mercy on me for I am your brother.

Never ever let go of what is being given to us as grace because what we are given is nothing less than the privileges of the Heir: all that He has to the extent that we shall sit with Him on the Throne of Divinity in heaven (Rev 3:21).

Philēmōn

No date

1966

**The Angels Song – Luke 2:14**

*“Glory to God in the highest*

*And on earth peace*

*Good will toward men”* (KJV)

*“Glory to God in the highest*

*And on earth peace among men of good will”* (CCD)

*“Glory to God in the highest,*

*And on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests”* (NIV)

There are many different translations. Let’s look at the last phrase regarding “good will,” which as we see here sometimes is rendered “on whom his *favor rests*.”

The Greek word ***eudokia*** means “good pleaser”

1. Luke used this word ***eudokia*** of God’s pleasure in humanity in (Luke 10:21) on the lips of Jesus as saying the Father has “*good pleasure*” in revealing his son and himself to our humanity. All English translations avoided this “pleasure in humanity” for bad doctrines have smeared even God’s love and his pleasure in us because we are sinners.
2. So the song does not say there is “good will” on earth among men toward each other as in (KIJ) nor even a good will but because now God is in our flesh.

**A Letter from one who called himself a sinner**

Brother George,

Our joy in our humanity is not due to the fact that we are good or have accomplished great things. Such joy in success does not last for it is very often humiliated by a failure.

My joy is that God the Son became man to make me his son in Christ. This is why I enjoy being a human who has the eternal pleasure of the Father who adopted me forever in Christ.

As the feast of the Incarnation of our Lord is approaching, I am obliged to write to you that our new life in Christ is not measured by success or failure, sin or holiness, but by the unchangeable and irreversible gift of adoption, “*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*” (Rom 11:29)

As far as my old life is concerned I call myself a sinner, but I am not a sinner in Christ, for no one in Christ is counted as a sinner. I enjoyed your words, that “I am” is the eternal state of being. May I add to your words, *I am in Christ*.

Philēmōn who calls himself a sinner

1959

***Pope’s Notes***

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