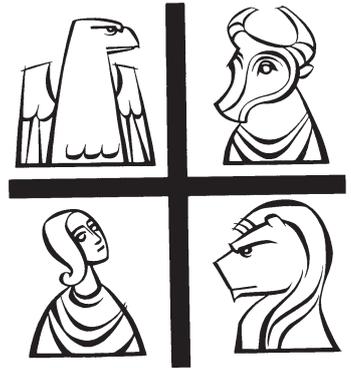


Reading Luke in Lent

Gospel of Luke 1: 1–25



Dedication to Theophilus

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative
² of the things that have been accomplished among us,
³ just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses
and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,
⁴ it seemed good to me also,
having followed all things closely for some time past,
to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,
that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,
of the division of Abijah.
And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.
⁶ And they were both righteous before God,
walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.
⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren,
and both were advanced in years.
⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,
⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood,
he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.
¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.
¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord
standing on the right side of the altar of incense.
¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.
¹³ But the angel said to him,
'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard,
and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.
¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,
¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord.
And he must not drink wine or strong drink,
and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.
¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God,
¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah,
to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,
and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.'
¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel,
'How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.'

19 And the angel answered him,
'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God,
and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.
20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak
until the day that these things take place,
because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.'
21 And the people were waiting for Zechariah,
and they were wondering at his delay in the temple.
22 And 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 And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.
24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived,
and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying,
25 'Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me,
to take away my reproach among people.'

Reflection

The Gospel of Luke begins in a formal manner addressed to Theophilus and sets out Luke's credentials as a historian. The narrative begins with the events leading up to the birth of Jesus, the only Gospel to do so, starting with the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist.

- The Gospel begins with a story of a couple's longed for hope being fulfilled. The initial reactions of Zechariah and Elizabeth are different: one looks for a sign but is made silent; one retreats into silence to give thanks to God.
 - What are your long term hopes?
 - How do you respond when you receive God's blessings?

Prayer

O God, you raise up prophets in every age.
Let your Spirit, who filled John the Baptist from his mother's womb,
fill us with joy as we celebrate his birth.

May the example of his life,
the urgency of his preaching,
and the power of his prayers
make us ready to receive the one he announced,
Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.