

Introduction – The Word of God

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **Hebrews 4: 12**

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. **2 Timothy 3: 16-17**

Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path. **Psalms 119: 105**

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever. **Isaiah 40: 8**

“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” **Luke 11: 28**

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **Matthew 7: 24**

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. **Matthew 24: 35**

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” **Matthew 4: 4**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **John 1: 1**

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. **John 1: 14**

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.
1 Pet 3: 15

“We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behaviour.”
— **John R.W. Scott**

“We need to encourage new believers to feed on God’s Word—it is nourishment for the soul.”

“The Bible is not an option, it is a necessity. You cannot grow spiritually strong without it.”

— **Billy Graham**

“The Bible is not Man’s word about God, but God’s Word about Man.” — **John Barth**

“Talk to God through Prayer, listen to God through His Word.”

Luke's Gospel

Universal Good News – God's love for all of humanity

Dedication of the Gospel to Theophilus – **1: 1-4**

Announcement to the Shepherds – **2: 10** ... for see I am bringing you good news of great joy *for all the people*

Song of the Angels – **2:14** ... and on earth peace among *those whom he favours!*"

Song of Simeon – **2:29-32** "... a light for revelation *to the Gentiles* and for glory to your people Israel." (Cf. **Isaiah 40: 5; 49: 6**)

Preaching of John the Baptist – **3: 6** "... and *all flesh shall see* the salvation of God." Compare the same text in Matthew and Mark **Mt 3: 3 & Mk 1: 2-3**; and the source in **Isaiah 40: 3-4**

List of ancestors – While Matthew begins his genealogy with Abraham the Father of the Jews, Luke traces it back to Adam the first Man –**Mt 1: 2-17 & Lk 3: 23-28**. Thus Luke includes the whole human race in the saving plan of God.

Chronological/historical references – Luke dates the events in Jesus' life within the larger context of the Roman Empire and Jewish life.

The Nazareth Manifesto – In the Synagogue Jesus' reads the prophecy of Isaiah (**Is 61: 1-2**) from the scroll making it his own programme of action to bring about God's kingdom among all the people especially the most needy.

Sent to the Gentiles – Jesus quotes examples of prophets, Elijah and Elisha who were sent to non-Israelites, the widow of Sidon and the leper of Syria – **4: 24-27**.

Gentiles among his followers – People from the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon were also his followers and recipients of his healing powers – **6: 17**.

Roman officer's faith – **7: 9** "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

Jesus' relatives – **8: 21** "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

The queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh are portrayed as better receivers of the good news than the Jews – **11: 29-32**.

The kingdom of God is not just for the chosen people the Israelites – **13: 29-30**.

Jerusalem is just the starting point to proclaim the good news "*to all the nations*" – **24: 47**.

Luke's Gospel – A Gospel of Liberation

Friend and Defender of the Poor

The poor have a privileged place in Luke's Gospel. Jesus *identifies himself* with them right from his birth in the manger to the death on the cross.

The Virgin Mary – The Magnificat – **1: 48a, 51 -56** – one of the most revolutionary documents in literature – a programmatic reversal of fortunes of the rich and the proud and the lowly and the hungry.

The birth of Jesus, the Messiah of the world in abject poverty – **2: 7**.

The Messiah's birth announced to humble shepherds – the first visitors- 8:20; compare **Mt 2: 1-12**

The Purification rite in the Temple – offering of the poor – **2: 24 (Cf. Lev 12: 6, 8)**

In the Synagogue in Nazareth - the Manifesto of Jesus – 4:18-19 – "...to bring good news to the poor (**Cf. Is 61: 1-2**)

Sermon on the Plains – **6: 20-21** – Blessed are the poor, the hungry and those who weep

Summary of his works for the poor – **7:22** – "...the poor have good news brought to them."

An attitude of humility is needed – **9: 48b** – "the least is the greatest:

The disciples of Jesus are expected to practise poverty – **10: 4**

This however does not mean that Luke presents Jesus only as a friend to the poor to the exclusion of the rich. Jesus had friends among the rich too.

Three times we see Jesus as a guest in some Pharisee's house. **7: 36; 11: 37; 14: 1**

Another of Jesus' friends is Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council – **23: 50-53**

Among his woman disciples was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, a member of the high society **8: 3**.

Jesus was at home with the rich and the poor, the distinguished and the people of disrepute, the saint and the sinner – he was a friend to all of them and cared for each of them.

Luke's Gospel

Good News to Sinners – Forgiveness

Luke sensitively portrays Jesus' attitude to sinners during his ministry.

Call of the disciples:

The very first man whom Jesus calls to be his disciple, Peter confesses that he is a sinful man **5: 1-8** “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

Jesus also calls Levi, a tax collector considered to be a sinner, to be his disciple. **5: 27**

Jesus mingles freely with tax collectors and sinners **5: 29-32**

Jesus not only forgives a woman who is a sinner, but even holds her up as a model to the Pharisee Simon – **7: 36-50**. This reveals Jesus attitude to sinners – respectful and caring.

Jesus associates freely with tax collectors and sinners – **15: 1**

He dines in the house of Zacchaeus – **19: 1-10** “...For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

On the cross Jesus even forgives his executioners – **23: 34** “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

One of the criminals who was crucified along with Jesus is forgiven and given an instant promise – **23: 43** “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

After his resurrection, before he ascends to the Father Jesus gives the mandate to his disciples – **24: 47** “...that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations.”

And so Luke's Gospel is rightly called “the Gospel of Mercy” and Luke the evangelist is extolled as “the scribe of the gentleness of Christ.”

Exaltation of Women in Luke's Gospel

Luke has often been hailed as the evangelist of women. In a society that considered women as mere chattel Luke portrays Jesus as not only giving them their due rights in society, but also extolling them and projecting them as models.

In the Infancy narratives Mary, Elizabeth and Anna are giving prominence. Each of them is paired with a male counterpart, namely Zachariah, Joseph and Simeon showing that in the birth events of Jesus women were as important as men if not more – **chapters 1 & 2**.

The annunciation to the Virgin Mary – **1: 26-38** – illustrates the important role that Mary was given in the salvific plan of God. The salvation of humankind depended on the response of the young girl Mary.

In the galaxy of women that Luke presents us in his Gospel widows have a special place. Anna in the temple – **2: 36-38** – although very old (84 years) and a widow is acclaimed as a 'prophet.' The widow of Nain – **7: 11-17** – Jesus has compassion on her and brings her dead son back to life. And the poor widow who drops two small copper coins in the treasury in the Temple is praised by Jesus as having offered more than all the others.

There were many sick women who were healed and restored to life by Jesus – Peter's mother in law **4: 38-39**; the daughter of Jarius who is brought back to life – **8: 40-42 & 49-56**; a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for 12 years – **8:43-48**; and the woman possessed and crippled for 18 years – **13: 10-17**.

In another instance Jesus not only forgives a repentant sinner but holds her up as an example to Simon the Pharisee – **7: 36-50**.

Women were never considered disciples of a rabbi, however, Jesus went against this custom and we find that women were close companions of Jesus and his apostles even ministering to them and providing for their needs out of their resources – **8: 1-3**.

Jesus always found a welcome in the house of Martha and Mary who were his friends **10: 38-42**.

There are also 2 parabolic women who are found only in this gospel and they both have their own importance. The woman who searches for the lost coin and rejoices when she finds it

15: 8-10 is paralleled to the rejoicing in heaven over a sinner who repents. As an example for perseverance in prayer is the woman in the parable of a widow who persistently pleads with a judge for justice **18: 1-8**; and she forms a parallel to the man who insistently implores with his friend for a piece of bread **11: 5-8**. Thus Luke places women on par with men in all these parables.

There are also in Luke's Gospel groups of women who play an important role. There are the 3 women mentioned by name in the company of the Twelve – **8: 1-3**, and "*many others*" who were perhaps constantly accompanying Jesus in his wandering ministry, and who looked after his and the apostles' needs **8: 3**. Moreover, when all of his male disciples had deserted their master during the crucial time of his sufferings, Luke presents a group of women from Jerusalem following Jesus carrying the cross, "beating their breasts and wailing for him" – **23: 27-31**. Luke also mentions women from far off Galilee who had followed him throughout the way of the cross. They take note of the tomb in which Jesus is buried, and then they return to it with spices and ointments that they themselves had prepared, to anoint the body for the burial – **23: 55-24:3**. It is now the same women with Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James who are presented by Luke as "*apostles to the apostles*" since they are the ones who convey the good news of the resurrection of Jesus to the Twelve and others – **24: 8-11**.

Luke's Gospel – A Gospel of Social Justice

Towards a Perfect Society

Luke in his Gospel displays a strong sense of social justice, and so his Gospel is often hailed as 'a Gospel of Social Justice.' Jesus identifies himself with the poor right from his birth in a manger, until his death on the cross. Throughout his ministry we see him strongly opposing the unjust structures of the Jewish society.

Mary's song of praise encapsulates the new order of things that Jesus' ministry seeks to establish – **1: 50-53** – he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, he has brought down the powerful from the thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

The tax collectors working for the Roman authority were notorious for overcharging and cheating the poor and the ignorant. (**3: 12-14**) John the Baptist warns them: "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." And he advises the soldiers: "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

The hallmark of Jesus' mission is "good news to the poor" – **4: 16-21** – "to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Blessings and Woes – **6: 20-26**. While the poor, the hungry and those who weep are blessed: "yours is the kingdom of God, you will be filled" and "you will laugh" respectively; woes are heaped on those who are rich, those who are full and those who are laughing now: they will have no consolation, will be hungry and will mourn and weep.

The poor, the sick, the disabled and the dead are the beneficiaries of Jesus' good works – **7: 22** – "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them." And when he sends out his disciples Jesus asks them to do the same – **10: 3-9**, "cure the sick who are there and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

Jesus teaches the true spirit of almsgiving – **11: 41** – ‘give for alms those things that are within,’ **12: 33** “Sell your possessions and give alms,” **18: 22** “Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come, follow me.” Similarly Jesus asks his followers to practise hospitality to the poor – **14: 12-14** – “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.”

The right use of wealth is also instilled by Jesus – **16: 9-13** – You cannot serve God and wealth.

Jesus teaches social responsibility of the rich through the parable of the rich man and Lazarus – **16: 19-31**.

Wealth may sometimes be a hindrance to complete surrender to God – the rich ruler is sad because he is attached to his wealth – **18:18-25**

Zachaeus is a wonderful example of the impact of Jesus on sinners **19:1-10**

Besides unjust social structures, Jesus also opposed religious and social structures that were unjust. That is why Simeon prophecies even when he is a little baby in the Temple – **2:34-35** “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus, He is “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness.” **3:3-14**. His mission is “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.” He sternly reprimands the people and exhorts them to give up their sinful ways and to do good.

Jesus knew that he would meet with persecution, but he still continued to preach the good news to the poor – **4:24-30**.

Jesus shows that laws are not more important than human beings: **6:1-5**.

Strong condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law – **11:37-52**. Jesus also denounces the Scribes **20:45-47**.

Nevertheless Jesus was a law abiding citizen – **20:20-25**.

Discipleship in Luke's Gospel

Of all the Gospel writers, Luke alone insists on the fact that the following of Jesus is **radical**, and it implies a **costly** commitment. This is seen already in the call of the apostles. While in Mark and Matthew, the apostles (Peter, Andrew, James and John) left their nets, boat, their fathers, hired men etc (**Mk 1: 16-20; Mt 4: 18-22**) and followed Jesus, Luke alone mentions that “**They left everything** and followed Jesus (**Lk 5: 1-11, 27**) a full, total and absolute commitment to Jesus.

This radicality is seen in all the general calls to discipleship in the Gospel of Luke. There are 4 specific texts in which Luke speaks about discipleship namely **9: 23-27; 9: 57- 62; 14:25-33** and **18: 18-20**. In these 4 the two terms which denote discipleship, namely “**to follow**” or “**disciple**” are used. In all these we may notice the radical element in discipleship.

- 1) **9: 23-27**; compare with **Mk 8: 34-9:1; Mt 16: 24-28**. Luke alone of all the three evangelists uses the term “**daily**” in the carrying of the cross. The radicality consists in this that discipleship is shown here in the fidelity to **day-to-day** humdrum life (which is daily martyrdom), and not merely once-in-a-lifetime heroic act of martyrdom.
- 2) **9: 57-62**; compare with **Mt 8: 18-22**. Here Luke like Matthew expresses radicality in the following of Jesus in expressions like “**nowhere**” and “**no one;**” but he also adds the once a person decides to follow Jesus there should be no looking back. Thus in following Jesus Luke stresses the importance of total giving up of place, person and self.
- 3) **14: 25-33**; compare with **Mt 10 37-39**. In the persons to be renounced by the disciple Luke alone mentions “**wife.**” The person to whom one must always be attached, must be left behind if she comes in the way of true discipleship. Similarly, the disciple must also give up **all his possessions** (**14: 33; 18: 22**). Note that in Matthew one does not find the same severity or radicality.
- 4) **18: 18-30**; compare with **Mk 10:17-22; Mt 19 16-22**. Once again Luke uses as conditions for discipleship the leaving behind of “**wife**” and “**all**” not found in Mark or Matthew.

Hence according to Luke discipleship would mean:

Negatively: to leave, give up, not to own etc self, all possessions and persons including “wife.” Discipleship in Luke is an either/or choice, everything/or nothing at all.

Positively: to follow Jesus and work for the kingdom; to allow oneself to be guided and ruled by Christ and his values: “follow me” – **9: 23, 18: 22**; “proclaim the kingdom of God” – **9: 60**; “be my disciple” – **14: 26, 27, 33**.

Being detached from things and from persons, the disciple is free to attach herself/himself to God. Not being possessed by creatures the disciple allows herself/himself to be possessed solely by God. The path of discipleship is narrow; there is no room for compromise.

The Infancy Narrative in Luke's Gospel

The function of **Chapter 1** is to give an artistic structure to the narrative by drawing a parallel between the announcement and birth of John and that of Jesus, much like a *diptych painting* with its two panels facing each other.

Luke's purpose goes even further to include his architectonic perception of God's plan dividing all history into three parts – the time of **the Law and the Prophets**, the time of **Jesus**, and the time of **the Church** like a *trptych*. Jesus of course is the centre piece. The time of the Law and the Prophets is the period that Christians associate with the Old Testament. The time of Jesus runs from the baptism to the ascension (**Acts 1: 21-22**) and is the subject of the Gospel proper. The two are connected by the Infancy Narratives in **Luke 1-2**. The time of the church's bearing witness to Jesus runs from after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost until the message reaches the ends of the earth (**Acts 1:8**).

Zechariah's prophecy (**1: 67-79**), also called the **Benedictus** is in fact a **very early Christology**, **the oldest preserved Christian prayer of praise** wherein Jewish believers expressed themselves entirely **in the language of their ancestors**.

The Annunciation, the Visitation and the Magnificat (1: 26-56)

The annunciation to Mary follows the same format – time, place, and the primary characters. The difference – in Elizabeth's case the conception of the Baptist is God's answer to her prayers, in Mary's it is purely God's initiative – a divine creative action by the Spirit of God and without human intercourse.

The Gabriel-Zechariah and the Gabriel-Mary dialogues follow a similar format, a set pattern of annunciations of birth found in the Old Testament (Cf. Ishmael, Isaac and Samson). However Luke underlines the uniqueness of Jesus in **Lk 3: 16**.

The identity of Jesus as the Son of David goes back in Jewish thought to **2 Samuel 7: 12-13** which is slightly rephrased in **1 32-33**. Mary's question allows Gabriel to explain God's role and thus highlight the other half of Jesus' identity. He is not only Son of David, he is Son of God. "The Holy Spirit will come on you..... The holy child will be called the Son of God" **1: 35**. This is not language of OT prophecy but of New Testament preaching, which Paul in 10 Romans

specifically calls “gospel.” When Luke reports Mary’s answer, he is describing not only one who is consenting to be the physical mother of Jesus but also and very importantly one who meets Jesus’ criterion for his family of disciples – indeed the first one **1: 38 & 8: 21**.

The Visitation – Mary’s haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth reflects her obedience to the plan of God. Elizabeth is the mother of a prophet, and being filled with the Holy Spirit pronounces a macarism, a blessing **1: 41-42**. Compare Jesus response to a macarism by a woman in the crowd **11:28**, and his own encomium of his mother **8:21**. So Mary is doubly blessed.

Now Mary responds by blessing the Lord himself in the Magnificat, a canticle in the style of Jewish psalmody, a mosaic of Old Testament passages. When Mary calls herself “the handmaid of the Lord” she is echoing Hannah in **1 Sam 1: 11**. Compare Mary’s song of praise with Hannah’s canticle in **1 Sam 2: 1-10**. Whether or not the Magnificat came from an early Christian group of “Poor Ones,” it clearly shares their mentality. Mary has become their spokeswoman describing the salvific action of God **1: 51-53**.

Besides echoing the Old Testament the Magnificat anticipates Jesus’ teaching in the Beatitudes. Unlike Matthew’s eight beatitudes Luke has just 4 which are like sharp hammer blows that have no mollifying clauses such as “in spirit” or “after justice” Compare **Mt 5: 3-10 and Lk 6: 20-21**. So in Luke, Jesus is talking about concrete poor, hungry and suffering people. The 4 blessings in Luke are followed by 4 antithetical woes uttered by Jesus **6: 24-25**.

The Magnificat historically composed after Jesus had proclaimed such a gospel, reuses Jesus’ antithetical style to celebrate what God has done, exalting the lowly and the hungry, and putting down the proud, the mighty and the rich. Mary has heard from Gabriel the Christological identity of Jesus, now she does not proclaim the greatness of God because he has sent the Messiah, but rather she interprets the sending. This is what a disciple of Jesus must do, not just hear the good news and repeat it, but interpret it, so that people see and accept it truly as good news.

The birth of Jesus – Chapter 2 in Luke reads like an independent narrative, not related to the material in Chapter 1 even to the point of reintroducing and identifying Joseph and Mary as if nothing had been said of them previously.

Leaving aside the question of origins we find parallel patterns in Luke and Matthew despite the very different story lines. In both Matthew and Luke the Christological insight of Jesus' identity as God's Son has been moved back from the resurrection to the conception and been retroverted.

If the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke share the same Christology, they also share the tendency to dramatise that Christology against a background of the Old Testament, mixed with an anticipation of Jesus' ministry (**Lk 2: 1-20**) By mentioning Augustus Caesar Luke is evoking a picture of the glorious age of pastoral rule, the end of a century of civil war. The birthday of Augustus was celebrated throughout the empire and he was hailed as "the saviour of the whole world." An altar was built to "pax Augustae;" the heavenly chorus in Luke proclaimed the "Pax Christi."

The birth of Jesus (**2: 6-7**) – like Matthew, Luke is laconic about the birth itself: simply "She gave birth to her first-born son." But he lays emphasis on the description that follows: "...and she wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." This he repeats twice: **2: 12 and 2: 16**. The manger is not a sign of poverty but is probably meant to evoke God's complaint against Israel in **Isaiah 1: 3**: "The ox knows its owner and the donkey knows the manger of its lord; but Israel has not known me, and my people have not understood me." Now, when the good news of the birth of their Lord is proclaimed to the shepherds, they go to find the baby in the manger and begin to praise God. In other words, God's people have begun to know the manger of the Lord.

The Lucan story has a two-fold proclamation of the Messiah by angels **2: 10-11**. Luke has borrowed the precise titles from his accounts of early Christian preaching. Cf. **Acts 2: 32, 36**, Peter says that God raised Jesus and "made him both Lord and Messiah;" and in **Acts 5: 31** he says that God exalted Jesus as saviour. Now that the Christological understanding has been moved back from the resurrection to the conception/birth, the same titles are applicable to the new born child.

The second angelic proclamation is the canticle "*Gloria in Excelsis*" **2: 13-14**. This is one of the four poetic canticles in the Lucan infancy narrative. The other three are the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus* and the *Nunc Dimittis*. The *Gloria* is similar to the praise sung by the disciples as Jesus enters Jerusalem to begin his passion **19: 38**.

The Lucan birth scene describes the reactions of three different participants:

- 1) The shepherds. They symbolise an Israel which at last recognises its Lord; and they glorify and praise God for all they have seen and heard **2: 17, 20**.
- 2) A group of hearers who are astonished at all the shepherds report **2: 18**.
- 3) Mary who “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” **2: 19**. She is not above being astonished **2: 33**, but her hearing is more perceptive, she is a model Christian believer.

The Presentation in the Temple – although very different from Matthew’s story of the King Herod’s attempt to kill the child Jesus similar to Pharaoh’s attempt to kill the baby Moses. Luke’s account is a peaceful presentation of Jesus in the Jerusalem temple where he is greeted by Simeon and Anna, modelled on the Hannah’s presentation of the boy Samuel in the shrine at Shiloh where he was accepted by the priest Eli – **1Sam 1-2**. However, both Matthew and Luke are in fact presenting opposition to Jesus and foretelling his persecution.

There were in fact two customs for the Jews – one the purification of the mother in the Temple after the birth of a child at which she offered two pigeons or doves (**Lev 12: 1-8**); the second was the presentation of the first male child to the Lord, and the paying of the five shekels to buy him back. Although there seems to be some confusion about these two customs, theologically Luke is more interested in the presentation which he mentions five times and stresses that it was in accordance with the **law of the Lord** – **2: 22, 23, 24, 27, 39** rather than the purification (mentioned only once in the initial verse).

Simeon and Anna are two characters who could have stepped out of the pages of the OT. Luke identifies Anna as a prophetess **2: 36**, and Simeon moved by the Spirit to utter a prophecy about Jesus’ future **2: 34-35**. Thus “the Law and the Prophets” come together to establish a context for the beginning of Jesus’ career.

From Simeon’s prophecy that “a sword will pierce her soul” a practical conclusion would be that Mary’s greatness stems not from her physical motherhood of Jesus which gave her no special status according to the values Jesus preached. If she is remembered as a mother in the Christian community, it is not only because her womb bore Jesus and her breasts nourished him **11: 27**;

rather it is because she believed the Lord's word in a way that gave her a preeminent membership in his true family of disciples **1: 41; 8: 21**.

Luke's Gospel – a Gospel of Prayer

“More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” - Tennyson

Luke's Gospel highlights the significance of prayer and there are many instances of prayer spread throughout the Gospel.

The Greek text uses **4 different** words to describe the various forms of prayer. In the other Gospels only the word “*proseucheusthai*” meaning “to pray” is used **3: 21; 5: 16** etc. The other terms used exclusively by Luke are “*ainein*” which means “to praise” **2: 3, 2: 20**; “*doxazein*” which means “to glorify” **5: 25-26**; and “*eulogein*” which means “to bless” **1: 64, 2: 28**.

The very first incident in Luke's Gospel is set in the context of prayer **1: 10**; similarly the Gospel closes with the disciples of Jesus praying in the Temple after the ascension of Jesus **24: 52-53**.

Like Matthew and Mark, Luke too mentions various **instances of prayer** – **6: 28; 11: 2; 20: 47** etc. There are also many **other instances which are unique to Luke** – **1: 10; 3: 21; 5: 16; 6: 12; 9:18; 11: 1; 18: 1, 10, 11** – **9 instances in all**.

Luke mentions **Jesus praying in 7 places** which are **not found in the other Gospels** – **3: 21; 6: 12; 9: 18; 9: 28; 11: 1; 23: 34, 46**.

In addition there are **3 parables about prayer** found only in Luke. Two of these teach perseverance in prayer – **11: 5-13; 18: 1-8**; and the other exhorts humility in prayer – **18: 9-14**.

All the important events in the life of Jesus are accompanied by prayer. In the Infancy Narratives Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna and Jesus are all presented in the context of prayer, the Temple and the Holy Spirit. At his **baptism**, prayer and the Holy Spirit together form the backdrop for the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah and the Beloved of God – **3: 21-22**. The **transfiguration** also takes place in the context of prayer – **9: 28-29** and here once again it is accompanied by the revelation of the Father. At the **agony in the garden** not only does Jesus

pray persistently – **22: 41-44**, but he also asks his disciples to pray so as not to fall into temptation – **22: 40, 45**.

It is important to note that Jesus' prayers are usually filial, addressing God as "*Abba, Father*" – **10: 21, 22; 22: 42; 23: 34, 46**. This highlights the **trust and closeness of Jesus' relationship with the Father**. That is why Luke omits Jesus' prayer reciting Psalm **22: 1** "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" a prayer of seeming desperation found in **Mk 15: 34 and Mt 27: 46!!!**

Luke's Gospel – the Gospel of the Holy Spirit

Almost every page of Luke's Gospel is permeated with the presence, action and effects (prayer and joy) of the Holy Spirit. **At the very beginning** we are told that the Baptist will be filled with the Holy Spirit – **1: 15**; and **at the end**, we are informed that the apostles will be filled with the Holy Spirit, "clothed with power" – **24: 49**. "Power is the translation of the Greek work "dynamis" (cf. The English words dynamite, dynamic etc) expressing the quality of the potentiality of the Holy Spirit.

All the people who appear **in the Infancy narratives** are persons filled with the Spirit. **John the Baptist** is one to be filled with the Spirit – **1: 15**. At the annunciation to **Mary**, she is told "the Holy Spirit will come upon you" – **1: 35**, and the child to be born too will be filled with the Spirit, and hence called the "Son of God" – **1: 35**. When Mary visits her cousin, **Elizabeth** is filled with the Spirit – **1: 41**. And it is moved by the Holy Spirit that **Zechariah** utters his prophecy – **1: 67**.

In the Temple, Luke mentions **Simeon** being filled with the Spirit – **2: 25, 26, 27**. And though it is not stated explicitly the fact that **Anna** was prophesying implies that she too was filled with the Spirit – **2: 38**.

Jesus is portrayed as one constantly filled with the Spirit. Jesus according to the Baptist, will baptise "with the Holy Spirit and fire" **3: 16**. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus himself at his own **baptism** – **3: 22**. After his baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit in the wilderness to be

tempted – **4: 1**; and after the temptations he returned to Galilee filled with the power of the Spirit – **4: 14**.

At the beginning of his public ministry at Nazareth in the synagogue, Jesus affirms that “the Spirit of the Lord is upon (him) me” reading from the scroll the passage from Prophet **Isaiah 61: 1-2**.

When the seventy two disciples returned **after their ministry** Jesus “rejoiced in the Spirit” – **10: 21. To the people** who pray with trust, Jesus says the Father will give the Spirit – **11: 13**. He also warns the people about sins against the Holy Spirit **12: 10**. And he assures them that the Spirit will assist them during moments of persecution **12: 12**.

At the end of the Gospel, Jesus promises to send the Spirit (“**power from above**”) upon the disciples waiting in Jerusalem – **24: 49** and Acts **1: 4, 8**.

Luke’s Gospel – the Parables of Jesus

Parables form a significant form of Jesus’ teachings. (**Mk 4: 33-34**) The word “parable” is from a Greek word that literally means a comparison. Jesus used human, earthly, everyday seen experiences to refer to the unseen Kingdom of God. Parables make use of similes, metaphors and allegories to draw the comparison. Jesus never used fables like Aesop’s fables or the Pancha Tantra.

Parables contain three elements – a similitude, an insight and a challenge. The parables in Luke in general are in a triadic structure – example **Luke: 15: 11-32**. We have the father, the younger brother and the elder brother.

Now why did Jesus teach in parables? There were several reasons why Jesus chose to teach in parables.

- 1) The political situation – After 3 years of Greek rule, during the time of Jesus, Palestine was under the Roman Empire. Although a few Jewish Kings were nominal figure heads, the Governor appointed by Rome had all the power. Heavy taxes were levied, and the

Romans maintained strict military control over the Jews and their property. All political agitation and movements were under surveillance.

- 2) The expectation of Israel – Because of this strong Roman foreign rule and subordination to pagan authority; and because of their economic exploitation, the common people were in great poverty and distress. The Jewish people were secretly longing for the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel under the promised Messiah and King. As they found Jesus speaking with authority and performing miracles, the common people were hoping that Jesus was this King.

So Jesus had to explain to the people again and again that his kingdom was a spiritual kingdom of truth, justice, love and service. He avoided popular agitations and movements which confused his spiritual kingdom with any sort of political rule or kingdom.

- 3) In order to avoid any opposition to the religious authority of the Sanhedrin – The Pharisees and the Sadducees were fiercely jealous of their position and the authority and income that it brought with it. Hence, the Sanhedrin kept a close watch over Jesus by sending spies who frequently questioned and argued with Jesus when he was preaching in the Temple or the synagogue. Later they even plotted to kill him.

Under these circumstances Jesus had to use a method that would ensure his safety but convey the meaning effectively. So he chose to teach through parables.

Luke has parables that are common to Mark and Matthew and some which are not attested in Mark, but which are found in his and Matthew's Gospel probably from the Q source. However there are about 18 parables that are found only in Luke. Of these the 3 memorable ones are the Good Samaritan (**10: 25-47**), the Prodigal Son (**15: 11-32**), the two debtors (**7: 41-43**), the Rich Man and Lazarus (**16: 19-31**), all of which reveal the tender and compassionate love of God.