

# The Gospel of Luke

An Introduction

2014

# Luke: a gospel structured on geography, not genre

- Compared with Matthew's, with its alternation between story-telling and discourse.

# The geographical structure of Luke

- 1:1-4:13- Prologue – set in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the river Jordan and the desert
- 4:14 – 9:50 Jesus preaches, heals, forgives – set in Galilee
- 9:51-19:27 The journey of Jesus and his disciples (through Samaria) to Jerusalem
- 19:28-end The Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem

# An early comparison between Matthew and Luke – the Prologue

- The Genealogy
- In Mt. it begins the gospel. The sonship of Jesus traced through David and the Kings of Israel to Abraham. Jesus is the fulfilment of Israelite history
- Luke: reverses order. Jesus' sonship traced back to Adam, stressing his relationship with humanity. Its position in the narrative suggests a comparison between Adam, the 'flawed' son of God, and Jesus.

# The early ministry of Jesus

- Begins in Nazareth and extends to towns and villages of Galilee, recruiting disciples, healing, forgiving.
- A 'prophetic' ministry, reminiscent of Elijah and Elisha. (Cf the sermon at Nazareth, raising of the widow's son; the people call him a prophet).
- Clash with the Pharisees, but not 'to the death at this stage'. Space is provided for repentance.

*When the days of his being taken up were fulfilled, Jesus set his face to journey in the direction of Jerusalem (Lk 9:51)*

- The next 10 chapters are set in the context of a journey from Galilee, (through Samaria) to Jerusalem. Jesus has already visited Jerusalem and the temple, now it will be the place of his departure to heaven .
- This section consists mainly of teaching by Jesus in turn – to his disciples (who act more positively than Mark's) he gives positive instruction – to the crowds, who get warnings and calls to conversions, and to those who resist he speaks of rejection. (eg. The parable of the barren fig tree – judgement but tempered by delay to accept God's mercy).

# In Jerusalem (Lk 19:28)

- The final stage begins in Bethphage and Bethany, two villages on the Mount of Olives.
- Jesus cleanses the Temple, thus inciting the envy of the chief priests and leaders who decide to kill him.
- Passion, death, resurrection. NB in contrast to Matthew with its post-resurrection setting in Galilee, all Luke's action is set in Jerusalem.

# Luke's Gospel – Part I of a 2 volume work (=Luke-Acts).

- Luke's gospel climaxes in Jerusalem, in Acts the gospel begins in Jerusalem and extends through Samaria to the heart of the Roman empire, the city of Rome. Its ultimate destination is 'the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8)

# Why did Luke write?

- Luke revisits the story of Jesus in the light of the experience of the community he writes for (*the events that have been fulfilled among us*).
- To show that God's plan for and promises to Israel were brought to fulfilment in Jesus, who is Lord and Saviour of the world.
- Showing the Church to be an essential aspect of the divine plan because it had emerged from faithful Israel.
- To show that the experience of the Church to that point was based on sound foundations.

# The historical background

- The earliest Christian community in Jerusalem was Jewish in character, practice and outlook.
- Traditionally Judaism focused on maintaining its identity and waiting for the nations to come in. Circumcision, food laws separated the Jews from their neighbours.
- This arrangement put into crisis by the Pauline mission directed to the Gentiles. It was not part of the Pauline vision, centred on Christ, that Christians should become Jews. This became a matter of tension once the communities began to mix – we see the dilemma in Acts 10 – Peter’s vision of the foods and his eating at the house of a gentile.

# The historical background, contd.

- The success of Paul's mission to the gentiles brought a certain trauma to the early church which had been largely resolved by the time Luke wrote (cf Acts 15).
- But it would have left feelings of unease among certain groups which Luke addressed – eg Jews who felt marginalised from their traditional religion and from the Law of God, Gentiles who were unsure of their identity vis a vis Judaism, and richer members of the community, such as minor Roman officials. Hence the stress on Christ's call to all, especially the marginalised and his great heart open to embracing all.

# How Jesus transcends parochialism; his first teaching at Nazareth

- Starting from a text of Isaiah on the mission of the Messiah, Jesus declares the text fulfilled in himself.
- He associates himself with the prophets Elijah and Elisha, but in a way that takes his audience by surprise, defining them not by their zeal to preserve the purity of their faith, but by their openness to the gentiles.

# The Portrait of Jesus in Luke – The risen Jesus walks by his disciples, preparing them for mission.

- Explicitly in Luke 24. Jesus accompanies two disciples towards Emmaus.
- They recognise him as *prophet mighty in deed and word*
- and express their disappointment - *We had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel*
- Using the Scriptures Jesus shows them that - *it was necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and so enter into his glory.*

# Jesus opens up the Scriptures concerning himself

- Isaiah 53:11 *Through his suffering my servant shall justify many and their guilt he shall bear. Therefore I will give him his portion among the great, and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty, because he surrendered himself to death and was counted with the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many and win pardon for their offences.*
- Referred to in Lk 22:37 in the context of the Last Supper.

# Jesus opens up the Scriptures concerning himself

- Lk. 4:18
- Jesus quotes Is 61:1-2 – *The spirit of the Lord is upon me – he has anointed me, to bring good news to the poor.....*
- Jesus defines his ministry in terms of prophecy. Prophets, like kings, were the anointed of the Lord. At his transfiguration he is associated with Elijah and Elisha. He laments over Jerusalem, *who kill the prophets* (13:34). Alluding to 1 Kings 7-8, Jesus foretells the destruction of Jerusalem (13:34).
- In Acts 7 Stephen also alludes to the pattern of rejecting those whom God has sent.

# Jesus walks with his disciples, preparing them for mission

- Lk 10 Jesus gives the 72 instructions for mission and warns them about rejection. That they are successful is down to *their names being written in heaven.*(1020).
- He points out the kinds of people who, unexpectedly, will be open to his message
- The necessity of persistent prayer which he demonstrates by his own example.

# Jesus walks with his disciples, Matthew and Luke compared

- Matthew 5 - 7 The Sermon on the mountain
- All the teaching confined to the two chapters
- Jesus goes up the mountain, sits, calls the disciples, they come, he teaches them
- Speaks about the poor in spirit, etc, as examples of members of the kingdom
- Luke 6:20-49 The Sermon on the Plain
- The teaching of Mt is spread throughout Lk's gospel.
- Jesus summons the disciples to the mountain, chooses 12, comes down with them to the level ground, speaks to all the disciples and the crowd.
- Addresses the poor directly

# Meals in Luke

- *Luke shows a special sensitivity for table fellowship, not just for its own sake but because it is a sign of a deeper kind of hospitality that entertains the strange and alien elements of life and looks for good everywhere.*
- *Demetrius Dunn, Quoted in R Karris, Luke, Artist and Theologian, Paulist 1985*

# What happens during the meals

- Pharisees complain that Jesus is eating with the wrong kinds of people, the non-elect. (Jesus models God as king sharing the food of creation with all).
- Jesus tells his hosts not to invite those who can repay him, but the poor. (The poor are the particular beneficiaries of the coming of the Messiah)
- He raises the status of women (eg Martha and Mary)
- Christian 'table manners'. Disciples at table are servants, following the example of Christ himself.

# Rich and poor

- Blessed are you poor. Woe to you rich
- Riches can be an encumbrance to mission – the 72 are not to carry money.
- The story of the rich man, the rich fool, the rich man and Lazarus
- Levi and Zacchaeus – rich men who convert to Jesus, and receive Jesus in their houses, but are marginalised by their people. Levi uses the meal to create a new kind of community.