

*The Gospel of*  
**LUKE**



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**LUKE**

To Seek and Save the Lost  
Volume 1: Chapters 1-11

J.C. Ryle

*Introduction by Kevin Swanson*

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**Generations**  
PASSING ON THE FAITH

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# Contents

Introduction .....	1
Part 1 – The Announcement .....	8
Part 2 – The Announcement .....	11
Part 3 – The Announcement .....	15
Part 4 – The Announcement .....	18
Part 5 – The Announcement .....	21
Part 6 – The Announcement .....	24
Part 7 – The Announcement .....	27
Part 8 – The Announcement .....	30
Part 9 – The Announcement .....	33
Part 10 – The Announcement .....	37
Part 11 – The Birth.....	40
Part 12 – The Birth.....	44
Part 13 – The Birth.....	47
Part 14 – The Birth.....	50
Part 15 – The Birth.....	54
Part 16 – The Birth.....	58
Part 17 – John the Baptist.....	61
Part 18 – John the Baptist.....	64
Part 19 – John the Baptist .....	68
Part 20 – John the Baptist.....	71
Part 21 – Year of Jubilee .....	75
Part 22 – Year of Jubilee .....	79
Part 23 – Year of Jubilee .....	82
Part 24 – Year of Jubilee .....	85
Part 25 – Jesus the Physician .....	89

Part 26 – Jesus the Physician .....	93
Part 27 – Jesus the Physician .....	96
Part 28 – Jesus the Physician .....	100
Part 29 – Jesus the Physician .....	103
Part 30 – Sermon on the Plain .....	107
Part 31 – Sermon on the Plain .....	111
Part 32 – Sermon on the Plain .....	114
Part 33 – Sermon on the Plain .....	118
Part 34 – Sermon on the Plain .....	121
Part 35 – Sermon on the Plain .....	125
Part 36 – Sermon on the Plain .....	128
Part 37 – Sinner Woman Forgiven .....	132
Part 38 – Sinner Woman Forgiven .....	136
Part 39 – Sinner Woman Forgiven .....	139
Part 40 – Sinner Woman Forgiven .....	143
Part 41 – Sinner Woman Forgiven .....	146
Part 42 – Sinner Woman Forgiven .....	150
Part 43 – Calming the Storm .....	154
Part 44 – Calming the Storm .....	157
Part 45 – Calming the Storm .....	161
Part 46 – Calming the Storm .....	164
Part 47 – Calming the Storm .....	168
Part 48 – Calming the Storm .....	171
Part 49 – Calming the Storm .....	175
Part 50 – Calming the Storm .....	178
Part 51 – The Transfiguration .....	182
Part 52 – The Transfiguration .....	185
Part 53 – The Transfiguration .....	188

Part 54 – The Transfiguration .....	191
Part 55 – The Transfiguration .....	194
Part 56 – The Transfiguration .....	197
Part 57 – The Transfiguration .....	201
Part 58 – The Transfiguration .....	204
Part 59 – The Transfiguration .....	207
Part 60 – The Transfiguration .....	211
Part 61 – Good Samaritan .....	215
Part 62 – Good Samaritan .....	218
Part 63 – Good Samaritan .....	222
Part 64 – Good Samaritan .....	225
Part 65 – Good Samaritan .....	229
Part 66 – Good Samaritan .....	233
Part 67 – Good Samaritan .....	237
Part 68 – Lord’s Prayer .....	241
Part 69 – Lord’s Prayer .....	245
Part 70 – Lord’s Prayer .....	248
Part 71 – Lord’s Prayer .....	252
Part 72 – Lord’s Prayer .....	256
Part 73 – Lord’s Prayer .....	259
Part 74 – Lord’s Prayer .....	262
Part 75 – Lord’s Prayer .....	266
Appendix.....	271





# Introduction

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The Gospel of Luke tells of the things Jesus did. Is there anything more wonderful in the world than that? The very Son of God comes to earth. God with us—walking with us and talking with us. Our children ask us, “what is God like?” Here is the answer. Listen to His words. Watch His every action. Look how He reacts to the woman washing his feet, to Zacchaeus the tax collector, disciples who deny Him, the cripple, and the blind man. What is this Man saying as He hangs from the cross? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” He says to the penitent thief on the cross, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

Put simply, the Gospel is a compendium of stories of the things Jesus did when He came to earth and ministered among men. Chiefly, He died on the cross for our sins and rose again on the third day.

J.C. Ryle’s Expository Thoughts on the Gospels are truly classic writings intended for the benefit of the church. His Expository Thoughts on Luke was first published in 1858. In the first preface to the series Ryle writes, “I indulge the hope that the work may be found suitable for use at family prayers. The supply of works adapted for this purpose has never yet been equal to the demand.” To which we say a hearty “Amen!” The Generations ministry has taken up the task of producing Family Bible Study Guides for English-speaking nations. While many Christian denominations have produced billions of dollars of resources for the use of Sunday schools, youth groups, women’s Bible studies, and the like, where are the resources for family worship? Where are the resources to encourage and enable families who engage day-to-day in the thing God has clearly commanded (Deuteronomy 6:7; Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews 3:13)?

Too often, the traditions of men make the law of God of none effect. The wholesale delegation of education and discipleship in much of the Christian world has displaced God’s original intention for the continuity of the faith. Search as you may, you will not find youth ministries and Sunday schools in Scripture. The combined effect of the disintegration of the family initiated by the Industrial Revolution, compulsory attendance laws of the last century, and age-segregated classrooms produced the massive youth ministries of the last fifty years or so. Statisticians now tell us only one in twenty American born-again parents actually teach their children from the Word of God on a daily basis.

This is why the faith dies out in many ecclesiastical neighborhoods. If one were to conduct a careful review of the historical Christian faith, he would find that, without a daily regimen of discipleship in the Word of God, there will be few real conversions and few disciples of Jesus Christ. According to recent surveys, Millennials are more than twice as likely to be “unaffiliated” (with a church) than their parents. Church attendance has dropped off 30%, between 2002 and 2020. The present apostasy in the western world is metastasizing especially among the younger generations.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. I would suggest a thorough study of all of the data from Scripture related to the discipleship of our children (Exodus 12:26–27; Deuteronomy 6:7–9; Proverbs 1–31; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:11; 1 Timothy 3:4; etc.). What you will find is that God commissions parents to the job of this discipleship. Sadly, the traditions of men have eroded this commitment in the hearts and lives of millions of families over the last 200 years.

In 1893, R.L. Dabney, an old Presbyterian pastor, registered his concerns about this very issue to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. His concern was that the Sunday schools (originally intended for unbelieving families), were displacing God’s “divinely appointed means of grace.”

*“Your memorialists would represent to the General Assembly, that we have seen, with anxious concern, certain perversions and abuses which have silently crept into the Sabbath schools of our Church and country. The first of these perversions is an extensive wresting of these schools from their proper and legitimate scope as missionary measures for the children of neglectful and godless parents, into a substitute for the Christian family training of the children of parents professing godliness, by their own parents in their own homes. The good Robert Raikes, of Gloucester, England, is reputed to have invented such schools in the eighteenth century. His avowed purpose was to give Christian instruction, by this means, only to children of godless parents who received no Christian teaching in their homes. He sought his pupils in the streets, among such neglected children as were straying there on the Sabbath. “Had one proposed to him to do what is now so frequently done among us, viz.: to invade the homes of them professing godliness, and withdraw to his Sabbath school such children from the domestic tuition which their parents were giving them during the private hours of the holy day (which was then the universal custom of all Christian parents of decent repute), we presume that Raikes would have drawn back in astonishment and strong refusal. His*

*missionary schools were never designed to invade, supersede, this divinely appointed means of grace.”\**

No one is more equipped to apply the Word to their children than the father and mother who know them best and live with them from day to day. Indeed, the most powerful form of evangelism, or discipleship, is God’s recommended form. There is no more effective form of discipleship than that which involves a father taking the hand of his son or daughter, and saying, “Let me show you Jesus. Let me show you how to walk in the ways of the Lord by my daily words and living example.”

Covenantal faithfulness from generation to generation is God’s intended design for His people (Genesis 17:10–12; Deuteronomy 6:7–9, 7:9; Psalm 78:4–6; the Book of Proverbs; Isaiah 59:20–21; Ezekiel 37:24–27; Malachi 2:15; Acts 2:38–39; 1 Thessalonians 2:11; Ephesians 6:4), and rebellion should be the exception, not the rule. Apostasy is the norm in Europe, Canada, and America, and what are we to make of the reports from conservative, evangelical denominations in our country that 88% of Christians’ children are leaving the faith? Could it be that we have neglected God’s appointed means by which children will carry on the faith of their fathers? Our abandonment of God’s designed means, and our displacement of it with other programs devised by men, will in the end produce meager results. Maximize on the means that God has designed, and we will be truly blessed. Ignore it and the faith will languish over the generations. May God bring about a true reformation that represents a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in our own generation!

*“My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring, says the Lord from now and forever.” (Isaiah 59:20–21)*

## Using the Study Guide

This Family Bible Study Guide is adapted from J.C. Ryle’s original commentary, *Expository Thoughts on Luke* (1858). Ryle’s first two commentaries on Matthew and Mark contained brief commentary and application covering the first two

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\* R.L. Dabney, *Discussions*, Vol. 5, (Sprinkle Publications, 1980). “A Memorial and Overture of the Synod of Texas to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, to meet in Macon, GA,” p. 336.

Gospels. However, when Ryle produced his commentaries on Luke and John, he not only produced his trademark simple “expository thoughts” but he also added a section of “notes.” This was to provide a more complete commentary that was suited both for individual and family use, and for those wanting to dig deeper into the meaning of the text. In order to present Ryle’s classic as part of our Family Bible Study Series, we have abridged Ryle’s commentary. We have not included his “notes” that are of a more technical nature, but only retained the summary commentary that includes Ryle’s basic explanation and application of the text. If the “notes” were included, this study guide would be twice its size making it more difficult for family use. Additionally, in a few places we have lightly edited Ryle’s text in order to generalize it for modern readers. For example, where Ryle refers to matters current in his homeland (the United Kingdom) or comments directed to the Church of England, we have provided a more general equivalent. In some places, we have shortened Ryle’s commentary to make this study guide easier to read out-loud as a family without making a single reading too long or laborious. Even with these changes, Ryle’s original comments remains largely unchanged. For this edition, we have retained the King James Version (KJV) for Scripture quotations. This is the version Ryle originally quoted from.

The following guidelines are suggested for the benefit of the families using this study manual:

1. Obtain a copy of the study guide for each child who can read. Encourage the children to write their own notes in the study guide. It is possible that some children under eight or nine years of age may have a hard time understanding the material contained in these lessons. Younger children are able to comprehend the Bible stories, but sometimes they have a hard time understanding the teaching behind it. Still, it is never harmful for younger children to be present when difficult material is shared. One never knows what children hear and what they will comprehend. My recommendation is that families aim high in family worship, whether in reading material or in music. This is how parents encourage maturation in the child’s learning and discernment. Of course, this should not preclude the occasional use of simple stories and songs for the younger ones.

2. In order that our children learn the major themes and the general flow of the Gospel of Luke, each chapter has been assigned a two- or three-word summary. I suggest that the family learn these summaries together. As a parent asks the question, “What are the themes of Luke chapters 1 through 10?” The family will together recite the themes from memory:

“Chapter 1. . . The Announcement”

“Chapter 2. . . The Birth”

“Chapter 3. . . John the Baptist”

And so on, through chapter 10.

By the end of this study, the family should have memorized each theme for every chapter of Luke’s Gospel. These summary titles do not always encompass everything contained in the chapter, but they serve as memory devices to help remember where prominent events and themes are found in the Gospel.

**3.** Also I recommend maintaining a regular order to family worship. I would suggest something like the following—this is the pattern that our family has found most edifying.

**Singing.** We open with the singing of hymns, psalms, and simple choruses. This is a good way to call everybody together and get them involved from the outset.

**Scripture.** We read the Scripture together. Sometimes we ask each child that can read to participate by reading several verses or one verse at a time. We find that if each person reads one verse at a time around the circle, the children are more likely to pay attention for the length of the chapter (or there will be a long pause as it comes around to their turn to read!). Some families may wish to split the chapter in two, including the exposition provided in the study guide. Also, we will include the review of a Psalm or a Proverb (at the same time we work through other books of the Bible). The Psalms and Proverbs are basic to our day-to-day life in Christ.

**Memory Work.** Work as a family on memory verses or catechism questions. Our family memorizes Scripture together, parents included. Each person recites the verse or passage, and then we repeat it in unison.

**Bible Story.** When our children were young, we would also read an adapted Bible Story aloud, or we would ask an older child to read it to them.

**Extra Reading.** We have also taken advantage of this time while the family is together to read the best Christian books ever written. We use the study guides provided by Generations’ Christian Discipleship Curriculum. These might include books like John Bunyan’s *Pilgrims Progress*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, or John G. Paton’s autobiography.

**Prayer.** The father should lead in prayer but allow for other family members to pray as well. As I pray, I like to tie in various lessons we have learned from reading the Word. When there is obvious sin in the home and where the Word has convicted us, I want to confess these sins at this time for the family. Also, it is

important to draw in other parts of the Lord's Prayer—including praise, petition, thanksgiving, and confession. The church's prayer request list also provides us opportunities to bear the burdens of others.

4. As much as possible, I recommend that families conduct worship at least once per day. This is the Hebrews 3:13 principle. For those who have never established the discipline of regular family worship, I encourage them to begin with a small, manageable chunk of time. Consistency is the priority. A consistent ten-minute worship time each time is better than thirty minutes, two or three times per week. At a bare minimum, families should read the Word together, produce at least one application for the family, and close in pray.

5. Endeavor to retain an enthusiasm for God and a rich appreciation for the deep truths of His Word during this time. If those leading the worship are not into it, you can assume the others will follow suit. Fathers should make this a matter of fervent prayer. It is easy to lose a sense for the importance of this time in the Word. May God help you to remember that this is the very lifeblood of the Christian family! This is what sustains spiritual life, even as bread and water sustains physical life. Would you deny bread and water to your children day after day, and week after week? A true disciple of Jesus Christ will come back to Him again and again, crying out, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!" (John 6:68)

As we hear God's Word, let us remember that this is God speaking directly to us. In fact, Jesus comes to us as the very Word of God. His Word is ultimate in power, authority, grace, and truth. By the spoken Word, He created the world. By His Word, He called Lazarus out of the grave and the dead responded, immediately. His Word is living, active, and powerful. Just read these words and listen to them, and you will feel its power. On the mount of transfiguration, the Father has but one thing to tell us, "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him." Indeed, our Lord Jesus is the final and the ultimate revelation of God to man. And so, Jesus speaks to our family in these words contained in the Gospel of Luke. As we receive this personal communication from God, we find ourselves growing into the likeness of Christ Himself.

May the Holy Spirit attend as you hear His voice speaking through the Gospel of Luke.

Kevin Swanson and Joshua Schwisow

October, AD 2024



## PART 1

# The Announcement

### Scripture Reading:

Luke 1:1-4

### Key Verse:

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

### What does this passage teach us?

The Gospel of Luke, which we now begin, contains many precious things which are not recorded in the other three Gospels. Such, for instance, are the histories of Zachariah and Elizabeth, the angel's announcement to Mary, and to speak generally, the whole contents of the first two chapters. Such, again, are the narratives of the conversion of Zacchaeus and of the penitent thief, the walk to Emmaus, and the famous parables of the pharisee and tax-collector, the rich man and Lazarus, and the prodigal son. These are portions of Scripture for which every well-instructed Christian feels peculiarly thankful. And for these, we are indebted to the Gospel of Luke.

The short preface which we have now read is a peculiar feature of Luke's Gospel. But we shall find, on examination, that it is full of most useful instruction.

**In the first place, Luke gives us a short but valuable sketch of the nature of a Gospel.** He calls it, "a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us." It is a narrative of facts about Jesus Christ.

Christianity is a religion built upon facts. Let us never lose sight of this. It came unto mankind at first, in this shape. The first preachers did not go up and down the world, proclaiming an elaborate, artificial system of obscure doctrines and deep philosophic principles. They made it their first business to tell men *great plain facts*. They went about telling a sin-laden world that the Son of God had



come down to earth, and lived for us, and died for us, and has risen again. The Gospel, at its first publication, was far more simple than many make it now. It was neither more nor less, than the history of Christ. Let us aim at *greater simplicity* in our own personal religion. Let Christ and His Person be the *sun* of our system, and let the main desire of our souls be to live a life of faith in Him, and daily know Him better. This was Paul's Christianity. "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

**In the second place, Luke draws a beautiful picture of the true position of the apostles in the early church.** He calls them "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." There is an instructive *humility* in this expression. There is an utter absence of that man-exalting tone which has so often crept into the Church. Luke gives the apostles no flattering titles. He does not afford the slightest excuse to those who speak of them with idolatrous veneration because of their office and nearness to our Lord. He describes them as "eyewitnesses." They told men what they had seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears (1 John 1:1).

He describes them as "ministers of the word." They were ministers of the word of the Gospel. They were men who counted it their highest privilege to carry about, as messengers, the tidings of God's love to a sinful world, and to tell the story of the *cross*.

Well would it have been for the Church and the world, if Christian ministers had never laid claim to higher dignity and honor than the apostles claimed for themselves. It is a mournful fact that ordained men have constantly exalted themselves and their office to a most unscriptural position. Let us remember this, and be on our guard.

**In the third place, Luke describes his own qualifications for the work of writing a Gospel.** He says that he "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first." It would be mere waste of time to inquire from what *source* Luke obtained the information which he has given us in his Gospel. We have no good reason for supposing that he saw our Lord work miracles, or heard Him teach. To say that he obtained his information from Mary, or any of the apostles, is mere conjecture and speculation. It is enough for us to know that Luke wrote by inspiration of God. Unquestionably, he did not neglect the ordinary means of getting knowledge. But the Holy Spirit guided him, no less than all other writers of the Bible, in his choice of matter. The Holy Spirit supplied him with thoughts,

arrangement, sentences, and even words. And the result is, that what Luke wrote is not to be read as the “word of man”—but the “word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13).

Let us carefully hold fast the great doctrine of the *plenary inspiration* of every word of the Bible. Let us never allow that any writer of the Old or New Testament could make even the slightest verbal mistake or error when writing, as he was “moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). Let it be a settled principle with us in reading the Bible, that when we cannot understand a passage or reconcile it with some other passage, the fault is not in the Book, but in *ourselves*. The adoption of this principle will place our feet upon a rock. To give it up is to stand upon a quicksand, and to fill our minds with endless uncertainties and doubts.

**Finally, Luke informs us of one main object that he had in view in writing his Gospel.** It was that Theophilus “might know the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed.”

There is no encouragement here for those who place confidence in *unwritten traditions* and *the voice of the church*. Luke well knew the weakness of man’s memory, and the readiness with which a history alters its shape, both by additions and alterations, when it depends only on word of mouth and report. What therefore does he do? He takes care to “write.”

There is no encouragement here for those who are opposed to the spread of religious knowledge, and talk of “*ignorance* as the mother of devotion.” Luke does not wish his friend to remain in doubt on any matter of his faith. He tells him that he wants him to “know the *certainty* of those things wherein he had been instructed.”

Let us close the passage with thankfulness for the Bible. Let us bless God daily that we are not left dependent on man’s traditions, nor need we be led astray by ministers’ mistakes. We have a written volume, which is “able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). Let us begin Luke’s Gospel with an earnest desire to know more ourselves of the truth as it is in Jesus, and with a hearty determination to do what in us lies to spread the knowledge of that truth throughout the world.

## Questions:

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. Why did Luke write his Gospel to Theophilus?

3. What qualified Luke to write this Gospel?
4. What are some of the narratives and parables that are only found in Luke's Gospel?

### **Family Application Questions:**

1. When we read and hear God's Word, what is the right spiritual attitude we should have?
2. Why is it important that we have certainty about who Jesus is and what He came to do?

## **PART 2**

# The Announcement

### **Scripture Reading:**

Luke 1:5-12

### **Key Verse:**

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

### **What does this passage teach us?**

**The first event recorded in Luke's Gospel is the sudden appearance of an angel to a Jewish priest named Zachariah.** The angel announces to him that a son is about to be born to him by a miraculous interposition, and that this son is to be the forerunner of the long-promised Messiah. The word of God had plainly foretold that when Messiah came, someone would go before him to prepare His way (Mal. 3:1). The wisdom of God provided that when this forerunner appeared, he would be born in the family of a priest.

We can form very little idea, at this period of the world, of the immense importance of this angel's announcement. To the mind of a pious Jew, it must

have been glad tidings of great joy. It was the first communication from God to Israel since the days of Malachi. It broke the long silence of four hundred years. It told the believing Israelite that the prophetic weeks of Daniel were at length fulfilled (Dan. 9:25), that God's choicest promise was at length going to be accomplished, and that "the seed" was about to appear in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 22:18). We must place ourselves in imagination, in the position of Zachariah, in order to give the verses before us their due weight.

**Let us mark, for one thing, in this passage, the noble testimony which is borne to the character of Zachariah and Elizabeth.** We are told that they were "both righteous before God," and that "they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

It matters little whether we interpret this "righteousness" as that which is *imputed* to all believers for their *justification*, or that which is wrought inwardly in believers by the operation of the Holy Spirit, for their *sanctification*. The two sorts of righteousness are never disjoined. There are none *justified* who are not *sanctified*, and there are none *sanctified* who are not *justified*. Suffice it for us to know that Zachariah and Elizabeth had grace, when grace was very rare, and kept all the burdensome observances of the ceremonial law with devout conscientiousness, when few Israelites cared for them except in name and form.

The main thing that concerns us all, is the *example* which this holy pair hold up to Christians. Let us all strive to serve God faithfully, and live fully up to our light, even as they did. Let us not forget the plain words of Scripture—"He who practices righteousness is righteous." Happy are those Christian families in which it can be reported that both husband and wife are "righteous," and exercise themselves to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men (Acts 24:16).

**Let us mark, for another thing, in this passage, the heavy trial which God was pleased to lay on Zachariah and Elizabeth.** We are told that *they had no child*. The full force of these words can hardly be understood by a modern Christian. To an ancient Jew, they would convey the idea of a very weighty affliction. To be childless was one of the bitterest of sorrows (1 Sam. 1:10).

*The grace of God exempts no one from trouble.* As righteous as this holy priest and his wife were, they had a "*crook* in their lot." Let us remember this, if we serve Christ, and let us not count trials as strange things. Let us rather believe that a

hand of perfect wisdom is measuring out all our portion, and that when God chastises us, it is to make us “partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). If afflictions drive us nearer to Christ, the Bible, and prayer—then they are positive blessings. We may not think so now. But we shall think so when we wake up in the eternal world.

**Let us mark, for another thing, in this passage, the means by which God announced the coming birth of John the Baptist.** We are told that *an angel* of the Lord appeared to Zachariah.

The ministry of angels is undoubtedly a deep subject. Nowhere in the Bible do we find such frequent mention of them, as in the period of our Lord’s earthly ministry. At no time do we read of so many appearances of angels, as about the time of our Lord’s incarnation and entrance into the world.

The meaning of this circumstance is sufficiently clear. It was meant to teach the church that the Messiah was no angel—but the *Lord* of angels, as well as of men. Angels announced His coming. Angels proclaimed His birth. Angels rejoiced at His appearing. And by so doing, they made it plain that He who came to die for sinners was not one of themselves, but one far above them—the King of kings and Lord of lords!

One thing, at all events, about angels, we must never forget. They take a deep interest in the work of Christ, and the salvation which Christ has provided. They sang high praise when the Son of God came down to make peace by His own blood between God and man. They rejoice when sinners repent, and are born again to our Father in heaven. They delight to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. Let us strive to be like them, while we are upon earth—to be of their mind, and to share their joys. This is the way to be in tune for heaven. It is written of those who enter in there, that they shall be “as the angels” (Mark 12:25).

**Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, the effect which the appearance of an angel produced on the mind of Zachariah.** We are told that he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

The experience of this righteous man here tallies exactly with that of other saints under similar circumstances. *Moses* at the burning bush, *Daniel* at the Tigris river, the *women* at the sepulcher, and *John* at the isle of Patmos all showed similar fear to that of Zachariah. Like him, when they saw visions of things belonging to another world, they trembled and were afraid.

How are we to account for this fear? To that question, there is only one answer. It arises from our inward sense of weakness, guilt, and corruption. The vision of an inhabitant of heaven reminds us forcibly of our own imperfection, and of our natural unfitness to stand before God. If angels are so great and terrible—then what must the Lord of angels be?

Let us bless God, that we have a mighty Mediator between God and man—the man Christ Jesus. Believing on Him, we may draw near to God with boldness, and look forward to the day of judgment without fear. When the mighty angels shall go forth to gather God's elect together, the elect will have no cause to be afraid. To them, the angels are fellow-servants and friends (Rev. 22:9).

Let us tremble when we think of the *terror of the wicked* at the day of judgment. If even the righteous are troubled by a sudden vision of friendly angels, then what will the *ungodly* do, when the angels come forth to gather them like tares for the burning! The fears of the *saints* are groundless, and endure but for a little season. The fears of the lost, when once aroused, will prove well-grounded, and will endure for evermore!

### **Questions:**

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. How does Luke describe Zachariah and Elizabeth?
3. How did Zachariah respond to the appearance of the angel?
4. How do we see God keeping His promises in this passage?

### **Family Application Questions:**

1. How does God use trials in our lives for good? What are some trials that we are currently experiencing? What are we learning from those trials?
2. Do we have the same sense of wonder and joy the angels have when they speak of Christ's redemption? What can we learn from the angels?

## PART 3

# The Announcement

### Scripture Reading:

Luke 1:13-17

### Key Verse:

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

### What does this passage teach us?

**We learn here, for one thing, that prayers are not necessarily rejected because the answer is long delayed.** Zachariah, no doubt, had often prayed for the blessing of children—and, to all appearances, had prayed in vain. At his advanced time of life, he had probably long ceased to mention the subject before God, and had given up all hope of being a father. Yet the very first words of the angel show plainly that the bygone prayers of Zachariah had not been forgotten: “Thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”

We shall do well to remember this fact, whenever we kneel down to pray. We must beware of hastily concluding that our supplications are useless—and especially in the matter of intercessory prayer in behalf of others. It is not for us to prescribe either the *time* or the *manner* in which our requests are to be answered. He who knows best the time for people to be born knows also the time for them to be born again. Let us rather “continue in prayer,” “watch unto prayer,” “pray always, and not faint.”

**We learn, in the second place, that no children cause such true joy, as those who have the grace of God.** It was a child about to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to whose father it was said, “Thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.”

Grace is the principal portion that we should desire for our children. It is a thousand times better for them than beauty, riches, honors, rank, or high connections. Until they have grace, we never know what they may do. They may make us weary of our life, and bring down our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave! When they are converted, and not until then, they are provided for—both for time and eternity. “A wise son maketh a glad father” (Prov. 10:1). Whatever we seek for our sons and daughters, let us first seek that they may have a place in the covenant, and a name in the book of life.

**We learn, in the third place, the nature of true greatness.** The angel describes it when he tells Zachariah that his son “shall be great in the sight of the Lord.”

The *measure of greatness* which is common among men, is utterly false and deceptive. Princes and potentates, conquerors and leaders of armies, statesmen and philosophers, artists and authors—these are the kind of men whom the world calls “great.”

Such greatness is not recognized among the angels of God. Those who do great things for God, they reckon *great*. Those who do little for God, they reckon *little*. They measure and value every man according to the position in which he is likely to stand at the last day and through eternity.

Let us not be ashamed to make God’s angels our example in this matter. Let us seek for ourselves and our children, that *true greatness* which will be owned and recognized in the eternal world. It is a greatness which is within the reach of all—of the poor, as well as the rich; of the servant, as well as of the master. It does not depend on power or patronage, nor on money or friends. It is the free gift of God to all who seek it at the Lord Jesus Christ’s hands. It is the portion of all who hear Christ’s voice and follow Him—who fight Christ’s battle and do Christ’s work in the world. Such may receive little honor in this life. But their reward shall be great at the last day!

**We learn, in the fourth place, that children are never too young to receive the grace of God.** Zachariah is informed that his son “shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.”

There is no greater mistake than to suppose that infants, by reason of their tender age, are incapable of being operated upon by the Holy Spirit. The manner of His work upon a little child’s heart is undoubtedly mysterious and incomprehensible. But so also are all His works upon the sons of men. Let us beware of limiting God’s power and compassion. He is a merciful God. With Him, nothing is impossible.



Let us remember these things especially in the training of young children. We should always deal with them as responsible to God. We should never allow ourselves to suppose that they are too young to have any religion.

Of course, we must be reasonable in our expectations. We must not look for evidences of grace that are unsuitable to their age and capacities. But we must never forget that the heart which is not too young to sin is also not too young to be filled with the grace of God.

**We learn, in the last place, from these verses, the character of a really great and successful minister of God.** The picture is set before us in a striking manner, by the angel's description of John the Baptist. He is one who will "turn hearts"—turn them from ignorance, to knowledge; from carelessness, to thoughtfulness; from sin, to God. He is one who will "go before the Lord"—he will delight in nothing so much as being the messenger and herald of Jesus Christ. He is one who will "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." He will strive to gather out of the world, a company of believers who will be ready to meet the Lord in the day of His appearing.

For such ministers, let us pray night and day. They are the true *pillars* of a Church, the true *salt* of the earth, and the true *light* of the world. Happy is that Church, and happy is that nation, which has many such men. Without such men, learning, titles, financial endowments, and splendid buildings will keep no Church alive. Souls will not be saved, good will not be done and Christ will not be glorified, except with men full of the Holy Spirit.

## **Questions:**

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. How does the world define "greatness"? How does the Bible define true greatness?
3. Can God give His Holy Spirit to little children as well as adults?
4. What made John the Baptist a great minister of the Lord? What was the effect of his ministry?

## Family Application Questions:

1. Is there a prayer request we have been bringing to the Lord for a long time? What are some of the reasons that the Lord does not answer the prayer as fast as we want?
2. What are some evidences of God's grace at work in the hearts of children? Spend time in prayer asking for the increase of God's grace in your home.

## PART 4

# The Announcement

## Scripture Reading:

Luke 1:18-25

## Key Verse:

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

## What does this passage teach us?

**We see, in this passage, the power of unbelief in a holy man.** As righteous and holy as Zachariah was, the announcement of the angel appeared unbelievable to him. He could not think it possible that an old man like himself could have a son. "Whereby shall I know this?" he says, "for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years."

A well-instructed Jew, like Zachariah, ought not to have raised such a question. No doubt he was well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. He ought to have remembered the astonishing births of *Isaac*, and *Samson*, and *Samuel* in old times. He ought to have remembered that what God has done once, He can do again; and that with Him, nothing is impossible. But he forgot all this. He thought of nothing but the arguments of mere human reasoning.

Let us learn in wisdom from the fault of Zachariah. It is a fault to which God's people in every age have been sadly liable. The histories of Abraham, and Isaac, and Moses, and Hezekiah, and Jehoshaphat will all show us that *a true believer may sometimes be overtaken by unbelief.*

Unbelief is one of the first corruptions which came into man's heart in the day of the Fall, when Eve believed the devil rather than God. Unbelief is one of the most deep-rooted sins by which a saint is plagued, and from which he is never entirely freed until he dies. Let us pray daily, "Lord increase my faith!" Let us not doubt that when God says a thing, that thing shall be fulfilled.

**We see furthermore, in these verses, the privilege and portion of God's angels.** They carry messages to God's people. They enjoy God's immediate presence. The heavenly messenger who appears to Zachariah rebukes his unbelief by telling him who he is: "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee."

The name "Gabriel" would doubtless fill the mind of Zachariah with humiliation and self-abasement. He would remember it was that same Gabriel who, 490 years before, had brought to Daniel the prophecy of the seventy weeks, and had told him how Messiah should be cut off (Dan. 9:26).

Zachariah would doubtless contrast his own sad unbelief, when peaceably ministering as a priest in God's temple, with the faith of holy Daniel when dwelling as a captive at Babylon, while the temple at Jerusalem was in ruins. Zachariah learned a lesson that day which he never forgot.

The account which Gabriel gives of his own office should raise in our minds great searchings of heart. This mighty angel, far greater in power and intelligence than we are, counts it his highest honor to stand in God's presence and do His will.

Let our aims and desires be in the same direction. Let us strive so to live, that we may one day stand with boldness before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.

The way to this high and holy position is open before us. Christ has consecrated it for us, by the offering of His own body and blood. May we endeavor to walk in it during the short time of this present life, so that we may stand in our lot with God's elect angels in the endless ages of eternity!

**We see, finally, in this passage, how exceedingly sinful is the sin of unbelief in the sight of God.** The doubts and questionings of Zachariah brought down

upon him a heavy chastisement. “Thou shalt be dumb,” says the angel, “not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words.” It was a chastisement especially suitable to the offence. The tongue that was not ready to speak the language of believing praise was struck speechless! It was a chastisement of *long continuance*. For nine long months at least, Zachariah was condemned to silence—and was daily reminded that, by unbelief, he had offended God.

Few sins appear to be so peculiarly provoking to God, as the sin of unbelief. None certainly have called down such heavy judgments on men. It is a *practical denial* of God’s Almighty power, to doubt whether He can do a thing when He undertakes to do it. It is giving the lie to God, to doubt whether He means to do a thing, when He has plainly promised that it shall be done. The forty years’ wanderings of Israel in the wilderness should never be forgotten by professing Christians. The words of Paul are very solemn; “They could not enter in, because of unbelief!” (Heb. 3:19)

Let us watch and pray daily against this soul-ruining sin of unbelief. Concessions to it rob believers of their inward peace, weaken their hands in the day of battle, bring clouds over their hopes, and make their chariot wheels drive heavily. According to the degree of our faith will be our enjoyment of Christ’s salvation, our patience in the day of trial, and our victory over the world.

Unbelief, in short, is the true cause of a thousand spiritual diseases; and once allowed to nestle in our hearts it will eat as a canker! “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (Isa. 7:9). In all that respects the pardon of our sins, the acceptance of our souls, the duties of our peculiar station, and the trials of our daily life, let it be a settled maxim in our religion to trust every word of God implicitly, and to beware of unbelief.

### **Questions:**

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. What is the name of the angel who appeared to Zachariah?
3. What difficult chastisement did Zachariah receive because of his unbelief?

### **Family Application Questions:**

1. What are some of the spiritual effects of unbelief in our lives?

2. Where are we struggling to trust in God's promises right now?

## **PART 5**

# The Announcement

### **Scripture Reading:**

Luke 1:26-33

### **Key Verse:**

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

### **What does this passage teach us?**

We have, in these verses, the announcement of the most marvelous event that ever happened in this world: the incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a passage which we should always read with mingled wonder, love, and praise.

**We should notice, in the first place, the lowly and unassuming manner in which the Savior of mankind came among us.** The angel who announced His coming was sent to an obscure town of Galilee, named Nazareth. The woman who was honored to be our Lord's mother, was evidently in a humble position of life. Both in her station and her dwelling-place, there was an utter absence of what the world calls "greatness."

We need not hesitate to conclude that there was a wise providence in all this arrangement. The Almighty counsel, which orders all things in heaven and earth, could just as easily have appointed Jerusalem to be the place of Mary's residence, as Nazareth; or He could as easily have chosen the daughter of some rich scribe to be our Lord's mother, as a poor woman. But it seemed good that it should not be so.

The first coming of Messiah was to be a coming in poverty and humiliation. That humiliation was to begin even from the time of His conception and birth.

Let us beware of despising poverty in others, and of being ashamed of it, if God lays it upon ourselves. The condition of life which Jesus voluntarily chose ought always to be regarded with holy reverence.

Let us admire the amazing condescension of the Son of God. The Heir of all things not only took our nature upon Him, but took it in the most humbling form in which it could have been assumed. It would have been condescension to come to earth as a king and reign. It was a miracle of mercy—surpassing our comprehension—to come to earth as a poor man, to be despised, and suffer, and die. Let His love constrain us to live not to ourselves, but to Him. Let His example daily bring home to our conscience the precept of Scripture: “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate” (Rom. 12:16).

**We should notice, in the second place, the high privilege of Mary.** The language which the angel Gabriel addresses to her is very remarkable. He calls her “highly favored.” He tells her that “the Lord is with her.” He says to her, “blessed *art* thou among women.”

It is a well-known fact that the Roman Catholic Church pays an honor to Mary, hardly inferior to that which it pays to her blessed Son. She is formally declared by the Roman Catholic Church to have been “conceived without sin.” She is held up to Roman Catholics as an object of worship, and prayed to as a mediator between God and man—no less powerful than Christ Himself. It should be remembered that there is not the slightest warrant in Scripture for these beliefs and practices.

But while we say this, we must, in fairness, admit that no woman was ever so highly honored as the mother of our Lord. It is evident that one woman only out of the countless millions of the human race could be the means whereby God would be “manifest in the flesh”—and Mary had the mighty privilege of being that one. By one woman, sin and death were brought into the world at the beginning. By the child-bearing of one woman, life and immortality were brought to light when Christ was born. No wonder that this one woman was called “highly favored” and “blessed.”

One thing in connection with this subject should never be forgotten by Christians. There is a relationship to Christ within reach of us all—a relationship far nearer than that of flesh and blood; a relationship which belongs to all who repent and believe. “Whoever shall do the will of God,” says Jesus, “the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

**We should notice, finally, in these verses, the glorious account of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the angel gives to Mary.** Every part of the account is full of deep meaning and deserves close attention.

Jesus “shall be great,” says Gabriel. Of His greatness, we know something already. He has brought in a great *salvation*. He has shown Himself to be a *Prophet* greater than Moses. He is a great *High Priest*. And He shall be greater still when He shall be owned as the eternal *King*.

Jesus “shall be called the Son of the Highest,” says Gabriel. He was so before He came into the world. Equal to the Father in all things, He was, from all eternity, the Son of God. But He was to be known and acknowledged as such by the Church. The Messiah was to be recognized and worshiped as nothing less than the true God.

Gabriel also says, “of His kingdom there shall be no end.” Before His glorious kingdom, the empires of this world shall one day go down and pass away. Like Nineveh, and Babylon, and Tyre, and Carthage—they shall all come to nothing one day, and the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom. Before Jesus, every knee shall one day bow, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord. His kingdom shall prove to be an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion shall never pass away! (Dan. 7:14, 27)

The true Christian should often dwell on this glorious promise, and take comfort in its contents. He has no cause to be ashamed of his Master. As poor and despised as he may often be for the Gospel’s sake, he may feel assured that he is on the conquering side. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of Christ. In a little while, He who shall come will come, and will not tarry (Heb. 10:37). For that blessed day, let us patiently wait, and watch, and pray.

Now is the time for carrying the cross, and for fellowship with Christ’s sufferings. The day draws near when Christ shall take His great power and reign, and when all who have served Him faithfully shall exchange a cross for a crown!

## Questions:

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. What condition was Jesus to be born into? Describe Mary’s background and position in life.

3. What are some wrong beliefs that the Roman Catholic church holds concerning Mary? How should we view Mary?
4. How is Jesus and His kingdom described in this passage?

### **Family Application Questions:**

1. What do we know about the growth of Christ's kingdom in history? What is the difference between the time of Jesus' resurrection and ascension compared with the present day? How has His kingdom grown and advanced?
2. How does this passage give us hope for the future as a family?

## **PART 6**

# The Annunciation

### **Scripture Reading:**

Luke 1:34-38

### **Key Verse:**

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

### **What does this passage teach us?**

**Let us mark, in these verses, the reverent manner in which the angel Gabriel speaks of the great mystery of Christ's incarnation.** In reply to the question of Mary, "How shall this be?"—he uses these remarkable words, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee."

We shall do well to follow the example of the angel in all our reflections on this deep subject. Let us ever regard it with holy reverence, and abstain from those improper and unprofitable *speculations* upon it, in which some have unhappily indulged. It is enough for us to know that "the Word was made flesh," and that



when the Son of God came into the world, He had a real body—so that He “took part of our flesh and blood,” and was “made of a woman.”

Here we must stop. The manner in which all this was effected is wisely hidden from us. If we attempt to pry beyond this point, we shall only darken counsel by words without knowledge, and rush in where angels fear to tread. In a religion which really comes down from heaven, there must needs be mysteries. Of such mysteries in Christianity, the incarnation is one.

**Let us mark, in the second place, the prominent place assigned to the *Holy Spirit* in the great mystery of the incarnation.** We find it written, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.”

An intelligent reader of the Bible will probably not fail to remember that the honor here given to the Spirit is in precise harmony with the teaching of Scripture in other places. In every step of the great work of man’s redemption, we shall find special mention of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Did Jesus die to make atonement for our sins? It is written, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God?” (Heb. 9:14).

Did Jesus rise again for our justification? It is written that He “was quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18).

Does Jesus supply His disciples with comfort between the time of His first and second coming? It is written that the Comforter, whom He promised to send, is “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17).

Let us take heed that we give the Holy Spirit the same place in our personal religion, which we find Him occupying in God’s Word.

Let us remember that all that believers have, and are, and enjoy under the Gospel—they owe to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit.

The work of each of the three Persons of the Trinity is equally and entirely needful to the salvation of every saved soul. The *election* of God the Father, the *redemption* of God the Son, and the *sanctification* of God the Spirit ought never to be separated in our Christianity.

**Let us mark, in the third place, the mighty principle which the angel Gabriel lays down to silence all objections about the incarnation.** “With God, nothing shall be impossible.”

A hearty reception of this great principle is of immense importance to our own inward peace. Questions and doubts will often arise in men's minds about many subjects in religion. They are the natural result of our fallen estate of soul. Our *faith*, at the best, is very feeble.

Our *knowledge*, at its highest, is clouded with much infirmity. And among many antidotes to a doubting, anxious, questioning state of mind, few will be found more useful than that before us now: a thorough conviction of the almighty power of God. With Him who called the world into being and formed it out of nothing, everything is possible. Nothing is too hard for the Lord!

There is no *sin* too black and too wicked to be pardoned—the blood of Christ cleanses from *all* sin. There is no *heart* too hard and wicked to be changed—the heart of *stone* can be made into a heart of *flesh*. There is no *work* too hard for a believer to do—we can do all things through Christ strengthening us. There is no *trial* too hard to be borne—the grace of God is sufficient for us. There is no *promise* too great to be fulfilled—Christ's words never pass away; and what He has promised, He is able to perform. There is no *difficulty* too great for a believer to overcome—if God is for us, then who can be against us? The *mountain* shall become a plain.

Let principles like these be continually before our minds. The angel's reply is an invaluable remedy. Faith never rests so calmly and peacefully as when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence!

**Let us mark, in the last place, the meek and ready acquiescence of Mary to God's revealed will concerning her.** She says to the angel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

There is far more of admirable grace in this answer than at first sight appears. A moment's reflection will show us that it was no light matter to become the mother of our Lord in this unheard-of and mysterious way. It brought with it, no doubt, great honor at a distant period; but it brought with it, for the present, no small danger to Mary's reputation, and no small trial to Mary's faith. All this danger and trial, Mary was willing and ready to risk. She asks no further questions. She raises no further objections. She accepts the honor laid upon her with all its attendant perils and inconveniences. "Behold," she says, "the handmaid of the Lord."

Let us seek, in our daily practical Christianity, to exercise the same blessed spirit of faith which we see here in Mary. Let us be willing to *go* anywhere,

and *do* anything, and *be* anything—whatever may be the present and immediate inconvenience—so long as God’s will is clear, and the path of duty is plain.

### **Questions:**

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. What is mysterious about the incarnation of Jesus Christ?
3. What does the angel Gabriel say about God’s power?

### **Family Application Questions:**

1. Nothing is impossible with God. But sometimes we struggle to believe this. Where are we, as a family, struggling to believe that God can or will do certain things?
2. How is Mary’s spirit of submission a good example for us?

## **PART 7**

# The Announcement

### **Scripture Reading:**

Luke 1:39-45

### **Key Verse:**

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

### **What does this passage teach us?**

**We should observe, in this passage, the benefit of fellowship and communion between believers.** We read of a visit paid by Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. We are told in a striking manner how the hearts of both of these holy women were cheered, and their minds lifted up by this interview. Without this visit, Elizabeth

might never have been so filled with the Holy Spirit as we are here told she was; and Mary might never have uttered that song of praise which is now known all throughout the Church of Christ.

We should always regard communion with other believers as an eminent means of grace. It is a refreshing break in our journey along the narrow way, to exchange experience with our fellow travelers. It helps us insensibly, and it helps them—and so it is a mutual gain. It is the nearest approach that we can make on earth to the joy of heaven.

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” We need reminding of this. The subject does not receive sufficient attention, and the souls of believers suffer in consequence. There are many who fear the Lord and think upon His name—and yet forget to speak often one to another (Mal. 3:16).

*First*, let us seek the face of God; *then* let us seek the face of God’s friends. If we did this more, and were more careful about the company we keep—we would know more often know what it is to feel filled with the Holy Spirit.

**We should observe, in this passage, the clear spiritual knowledge which appears in the language of Elizabeth.** She uses an expression about Mary which shows that she herself was deeply taught of God. She calls her “the mother of my Lord.”

Those words, “my Lord,” are so familiar to our ears that we miss the fullness of their meaning. At the time they were spoken, they implied far more than we might suppose. They were nothing less than a distinct declaration that the Child who was to be born of Mary was the long-promised Messiah—the “Lord” of whom David in spirit had prophesied, and the Christ of God. Viewed in this light, the expression is a wonderful example of faith. It is a confession worthy to be placed by the side of that of Peter, when he said to Jesus, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

Let us remember the deep meaning of the words, “the Lord,” and beware of using them lightly and carelessly. Let us consider that they rightly apply to none but Him who was crucified for our sins on Calvary. Let the recollection of this fact invest the words with a holy reverence, and make us careful how we let them fall from our lips.

There are two texts connected with the expression which should often come to our minds. In one, it is written, “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by

the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 12:3). In the other, it is written, “Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).

**Finally, we should observe, in these verses—the high praise which Elizabeth bestows upon the grace of *faith*.** She says, “Blessed *is* she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord!” We need not wonder that this holy woman should thus commend *faith*. No doubt she was well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. She knew the great things that *faith* had done in the past. The whole history of God’s saints in every age is but a record of men and women who obtained a good report by faith! The simple story of all from Abel downwards is but a narrative of redeemed sinners who believed, and so were blessed. By faith, they embraced promises. By faith, they lived. By faith, they walked. By faith, they endured hardships. By faith, they looked to an unseen Savior, and good things yet to come. By faith, they battled with the world, the flesh, and the devil. By faith, they overcame, and got safely home to heaven.

Do *we* know anything of this precious faith? This, after all, is the question which concerns us. Do we know anything of the faith of God’s elect—the faith which is the working of God? (Tit. 1:2, Col. 2:12) Let us never rest until we know it by experience. Once knowing it, let us never cease to pray that our faith may grow exceedingly.

Better a thousand times to be rich in faith than rich in gold. Gold will be worthless in the eternal world to which we are all traveling. Faith will be owned in that world, before God the Father and the holy angels. When the great white throne is set, and the books are opened, and the dead are called from their graves, and are receiving their final sentence—the value of saving faith will then be fully known! Men will learn then, if they never learned before, how true are the words, “Blessed are those who believed!”

## Questions:

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. Who did Mary visit in this passage?
3. How did Elizabeth show her faith in the way she described Mary?

## Family Application Questions:

1. What kind of blessings have we experienced by being a part of Christ's Church? What sort of opportunities do we have each Lord's Day (or throughout the week) to receive God's blessings through fellowship with other Christians?
2. Why is being rich in faith so much more important than being rich in gold? What are the differences between these two kinds of riches?

## PART 8

# The Announcement

## Scripture Reading:

Luke 1:46-56

## Key Verse:

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

## What does this passage teach us?

These verses contain Mary's famous hymn of praise, in the prospect of becoming the "mother of our Lord." Next to the Lord's Prayer perhaps, few passages of Scripture are better known than this.

**Let us mark, firstly, the full acquaintance with Scripture which this hymn exhibits.** We are reminded as we read it, of many expressions in the book of Psalms. Above all, we are reminded, of the *song of Hannah*, in 1st Samuel chapter 2. It is evident that Mary's memory was stored with Scripture. She was familiar, whether by hearing or by reading, with the Old Testament. And so, when out of the abundance of her heart her mouth spoke, she gave vent to her feelings in Scriptural language. Moved by the Holy Spirit to break forth into praise, she chooses language which the Holy Spirit had already consecrated and used.

Let us strive, every year we live, to become more deeply acquainted with Scripture. Let us study it, search into it, dig into it, meditate on it—until it dwells in us richly. (Col. 3:16) In particular, let us labor to make ourselves familiar with those parts of the Bible which, like the book of Psalms, describe the experience of the saints of old. We shall find it most helpful to us in all our approaches to God. It will supply us with the best and most suitable language for both the expression of our needs and our thanksgivings.

Such knowledge of the Bible can doubtless never be attained without regular, daily study. But the time spent on such study is never misspent. It will bear fruit after many days.

**Let us mark, secondly, in this hymn of praise, Mary's deep humility.** She who was chosen by God to the high honor of being Messiah's mother speaks of her own "low estate," and acknowledges her need of a "Savior." She does not let fall a word to show that she regarded herself as a sinless, "immaculate" person. On the contrary, she uses the language of one who has been taught by the grace of God to feel her own sins, and so far from being able to save others, requires a Savior for her own soul. We may safely affirm that none would be more forward to reprove the honor paid by the Romish Church to Mary, than Mary herself!

Let us copy this holy humility of our Lord's mother. Like her, let us be lowly in our own eyes, and think little of ourselves.

Humility is the highest grace that can adorn the Christian character. It is a true saying of an old divine, that "a man has just so much Christianity as he has humility." It is the grace which is most suitable of all to human nature. Above all, it is the grace which is within the reach of every converted person. All are not rich. All are not learned. All are not highly gifted. All are not preachers. But all children of God may be clothed with humility!

**Let us mark, thirdly, the lively *thankfulness* of Mary.** It stands out prominently in all the early part of her hymn. Her "soul magnifies the Lord." Her "spirit rejoices in God." "All generations shall call her blessed." "Great things have been done for her." We can scarcely enter into the full extent of feelings which a holy Jewess would experience on finding herself in Mary's position. But we should try to recollect them as we read her repeated expressions of praise.

We, too, shall do well to walk in Mary's steps in this matter, and *cultivate a thankful spirit*. Gratefulness has ever been a mark of God's most distinguished saints in every age. David, in the Old Testament, and Paul, in the New Testament,

are remarkable for their thankfulness. We seldom read much of their writings, without finding them blessing and praising God.

Let us rise from our beds every morning with a deep conviction that we are debtors, and that every day we have more mercies than we deserve. Let us look around us each week, as we go through the world, and see if we don't have much to thank God for. If our hearts are in the right place, then we shall never find any difficulty in building an *Ebenezer*—a monument of thanksgiving. Well would it be if our prayers and supplications were more mingled with thanksgiving. (1 Sam. 7:12, Phil. 4:6)

**Let us mark, fourthly—the experimental acquaintance with God's former dealings with His people, which Mary possessed.** She speaks of God as One whose “mercy *is* on them that fear him”—as One who “scatters the proud, and puts down the mighty, and sends the rich empty away”—as One who “exalts those of low degree, and fills the hungry with good things.” She spoke, no doubt, in recollection of Old Testament history. She remembered how Israel's God had brought down Pharaoh, and the Canaanites, and the Philistines, and Sennacherib, and Haman, and Belshazzar. She remembered how He had exalted Joseph, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Esther, and Daniel—and never allowed His chosen people to be completely destroyed. And in all God's dealings with herself, in placing honor upon a poor woman of Nazareth—in raising up Messiah in such a dry ground as the Jewish nation seemed to have become—she traced the handiwork of Israel's covenant God.

The true Christian should always give close attention to Bible history, and the lives of individual saints. Let us often examine the “footsteps of the flock” (Song of Sol. 1:8). Such study throws light on God's mode of dealing with His people. He is of one mind. What He did for them, and to them, in time past—He is likely to do now, and in time to come. Such study will teach us what to expect, check unwarrantable expectations, and encourage us when cast down. Happy is that man whose mind is well stored with such Scripture knowledge. It will make him patient and hopeful.

**Let us mark, lastly, the firm grasp which Mary had of Bible promises.** She ends her hymn of praise by declaring that God has “helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy,” and that He has done “as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.” These words show clearly that she remembered the old promise made to Abraham: “In thee shall all families of the earth be



blessed” (Gen. 12:3). And it is evident that in the approaching birth of her Son, she regarded this promise as about to be fulfilled.

Let us learn from this holy woman’s example to lay firm hold on *Bible promises*. It is of the deepest importance to our peace to do so. Promises are, in fact, the *manna* that we should daily eat, and the *water* that we should daily drink, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. We do not yet see all things put in subjection under us. We do not yet enjoy Christ, and heaven, and the book of life, and the mansions prepared for us. We walk by faith, and this faith leans on promises. But on those promises, we may lean confidently. They will bear all the weight we can lay on them. We shall find one day, like Mary, that God keeps His word, and that what He has spoken, so He will always in due time perform.

### **Questions:**

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. Summarize some of the elements of Mary’s hymn of praise.
3. How do we know Mary saw herself as a sinner?

### **Family Application Questions:**

1. Share some of your favorite promises from the Bible as a family. How do these promises encourage and strengthen you?
2. Can you think of any recent examples in history where God has humbled the proud and exalted the humble?

## **PART 9**

# The Announcement

### **Scripture Reading:**

Luke 1:57-66

## Key Verse:

*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)*

## What does this passage teach us?

We have in this passage the history of a birth—the birth of a burning and shining light in the Church, the forerunner of Christ Himself: John the Baptist. The language in which the Holy Spirit describes the event, is well worthy of remark. It is written that “the Lord showed great mercy to Elizabeth.” There was mercy in bringing her safely through her time of trial. There was mercy in making her the mother of a living child. Happy are those family circles whose births are viewed in this light—as special instances of “the mercy” of the Lord.

**We see in the conduct of Elizabeth’s neighbors and cousins a striking example of the kindness we owe to one another.** It is written that “they rejoiced with her.” How much more happiness there would be in this evil world, if conduct like that of Elizabeth’s neighbors and relations was more common!

*Sympathy* in one another’s joys and sorrows costs little—and yet is a grace of most mighty power. Like the oil on the wheels of some large engine, sympathy may seem to be a trifling and unimportant thing; yet in reality, it has an immense influence on the comfort and well-working of the whole fabric of society. A kind word of encouragement or consolation is seldom forgotten. The heart that is chilled by affliction, is peculiarly susceptible, and sympathy to such a heart is often more precious than gold.

The servant of Christ will do well to remember this grace of sympathy. It seems to be such a small thing; and amid the din of controversy, and the battle about mighty doctrines, we are sadly apt to overlook it. Yet it is one of those *ornaments of the Christian character* which make it beautiful in the eyes of men. Let us not forget that it is enforced upon us by a special precept: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15).

The practice of sympathy seems to bring down a special blessing. The Jews who came to comfort Mary and Martha at Bethany saw the greatest miracle that Jesus ever worked. Above all, it is commended to us by the most perfect example. Our

Lord was ready both to go to a marriage feast, and to weep at a grave (John 2, 11). Let us be ever ready to go and do likewise.

**We see in the conduct of Zachariah, in this passage, a striking example of the benefit of affliction.** He resists the wishes of his relations to call his new-born son after his own name. He clings firmly to the name “John,” which the angel Gabriel had commanded him to be called. He shows that his nine months’ dumbness had not been inflicted on him in vain. He is no longer faithless, but believing. He now *believes* every word that Gabriel had spoken to him, and every word of his message *shall* be obeyed.

We need not doubt that the past nine months had been a most profitable time to the soul of Zachariah. He had learned, probably, more about his own heart, and about God, than he ever knew before. His conduct shows it. *Correction* had proved to be needful *instruction*. He was ashamed of his unbelief. Like Job, he could say, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5). Like Hezekiah, when the Lord left him—he had found out what was in his heart (2 Chron. 32:31).

Let us take heed that affliction does us good—just as it did to Zachariah. *We cannot escape trouble in a sin-laden world.* Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards (Job 5:7). But in the time of our trouble, let us make earnest prayer that we may “hear the rod, and him who has appointed it”—that we may learn wisdom by the rod, and not harden our hearts against God.

“Sanctified afflictions,” says an old theologian, “are spiritual promotions.” The sorrow that humbles us and drives us nearer to God is a blessing, and a downright gain. No case is more hopeless than that of the man who, in time of affliction, turns his back upon God. There is a dreadful mark set against one of the kings of Judah, King Ahaz: “And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord” (2 Chron. 28:22).

**We see, in the early history of John the Baptist, the nature of the blessing that we should desire for all young children.** We read that “the hand of the Lord was with him.” We are not told distinctly what these words mean. We are left to gather their meaning from the *promise* that went before John before his birth, and the *life* that John lived all his days. But we need not doubt that the hand of the Lord was with John to sanctify and renew his heart, to teach and fit him for his office, to strengthen him for all his work as the forerunner of the Lamb of God,

to encourage him in all his bold denunciation of men's sins, and to comfort him in his last hours, when he was beheaded in prison.

We know that he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. We need not doubt that from his earliest years, the grace of the Holy Spirit appeared in his ways. In his boyhood as well as in his manhood, the constraining power of a mighty principle from above appeared in him. That power was the "hand of the Lord."

This is the *portion* that we ought to seek for our children. It is the best portion, and the happiest portion. It is the only portion that can never be lost, and will endure beyond the grave. It is good to have over them the hand of teachers and instructors, but it is better still to have "the hand of the Lord" over them.

We may be thankful if they obtain the patronage of the great and the rich. But we ought to care far more for their obtaining the favor of God. The hand of the Lord is a thousand times better than the hand of Herod. The one is weak, foolish, and uncertain—caressing today and beheading tomorrow. The other is almighty, all-wise, and unchangeable. Where it holds, it holds for evermore.

Let us bless God that the Lord never changes. What He was in John the Baptist's day, He is now. What He did for the son of Zachariah, He can do for our boys and girls. But He waits to be entreated. If we would have the hand of the Lord with our children, we must diligently seek it.

### **Questions:**

1. What is the theme of chapter 1?
2. How did Elizabeth's neighbors show love to her?
3. How had Zachariah grown in faith over nine months?

### **Family Application Questions:**

1. Discuss as a family the spiritual benefits of trials. What have we learned from past afflictions? What is God teaching us right now as a family?
2. How are we doing in showing sympathy to one another and to others in the body of Christ? Is there any among us who are hurting right now that we could bless in some way?