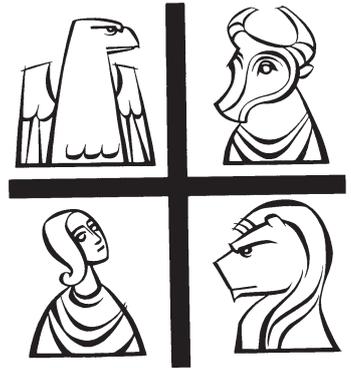


# Reading Luke in Lent

## Gospel of Luke 1: 1–25



### Dedication to Theophilus

<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative  
<sup>2</sup> of the things that have been accomplished among us,  
<sup>3</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses  
and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,  
<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> 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.  
<sup>6</sup> And they were both righteous before God,  
walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.  
<sup>7</sup> But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren,  
and both were advanced in years.  
<sup>8</sup> Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,  
<sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood,  
he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.  
<sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.  
<sup>11</sup> And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord  
standing on the right side of the altar of incense.  
<sup>12</sup> And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.  
<sup>13</sup> 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.  
<sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,  
<sup>15</sup> 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.  
<sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God,  
<sup>17</sup> 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.'  
<sup>18</sup> 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.'

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## 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?

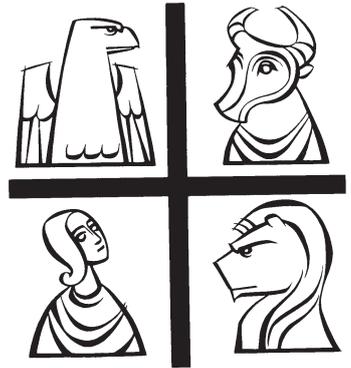
## Prayer

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.

# Reading Luke in Lent

## Gospel of Luke 1: 26–38



### Birth of Jesus Foretold

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God  
to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,  
<sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph,  
of the house of David.  
And the virgin's name was Mary.  
<sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said,  
'Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!'  
<sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying,  
and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.  
<sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her,  
'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.  
<sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,  
and you shall call his name Jesus.  
<sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.  
And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,  
<sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever,  
and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel,  
'How will this be, since I am a virgin?'  
<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her,  
'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;  
therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.  
<sup>36</sup> And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son,  
and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.  
<sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.'  
<sup>38</sup> And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord;  
let it be to me according to your word.'  
And the angel departed from her.

---

## Reflection

The Annunciation is contrasted with the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist to show that Jesus will be the greater. In the first there is the miracle of the barren Elizabeth conceiving whereas here it is Mary the virgin. John will be great before the Lord and will prepare a people for the Lord. Jesus will be the Son of the Most High and his kingdom will never end.

- Mary is a young woman who is not found among the rich and the powerful. The antithesis of where the contemporary society might have expected God to be changing human history.
  - What surprising places do you see God at work today?
  - To what new life is God inviting you to say Yes?

## Prayer

Here in our midst, O God of mystery,  
you disclose the secret hidden for countless ages.  
For you we wait; for you we listen.

Upon hearing you voice  
may we, like Mary, embrace your will  
and become a dwelling fit for your Word.

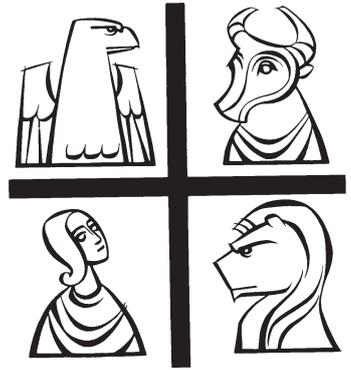
Grant this through him whose coming is certain,  
whose day draws near:  
your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.  
Amen.

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# Reading Luke in Lent

## Gospel of Luke 1: 39–56



### Mary visits Elizabeth

39 In those days Mary arose  
and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,  
40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.  
41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary,  
the baby leaped in her womb.  
And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,  
42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry,  
'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!  
43 And why is this granted to me  
that the mother of my Lord should come to me?  
44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears,  
the baby in my womb leaped for joy.  
45 And blessed is she who believed  
that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.'

### Mary's Song of Praise: The Magnificat

46 And Mary said,  
  
'My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
51 He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate;  
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
55 as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.'  
  
56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

## Reflection

The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth is filled with joy. John the Baptist's leaping in the womb is the first of his prophetic gestures — pointing towards Jesus. Elizabeth pours blessings on Mary; for the child in her womb and for her faith. Mary responds with a hymn of praise to God — the Magnificat. It recalls the psalms and canticles of the Old Testament, especially the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1–10), but is also a vision of the coming kingdom which her son will inaugurate.

- The joys of family and friendship can be taken for granted.
  - For whom do you pray for God's blessings?
  - What aspects of contemporary society do you hope to see turned upside down?

## Prayer

Who are we, Lord God,  
that you should come to us?  
Yet you have visited your people  
and redeemed us in your Son.

As we prepare to celebrate his birth,  
make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of your Word,  
and move us by your Spirit to bless your wonderful works.

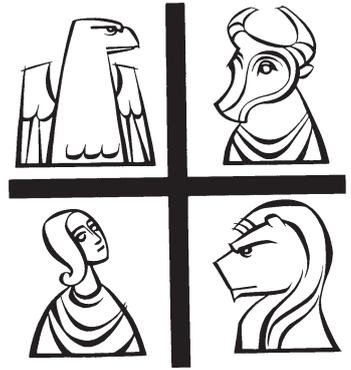
We ask this through him whose coming is certain,  
whose day draws near:  
your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.  
Amen.

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# Reading Luke in Lent

## Gospel of Luke 1: 57–80



### The Birth of John the Baptist

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth,  
and she bore a son.  
58 And her neighbours and relatives heard  
that the Lord had shown great mercy to her,  
and they rejoiced with her.  
59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child.  
And they would have called him Zechariah after his father,  
60 but his mother answered,  
'No; he shall be called John.'  
61 And they said to her,  
'None of your relatives is called by this name.'  
62 And they made signs to his father,  
inquiring what he wanted him to be called.  
63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote,  
'His name is John.'  
And they all wondered.  
64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed,  
and he spoke, blessing God.  
65 And fear came on all their neighbours.  
And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea,  
66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts,  
saying, 'What then will this child be?'  
For the hand of the Lord was with him.

### Zechariah's Prophecy

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,  
68 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
71 that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
74 that we, being delivered 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 before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high  
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 And the child grew and became strong in spirit,  
and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

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## Reflection

The crowd is often fickle in Luke’s Gospel. They begin by rejoicing with Elizabeth but then put pressure on her about the name of the child. Because she does not give the expected answer they turn to her husband who has been struck deaf and mute. Then the neighbours are struck with fear as they recognise that God is at work among them. Zechariah can speak again because he is faithful to God’s promise and the first thing he does is to bless God.

- In his song of praise Zechariah explains how God is at work through the birth of John the Baptist.
  - Where have you experienced the tender mercy of God?
  - How might you be a light that brings comfort to those who sit in darkness?

## Prayer

Amen.