SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

Luke

Chapter One, Verses 1–80

Nothing Will Be Impossible with God — a careful historian, a silenced priest, a willing virgin, and two songs that break four hundred years of silence

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Luke checks his sources and begins in the temple: an old priest hears that his prayer is answered and cannot believe it, while a young virgin in Nazareth hears something far harder to believe and says, “may it be done to me according to your word.” Two mothers meet, and two songs announce that God has visited His people. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Luke’s key words.

THE PASSAGE

Luke 1:1–80

preface · Zacharias · Mary · Magnificat · Benedictus

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Five movements from Luke's preface to the child in the wilderness

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"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people." — Luke 1:68

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

Luke 1:1–80

Nothing Will Be Impossible with God — God remembers His promises — to a barren couple, to a girl in Nazareth, and to Israel

† How to Read This Study

This study walks Luke 1 in 5 movements, in Luke's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the passage so you can see where Luke is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word — R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle — MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · LUKE 1:37

"For ☆ nothing will be impossible △ with God."

† Before the Passage

Luke is the only Gospel writer who tells us how he worked. He was not an eyewitness; he was a careful researcher who "investigated everything carefully from the beginning" (v. 3) and wrote for a man named Theophilus. Sproul calls the book "the prequel to the book of Acts," and the two volumes together make up more of the New Testament than any other single writer contributes. Luke was a physician and Paul's companion (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11), and, as Sproul notes, "Luke gives us more information about the birth of Jesus than anybody else."

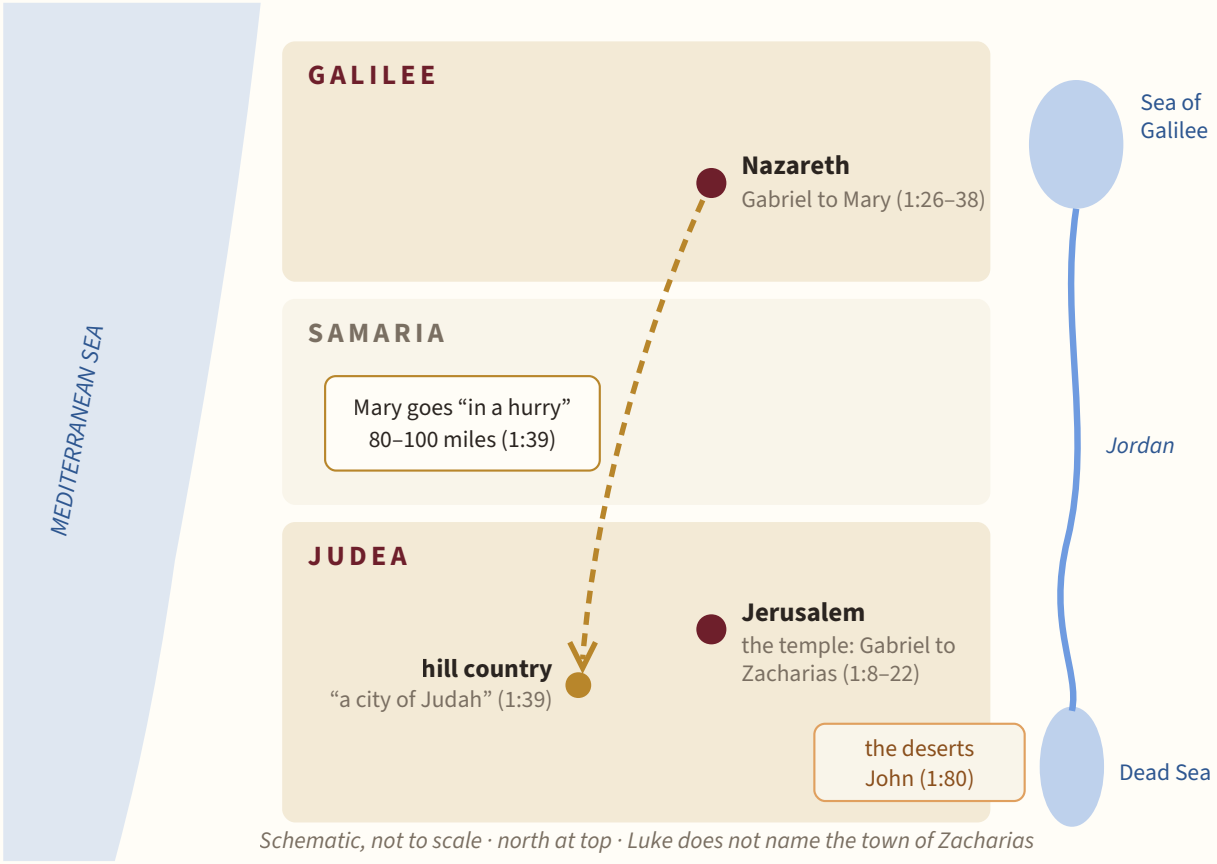
The story opens "in the days of Herod, king of Judea" (v. 5) — Herod the Great, whom Guzik describes as "known for his spectacular building programs, but even more so for his paranoid cruelty." The last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, had closed with a promise that God would send Elijah before the day of the LORD (Malachi 4:5–6). Then heaven went quiet. Guzik: "The prophetic voice of the Lord had been silent for 400 years." Luke 1 is the silence breaking.

The scenes move between two places. Jerusalem's temple, where priests from twenty-four divisions (1 Chronicles 24) took turns, and where one priest, chosen by lot, burned incense on the golden altar while the

people prayed outside. And Nazareth, a small Galilean town that the Old Testament never mentions. Guzik: "Nazareth is perhaps remarkable for its unremarkable nature." Between them lies the "hill country" of Judah, where Zacharias and Elizabeth lived.

Luke 1 is built like a pair of matching panels: an announcement to Zacharias and an announcement to Mary; the birth of John and (in chapter 2) the birth of Jesus. Each panel is answered by a song. Mary's song (the Magnificat, vv. 46–55) and Zacharias' song (the Benedictus, vv. 68–79) are woven from Old Testament language — Hannah's prayer, the Psalms, the prophets — and both sing of the same thing: God has remembered His mercy and His covenant with Abraham.

FIGURE · NAZARETH, JERUSALEM AND THE HILL COUNTRY



Schematic, not to scale · north at top · Luke does not name the town of Zacharias

Gabriel visits the temple in Jerusalem and then a home in Nazareth; Mary hurries south to the hill country of Judah, and John grows up in the deserts.

I
MOVEMENT

LUKE 1:1–4

The Exact Truth

A physician-historian checks his sources for a man named Theophilus

> [1] *Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,* [2] *just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,* [3] *it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;* [4] *so that you may know* ☆ *the exact truth about the things you have been taught.*
>
> LUKE 1:1–4

αὐτόπται

AUTOPTAI · "EYEWITNESSES" · G845

From *autos* (self) and the root of *optanomai* (to see): people who saw for themselves. Used only here in the New Testament. Luke does not claim to be one of them; he claims to have listened to them — the men who were there "from the beginning" and were also "servants (*hypēretai*) of the word" (v. 2). Our English word "autopsy," seeing for oneself, comes from the same root.

ἀσφάλεια

ASPHALEIA · "EXACT TRUTH, CERTAINTY" · G803

The last word of Luke's long opening sentence (vv. 1–4 are one sentence in Greek), and the point of it: "so that you may know the exact truth." The word means firmness, safety, something that will not slip — it is used of a prison "securely" locked in Acts 5:23. Luke wrote so that a man already taught (*katēcheō*, to instruct by word of mouth) could stand on solid ground.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that "Luke wrote his gospel knowing that many had already written histories of the life of Jesus," and that his own "account was based on diligent research and a perfect understanding of events." He reads the plain style of the preface as purposeful: "Luke wrote so that people would understand Jesus, not so they would admire his brain and literary skill." Because he gathered so widely, "Luke is the most comprehensive gospel." As for the reader: "By his title (most excellent), we gather that Theophilus was probably a Roman government official."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul opened his Luke series at St. Andrew's ("The Gospel of Luke," 2 Oct 2011) by calling it "the prequel to the book of Acts." He sketches the author — "Luke, we know, was a physician" — and stresses what he was not: "But Luke was not a disciple." The preface shows his method: "Luke is saying, "I am not an eyewitness, but I am a historian, and as a historian, I check the sources."" And the method has been tested: "no historian of the ancient world has been subjected to as much academic and archaeological scrutiny as Luke." The point is not academic: "The New Testament is committed to the historical foundation of the truth of our faith."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry admits, "It is not certain who this Theophilus was," but notes Luke's courteous address: "Religion does not destroy civility and good manners." He honors those who wrote before Luke without letting their work excuse ours — "Others' services to Christ must not be reckoned to supersede ours, but rather to quicken them." And he describes the apostles' humility before the message: "They had not a gospel to make as masters, but a gospel to preach as ministers."

II
MOVEMENT

LUKE 1:5–25

Your Petition Has Been Heard

A priest at the altar of incense, an angel, and the silence of unbelief

5 *In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a*
wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 *They were both righteous in the sight of God,*
walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7 *But they had no child, because*
Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. 8 *Now it happened that while he was performing*
his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, 9 *according to the custom of the priestly*
office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 *And the whole multitude of the*
people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. 11 *And an angel of the Lord appeared to him,*
standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 *Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped*
him. 13 *But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your*
wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. 14 *"You will have joy and gladness, and*
many will rejoice at his birth. 15 *"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor,*
and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. 16 *"And he will turn many of the sons*
of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 *"It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power*
of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of
the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." 18 *Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I*
know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." 19 *The angel answered and said to*
him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this
good news. 20 *"And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place,*
because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time." 21 *The people were waiting*
for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 *But when he came out, he was unable to speak to*
them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained
mute. 23 *When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.* 24 *After these days Elizabeth his*
wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, 25 *"This is the way the Lord has*
dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."

LUKE 1:5–25

> *"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."*
>
> MALACHI 4:5–6

FIGURE · TWO ANNOUNCEMENTS

ONE ANGEL, TWO ANNOUNCEMENTS · LUKE 1:5–38

	GABRIEL TO ZACHARIAS	GABRIEL TO MARY
WHO	an old priest, "advanced in years" (v18)	a virgin, engaged to Joseph (v27)
WHERE	the temple, by the altar of incense (v11)	a city in Galilee called Nazareth (v26)
THE NEWS	a son, John, the forerunner (vv13–17)	a Son, Jesus, Son of the Most High (vv31–33)
THE QUESTION	"How will I know this for certain?" (v18)	"How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (v34)
THE HEART	"you did not believe my words" (v20)	"blessed is she who believed" (v45)
THE OUTCOME	silent until the day it happens (v20)	"may it be done to me according to your word"

Guzik: "his question was asked in skeptical unbelief, and her question was asked in wonder-filled faith."

Read across each row: the same angel, two questions that sound alike, and two very different hearts behind them.

δέησις

DEĒSIS · "PETITION" · G1162

A specific request born of need, from *deomai*, to ask or beg. Gabriel says, "your petition has been heard" (v. 13) — but which one? Zacharias was offering incense for the nation while "the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside" (v. 10). Guzik thinks the answer is both: "Zacharias didn't know that God would answer both prayers at once" — a son for an old couple, and the forerunner for Israel.

εὐαγγελίσασθαι

EUANGELISASTHAI · "TO BRING GOOD NEWS" · G2097

Gabriel was sent "to bring you this good news" (v. 19). This is Luke's favorite verb for preaching the gospel — the first time it appears in his book is on an angel's lips in the temple, and the angel of 2:10 will use it again over Bethlehem. Guzik: "This gives a better idea of what it really means to preach the gospel." Verse 25's "disgrace" is *oneidos* (G3681), reproach or shame — the shame Elizabeth says God has taken away.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik stresses that "These events happened at a definite time," and that Zacharias and Elizabeth "were righteous and obedient, yet also stigmatized by their barrenness." The lot to burn incense "might fall to a priest only once in his life," and "in the Bible the burning of incense is a strong picture of prayer." When the promise came, "Zacharias looked at the circumstances first, and what God can do last." Yet God kept His word: "His unbelief did not make God take his promise back; it just kept Zacharias from enjoying it." Elizabeth's seclusion was not shame — "She went away to spend time with the Lord."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul's three sermons on these verses (Oct 2011) begin with high praise: "John the Baptist is the most underrated person in the whole New Testament." Zacharias' name speaks of God remembering, and "God's pattern throughout redemptive history is that He remembers every promise He's ever made." The couple's barrenness was no punishment: "There was no hidden sin." Among "eighteen thousand priests," God chose this one. But Sproul is sober about verse 20: "Abraham got mercy. Zacharias got justice." "Zacharias' problem wasn't an intellectual problem; it was a moral one," because "When I don't believe what God says, I am assaulting the very integrity of the Almighty."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry delights that both partners were godly: "It is a happy thing when those who are joined to each other in marriage are both joined to the Lord." The outward rite needed the inward: "the incense could not be accepted without prayer, any more than the shell without the kernel." He takes comfort in God's timing: "Prayers made when we were young and coming into the world may be answered when we are old and going out of the world." Zacharias' question "was not a humble petition for the confirming of his faith," and his silence carried a lesson: "It is better not to speak at all than to speak wickedly."

III
MOVEMENT

LUKE 1:26–38

Nothing Will Be Impossible

Gabriel in Nazareth, the Son of the Most High, and Mary's yes

26 *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth,* 27 *to a virgin*
engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 *And*
coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! △ *The Lord is with you*." 29 *But she was very perplexed at this*
statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 *The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid,*
Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 *"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and*
△ *you shall name Him Jesus*. 32 *"He will be great and will be called the Son of the* ⟳ *Most High*; *and the Lord*
God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 *and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and* ☆ *His*
kingdom will have no end." 34 *Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"* 35 *The angel*
answered and said to her, "△ *The Holy Spirit will come upon you*, *and the power of the* ⟳ *Most High will*
overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 *"And behold, even your*

relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. [37] *"For nothing will be impossible with God."* [38] *And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

LUKE 1:26–38

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."

ISAIAH 7:14

κεχαριτωμένη

KECHARITŌMENĒ · "FAVORED ONE" · G5487

A perfect passive participle of *charitoō*, "to grace, to favor": one who has been, and remains, graced. The verb is used only twice in the New Testament — here, and Ephesians 1:6, where God "freely bestowed" His grace on all believers in the Beloved. The grammar points to the Giver. Guzik: "Mary's grace was a received grace, not grace to give to others." Gabriel explains it in verse 30: "you have found favor (*charis*) with God."

ἐπισκιάσει

EPISKIASEI · "WILL OVERSHADOW" · G1982

To throw a shadow upon, to envelop. The same verb describes the bright cloud that "overshadowed" Peter, James and John at the transfiguration (Luke 9:34), and in the Greek Old Testament it is used of the cloud settling on the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35). Guzik: "The word overshadow means "to cover with a cloud."" Morris (quoted by Guzik): "This delicate expression rules out crude ideas of a 'mating' of the Holy Spirit with Mary."

δούλη

DOULĒ · "BONDSLAVE" · G1399

A female slave — not a hired maid but one who belongs to her master. Mary uses it of herself twice (vv. 38, 48). Only three New Testament uses: these two and Acts 2:18, where God pours out His Spirit on His "bondslaves, both men and women." Mary's answer to the most astonishing news in history is to take the lowest title she knows.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that "Nazareth is perhaps remarkable for its unremarkable nature," and that "There were three stages to a Jewish wedding in that day" — Mary was in the binding middle stage. "Mary is clearly said to be a virgin." He keeps the focus where Gabriel did: "The focus was not on Mary, but on a Son, to be named JESUS." Her question differed from Zacharias': "his question was asked in skeptical unbelief, and her question was asked in wonder-filled faith." And her answer is a pattern: ""Let it be to me according to Your word" is the proper response of every believer to every promise of God."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

In "The Annunciation" (6 Nov 2011) Sproul presses what was new: barren women had conceived before, but "At no time in the history of the world, however, had any woman ever had a child while she remained a virgin." Miracles do not threaten God's order, because "what we call natural laws are simply the ordinary way in which God governs His creation." He links the overshadowing to the Spirit hovering in Genesis 1, and defines omnipotence carefully: "To be omnipotent does not mean that God can do anything" — "God can't stop being God." In "Mary's Fiat" (13 Nov) he honors her — "She was humble, she was willing, and she was obedient" — and warns against exalting her: "Mary is not divine. She is a sinner saved by grace, just as we are."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry notes that the throne promised to Jesus would be resisted: "His people will not give him that throne, will not acknowledge his right to rule them." The conception would be God's own work — "a divine power will undertake it, not the power of an angel employed in it." From verse 37 he draws courage: "Nothing is to be despaired of, not the performance of any service, not the obtaining of any favour." And he admires Mary's surrender: "She objects not the danger of spoiling her marriage, and blemishing her reputation"; "She is not only content that it should be so, but humbly desires that it may be so."

IV
MOVEMENT

LUKE 1:39-56

My Soul Exalts the Lord

Two mothers, a leaping baby, and Mary's song of the great reversal

39 *Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah,* 40 *and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.* 41 *When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.* 42 *And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!* 43 *"And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?* 44 *"For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.* 45 *"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."* 46 *And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord,* 47 *And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.* 48 *"For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.* 49 *"For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name.* 50 *"AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.* 51 *"He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.* 52 *"He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.* 53 *"HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed.* 54 *"He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy,* 55 *As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever."* 56 *And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.*

LUKE 1:39-56

> *Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation. There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God."*
>
> 1 SAMUEL 2:1–2

FIGURE · THE GREAT REVERSAL

THE GREAT REVERSAL IN MARY'S SONG · LUKE 1:48–53

BROUGHT DOWN	LIFTED UP
"those who were proud" — scattered (v51)	"His bondslave" — He "had regard" (v48)
"rulers" — brought down from thrones (v52)	"those who were humble" — exalted (v52)
"the rich" — sent away empty-handed (v53)	"the hungry" — filled with good things (v53)

THE REASON: "HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION …" (v50)

Henry: "they come full of self, and are sent away empty of Christ"

Mary's song turns the world upside down — the proud, the powerful and the full go down; the humble and the hungry are lifted up.

ἐσκίρτησεν

ESKIRTĒSEN · "LEAPED" · G4640

From *skirtaō*, to leap or skip for joy. Used only three times in the New Testament: twice here (vv. 41, 44, "leaped in my womb for joy") and in Luke 6:23, "Be glad in that day and leap for joy." In the Greek Old Testament it describes Jacob and Esau struggling in Rebekah's womb (Genesis 25:22). Luke calls the unborn John a *brephos*, "baby" (vv. 41, 44) — the same word he uses for the newborn Jesus in the manger (2:12, 16).

μεγαλύνει

MEGALYNEI · "EXALTS, MAGNIFIES" · G3170

From *megas*, great: to make great, to declare great. The Latin of this word, *Magnificat*, has named Mary's song ever since. A telescope makes a star look as big as it really is; Mary's soul does the same for God. Sproul: "That's what it means to magnify—to lift God up in exaltation." Verse 48's "humble state" is *tapeinōsis* (G5014), low estate — the word picked up again in verse 52, "exalted those who were humble."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that Mary went "the considerable distance (somewhere between 80 and 100 miles)" and probably sought someone who could understand. At her greeting, "Though John wasn't born yet, he had a spiritual awareness and could respond to the Spirit of God." Elizabeth's blessing on Mary's faith carries a lesson: "God promises should never make us passive; they should prompt us to seize them by faith." Mary's song "resembles Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, but it also has at least 12 other allusions to the Old Testament" — "Mary was a woman who studied and knew God's Word." With Liefeld: "Only sinners need a Savior."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

In "Mary's Visit to Elizabeth" (20 Nov 2011) Sproul insists "the child in her womb was alive, was human, and was a person," and he speaks to the wounded as well as the guilty: abortion "is a grave and heinous sin, but it is not unforgivable." In "The Magnificat (Part 1)" (27 Nov) he hears Scripture in Mary's mouth: "Mary, as a young Jewish girl, did something that most Jewish girls did in her day: memorize Scripture." To magnify is "to lift God up in exaltation." Verse 48 is personal — "He looked at me. He noticed me." And the fear of verse 50 "is not in the sense of being frightened like you would be by a burglar or a ghost."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Mary's Magnificat" (Luke 1:46–47, MTP 51) is a call to sing, because "singing is the natural language of joy." Mary did not delay: "Unbelief would have said, "Wait." Fear would have said, "Be silent."" So, he pleads, "do not wait, for your song will spoil if you do." Then he teaches us to sing after Mary's manner — "Mary sings very reverently, and so should we" — and personally: "we must always mind that our personal note is not omitted." He admits the paradox of her word: "We cannot really make God great, though that is the meaning of the word." And he presses it home: "If thou dost never praise God, my friend, thou canst never go to heaven." "But you can all praise God."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry calls the meeting of the two women a picture of fellowship: "as in water face answers to face, so doth the heart of man to man, of Christian to Christian." Elizabeth's word to Mary holds for every believer: "Believing souls are blessed souls, and will be found so at last." Mary's song begins in the soul because "Praising work must be soul work." In its reversals Henry sees how God works: He "puts contempt upon the haughty and honour upon the humble." The hungry are filled, for "To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet," while the self-satisfied "come full of self, and are sent away empty of Christ."

V
MOVEMENT

LUKE 1:57–80

The Sunrise from on High

"His name is John," a loosed tongue, and Zacharias' song of visitation

57 *Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.* 58 *Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great* ⟳ *mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.*
59 *And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.* 60 *But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John."* 61 *And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name."* 62 *And they made signs to his*

father, as to what he wanted him called. 63 *And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished.* 64 *And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.* 65 *Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.* 66 *All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.* 67 *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:* 68 *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,* 69 *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant—* 70 *As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—* 71 *Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;* 72 *To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant,* 73 *The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,* 74 *To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,* 75 *In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.* 76 *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;* 77 *To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,* 78 *Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,* 79 *TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace."* 80 *And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

LUKE 1:57-80

"The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them."

ISAIAH 9:2

ἐπεσκέψατο

EPESKEPSATO · "HAS VISITED" · G1980

From *episkeptomai*, to look upon, to come and see about someone — to visit with care. The song opens and closes with it: God "has visited us" (v. 68) and "the Sunrise from on high will visit us" (v. 78). Sproul ties it to *episkopos*, the overseer or bishop, and to providence — God's watchful care. Luke uses it again when Nain's widow gets her son back: "God has visited His people!" (7:16).

ἀνατολή

ANATOLÉ · "SUNRISE, DAYSPRING" · G395

The rising of the sun, and so "the east." The KJV's "dayspring" keeps the picture. In the Greek Old Testament the same word translates the messianic "Branch" that "sprouts" from David (Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12), and Malachi promised that "the sun of righteousness will rise" (4:2). Zacharias joins the two: the Messiah dawns on those who "sit in darkness and the shadow of death" (v. 79). Verse 69's "horn" (*keras*, G2768) is the strong horn of a bull — a picture of power to save.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes the neighbors' mistake with a smile: "They treated Zacharias as if he were deaf, not mute." His tablet was not a vote: "It wasn't "I think his name should be John." For Zacharias, this was recognition of a fact, not a suggestion," and "Even though he had failed before, God gave Zacharias a second chance at faith." In the song, "The prophetic voice of the Lord had been silent for 400 years," and "the first focus of his prophecy is the unborn Jesus," then John, "the prophet of the Highest." The deserts of verse 80 are no waste: "that is where God trains many of His prophets."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

In "The Birth of John the Baptist" (18 Dec 2011) Sproul sees the neighbors' joy as "the communion of saints" and the naming as obedience over custom: "He already has his name, and his name is John." Fittingly, "the first words out of this man's mouth were praise and adoration for his God." In the Benedictus sermons (Jan 2012) the key is visitation — "Those visits can be either wonderful and redemptive or tragic as they bring His judgment," so "it is impossible to be neutral with respect to Christ." Salvation is rescue from God's wrath: "The forgiveness of sins is not something that you merit," and "When God forgives sinners, He forgives them forever."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In "The Tender Mercy of Our God" on verse 78, Spurgeon reads the Greek *splanchna* as "The mercy of the heart of our God." "The eternal God has thrown His whole soul into the business of redeeming men"; "God made heaven and earth with His fingers, but He gave His Son with His heart in order that He might save sinners." The visit is personal — "He has not merely pitied us from a distance" — and it comes like the dawn, gently and surely: "The dayspring is not the noon, but it is the sure guarantee of it." It does not wait for us to deserve it: "He gives with gladness to those who have no deservings of any kind." Like a lost caravan at sunrise, "The dayspring has saved them from swift destruction by discovering the way of peace."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry reads the birth as God keeping time: "Promised mercies are to be expected when the full time for them is come, and not before." The neighbors model love — "We ought to take pleasure in the prosperity of our neighbours and friends." "When Zacharias could not speak, he wrote," and then: "Infidelity closed his mouth, and now believing opens it again; he believes, therefore he speaks." Salvation leads to service, for "God must be served with a filial fear, a reverent obedient fear," and "The very bonds which he has loosed do bind us faster unto him." Of John in the desert: "Many a one is qualified for great usefulness, who yet is buried alive."

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From the promise to Abraham to the throne of David and the dawn of Isaiah

> *"Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."*
>
> GENESIS 18:14

> *"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."*
>
> 2 SAMUEL 7:12-13

> *"A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.""*
>
> ISAIAH 40:3

> *"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple ..."*
>
> MALACHI 3:1

> *"But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."*
>
> MALACHI 4:2

> *"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."*
>
> GALATIANS 4:4-5

> *"Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!""*
>
> LUKE 7:16

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik points out that Jesus Himself later said the Elijah promise of verse 17 "was fulfilled in John," and he quotes Trapp on the harmony of the prophets Zacharias invokes: "There were so many prophets, yet they all had one mouth, so sweet is their harmony."

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one chapter. Guzik walks the history and the customs; Sproul preaches it as doctrine — the sin of unbelief, the virgin conception, the danger of exalting Mary, salvation from wrath; Spurgeon sings with Mary; Henry turns each verse into counsel for ordinary believers. They agree that God keeps His word on His own timetable, and that the right answer to His word is to believe it.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · The exact truth	Diligent research; the most comprehensive gospel; Theophilus an official.	Not an eyewitness but a historian who checks the sources.	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	Religion teaches good manners; others' work should quicken ours.
II · Zacharias	Incense is a picture of prayer; unbelief kept him from enjoying the promise.	God remembers every promise; Abraham got mercy, Zacharias got justice.	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	Incense without prayer is a shell without the kernel.
III · The annunciation	Her question was wonder-filled faith; "let it be" fits every promise.	No virgin had ever conceived; Mary is a sinner saved by grace.	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	A divine power undertakes it; nothing is to be despaired of.
IV · The Magnificat	John responded to the Spirit; Mary knew God's Word; only sinners need a Savior.	The unborn child is a person; "He looked at me. He noticed me."	Sing now — your song will spoil if you wait; you can all praise God.	Praising work must be soul work; full of self, empty of Christ.
V · The Benedictus	A second chance at faith; 400 silent years end; the desert trains prophets.	God visits in mercy or judgment; no one is neutral about Christ.	The mercy of God's heart; the dawn is the guarantee of the noon.	Unbelief closed his mouth; believing opened it.

LUKE 1:1–80 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **Faith stands on history.** Sproul: "The New Testament is committed to the historical foundation of the truth of our faith." Luke checked his sources so Theophilus could know "the exact truth" (*asphaleia*, v4). SPROUL
- **Godly people still suffer.** Zacharias and Elizabeth were "righteous in the sight of God" and still barren (vv6–7). Sproul: "There was no hidden sin." Pain is not always punishment. THE TEXT
- **Old prayers are not forgotten prayers.** Henry: "Prayers made when we were young and coming into the world may be answered when we are old and going out of the world." HENRY
- **Unbelief is a moral problem.** Sproul: "Zacharias' problem wasn't an intellectual problem; it was a moral one." Guzik: unbelief did not cancel the promise; "it just kept Zacharias from enjoying it." SPROUL
- **Same question, different heart.** "How will I know?" (v18) and "How can this be?" (v34) sound alike. Guzik: one was "skeptical unbelief," the other "wonder-filled faith." GUZIK
- **Grace received, not grace to give.** *Kecharitōmenē* (v28) is passive — Mary was graced. Guzik: "Mary's grace was a received grace." Mary herself sings of "God my Savior" (v47). THE GREEK
- **The right answer to every promise.** "May it be done to me according to your word" (v38). The lowest title she knew — *doulē*, bondslave — was the one she chose. THE TEXT

- **The unborn are persons.** Luke calls John in the womb a *brephos*, a baby (v41), the word he uses for Jesus in the manger (2:12). He leaped for joy at the presence of his Lord. THE GREEK
- **God turns the world upside down.** The proud are scattered, rulers brought down, the rich sent away empty; the humble and the hungry are lifted up (vv51–53). Henry: "To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." HENRY
- **The silence ends in praise.** Henry: "Infidelity closed his mouth, and now believing opens it again." Sproul: "the first words out of this man's mouth were praise and adoration for his God." HENRY

† Questions for the Table

1 **Luke wrote so Theophilus could know "the exact truth" about what he had been taught. What do I believe about Jesus only because someone told me, and what have I checked for myself?**

Faith stands on things that actually happened (Sproul).

1:1-4; 2 Pet 1:16

2 **Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous and still carried a deep disappointment for years. What long-standing prayer have I stopped praying — and why?**

Your petition has been heard.

1:6-7, 13

3 **When God's promise came, Zacharias "looked at the circumstances first, and what God can do last" (Guzik). Where am I doing the same right now?**

Unbelief did not cancel the promise; it cost him the joy.

1:18-20

4 **Mary called herself the Lord's bondslave and said, "may it be done to me according to your word," knowing what it might cost her reputation. What is God's word asking me to say yes to that will cost me something?**

She was humble, she was willing, and she was obedient (Sproul).

1:34-38

5 **Mary's song says God scatters the proud and fills the hungry. Am I coming to God full of myself or hungry for Him?**

They come full of self, and are sent away empty of Christ (Henry).

1:51-53; James 4:6

6 **Zacharias' first words after nine months of silence were praise. What would my first words be if God gave me a second chance at faith today?**

God gave Zacharias a second chance at faith (Guzik).

1:63-68

Luke 1 begins with a careful historian and ends with a child in the wilderness, and in between God keeps every promise He has made. He hears an old couple's prayer, overshadows a willing virgin, and opens a silenced mouth in praise. Nothing will be impossible with God — so take Him at His word, and let the Sunrise from on high guide your feet into the way of peace.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) completed his *Commentary* himself through the Gospels and Acts. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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