The Infancy Narrative (according to Luke)

The Gospel of Luke

Date Composed: Mid-80s CE
Place: A wide variety of sites have been proposed. Somewhere in Greece or Asia-Minor seems reasonable.

Author: A Gentile believer, possibly a God-fearer who admired Judaism before learning of Christianity.

Sources: The Gospel of Mark
"Q" sayings source
Other special material

Features of Luke (Acts)
- Is the first of a two-volume work; the second part presents the spread of salvation to the nations (Acts).
- Begins with an infancy narrative markedly different from Matthew’s.
- Is patterned after a Greek “history”
- Geography plays a major role. Jerusalem is the focus of the Gospel as the site through which salvation comes.
- Many biblical themes are woven into the Gospel and Acts, but the writer does not usually make explicit reference to the fact as Matthew did. A stress on Israel as first blessed by salvation, as God had promised.
- Jesus and his associates and followers are all depicted as pious, righteous, law-abiding Jews.
- Frequently mentions the poor and women.
- Jesus is often depicted as praying.
- There is a stress on Jesus as healer and peace bringer.
- The fact that Jesus was righteous and innocent is emphasized.
- There is a tendency to smooth over conflicts, disputes, and negative behaviour among the disciples and in the Church.
- Huge crowds are prominent. They often are portrayed very positively.
- Romans are depicted favorably.
- A sad and wistful attitude toward Jews outside the Church is noticeable.
- There are frequent references to guidance by the Spirit.

Context
- The Lukian community is predominantly Gentile.
- Christians could be taken for Jews or Jewish sympathizers by Romans.
- There is a danger in being perceived as revolutionaries by the Empire.
- Some members of the Lukian community may be concerned about the disapproval of unbaptized Jews. Is the Church’s distancing from Jews really what God planned?
- The Lukian community may be an affluent one, which the author feels is inadequately concerned with the poor.
Author’s Beliefs
- Jesus is the culmination of God’s plan to save humanity. His ministry marks the pivotal epoch in human history.
- Salvation enters the world through Israel and is offered to Israel first.
- The salvation which Jesus brings is the very peace of God. It rescues people from hatred, sickness, conflict, and alienation from God and each other. Jesus brings interpersonal harmony, physical and spiritual wholeness, contentment, and joy.
- Christianity is the natural, divinely-intended offshoot of Judaism.
- Jews who have not recognized God’s salvation in Christ are to be lamented. They are denying themselves the saving peace which Jesus brought.

Symbols used in the Infancy Narrative

Census
- May or may not have happened, can’t find any historical evidence that this occurred
- Luke wants Jesus to be born in Bethlehem to fulfill the prophecy, but to grow up in Nazareth
- If going to Joseph’s home town, then they would have been staying with relatives
- They would not have been alone – surrounded by family
- Young girl, aged 12, giving birth for the first time – would have been surrounded by women, as giving birth was the most dangerous thing a women in 1st century could do
- Vision of helplessness in the face of oppression

No room in the inn
- “inn” is translated as upper room – no room upstairs, for a screaming woman in labour, with blood – therefore down stairs, where the animals are kept
- makes sense that there is no room upstairs because if family was in town for the census, family home would have been filled
- Joseph would not have been allowed there

Shepherds
- Symbolize that Jesus is here for the poor, the outcast, not born among kings and royalty (no three kings here!)
- Shepherds were the working class of the Jewish society
- Were hated for their dishonesty in using the land of others for grazing and for not observing Jewish purity customs
- Marginalized, peasant people
- Wanderers, gave little attention to customs and laws
- They are the simple poor
- Shows the infant Jesus has a unique mission to the poor and disenfranchised

Animals
- Jesus born amongst the poorest and outcast – with the animals – especially those not Kosher.
Teaching Kataluma (καταλυματι)

- The Christmas story is one of “genuine and touching piety” (Bailey 2008b, p34)
- All bible translations, translate the Greek word Kataluma as “inn” (wrongly- the greek word for ‘inn’ is pandocheion and is used in the Good Samaritan Story – with the inn keeper!)
  - NRSV: “And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”
  - NIV: “and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”
  - Good News: “She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger – there was no room for them to stay in the inn.”

Καταλυματι is only used 3 times in all 4 gospels.
- 1- Mark where he uses καταλυματι to explain where Jesus had the last supper (the upper room),
- 2 – Luke’s infancy narrative where there was no room for Jesus in the upper room to be born,
- 3 – Luke has Jesus has his final meal (last supper) in the upper room καταλυματι

So where was Jesus really born if there was no room “somewhere for him”?
- Marshall (1978) translates as lodging
- Raymond Brown (1993) translates kataluma = lodgings, part of a private home, room
- Ottey (1986 pp72-73) translates as a form of caravansary (as travelling in first century Palestine, people travelled together and rested for the night under the protection of each other)
- Kerr (1991 p15) translates as guest room or upper room
- Bailey (2008) translates as guest room
- All these scholars also mention that if Jesus was of royal birth, and family was in Bethlehem, then every door would have been opened to welcome his family into their humble homes
Most likely then, Jesus was born in the main room of the house, with fire and hot water, like most first century Palestinian children, welcomed into the family as a miracle and a gift from God.

Animals were welcome into the house each night for warmth, and security and let out during the day, due to Rabbinic law.
Teaching Tips for Luke’s Infancy Narrative

1. Only teach 1 infancy narrative: if you teach both (from Matthew and Luke) than do a comparison. It is much easier in the primary setting to teach just one story.

2. Focus on the story itself – read the story from the bible. DO NOT rely on memory, past teachings, or read from picture books. Rely on the direct source.

3. Use an appropriate bible translation: NRSV, NIV, American Bible

4. The infancy narrative story should be a priority for the Religious Education Classroom – and either be part of the Scripture, Celebration and Prayer or Beliefs strands.

5. This story should be studied in its historical context to give greater meaning and understanding of the story.

6. Luke has Jesus born in the main room of the house – Teachers should avoid any learning activities that involve motels, inn-keepers, sons of inn-keepers and stables “not far away.” These popular ‘Hallmark greeting card’ additions are not mentioned in Luke. Teachers should be explicit about this. Teachers should allow students to investigate the lifestyle and culture of first century Palestinian families. Jesus is not born in a palace, not even in his own home, not even in the guest room of his relative’s home, but in the common room of a small peasant home, in a small, relatively insignificant town, in an out of the way corner of the world.

7. Sequencing events – When teaching the sequence of events in the infancy narratives, use the original Lukan text, rather than a picture book or children’s bible.

8. List characters from the original text – When teaching the infancy narrative, part of the learning sequence, could involve the listing of characters of the story. Teachers should list the characters directly from the Lukan source rather than from picture books or children’s bibles.

9. Recreate the nativity scene – Within their religious education programs, teachers should allow students to recreate the nativity scene according to Luke’s presentation.

10. Explore and enjoy the story for the sake of story telling, but don’t forget to allow students to discuss their faith sharing and understanding of the story: this is the story of the incarnation of God?? What does this mean????

Core Learning Outcomes & Suggested Learning Activities

51.1 Students use textual features to explore information and ideas in familia scriptural texts.
- Examine characters, features, story lines, sequence of the story, familiar and unfamiliar words
- The New Testament tells the story of Jesus, who is the Son of God
- Luke’s story tells us one version of Jesus birth

52.1 Students examine the textual features of text types of communication information and ideas about scriptural texts.
- Deepen the students understanding of the infancy narrative
- Read and story sequence from John’s birth
- Discuss plot, characters, images, symbols, messages
- Biblical referencing system
S3.1 Students explore textual features common to familiar text types to make meaning of scriptural texts.
- Read the story as a narrative and discuss the genre and textual features of narratives – orientation, complication, resolution
- Points of view from the different characters
- Themes, characters

S4.1 Students identify images, symbols and metaphoric language to communicate multiple meanings from scriptural texts.
- Identify the images used within the Lukan text to portray the theological meaning of the story from the author’s point of view
- Discuss symbols and their use in stories and myths and legends
- Discuss the metaphoric language of Jesus Son of God and the meaning this holds for us today.

Conceptual Organiser 2: Scriptural texts are composed and comprehended contextually.

S1.1 Students gather and record information facts about people, places and things in scriptural texts.
- Students gather and record information about the characters mentioned in the Lukan infancy narrative
- Use of maps, Bethlehem, Nazareth, types of houses

S2.2 Students retrieve contextual information to communicate thinking feelings and understandings about scriptural texts.
- Students study the history of the story: the cultural way of life, family life in first century Palestine, way of life of Jesus as a baby, houses, food, clothing, daily life, customs, key people
- Understanding of how the gospels were formed – 3 stages

S3.2 Students make connections between contextual information within scriptural texts and audiences of those texts.
- Study of the author of Luke, the community to which this gospel was written for, the purpose, the time of writing, the intended audience and the point of view the author is writing from and how contemporary audiences interpret gospel stories for their own faith life
- Study the historical context of the birth of Jesus – the messiah
- Geography/maps of the area
- Political systems and tensions in relation to the birth of Jesus

S4.1 Students apply in a systematic way the social, cultural and historical contexts of scriptural texts to clarify personal and shared meanings.
- Students are to study the way of life of first century Palestine in relation to the Lukan infancy narrative and then clarify personal and shared meanings of this story
- Students investigate social contexts, cultural contexts, historical contexts
- Students then use this information to clarify the meaning of the story for the contemporary world
51.1 **Students share and compare their ideas, feelings and experiences in interpreting familiar scriptural texts.**
- Students understand that Jesus is the central person of the New Testament and the stories about Jesus, and the stories Jesus tells all show us how to live our lives as God wants

52.3 **Students discuss levels of meaning to communicate a personal interpretation of a familiar scriptural text.**
- Students understand that Catholics take a contextual understanding of the bible, NOT a literal understanding.
- “Do not ask me did it happen or is it true?, BUT ask me “WHAT DOES IT MEAN?”
- Students are to have a simple understanding that the story of Jesus’ birth is the story of how God came to be on this earth, in human form

53.3 **Students explore range of biblical tools for interpreting scriptural texts.**
- Students are to be able to use biblical tools – concordances, look at different translations of the same story, commentaries, parallels, atlases etc. to aid their understanding of the infancy narrative according to Luke.

54.3 **Students develop a process using selected elements of interpretation, to explain a scriptural text.**
- Students are to be shown a variety of processes used by biblical scholars to aid in biblical interpretation. Students then develop/choose one to apply to the Lukan infancy narrative story.

**The Text**

*Luke 1*

**Introduction**

1Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 3Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

**The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold**

5In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. 7But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

8Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.
Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—
to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.
Mary Visits Elizabeth

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!'

Mary's Song

And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holly is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

The Birth of John the Baptist

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John."

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

Zechariah's Song

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come and has redeemed his people.

69 He has raised up a horn[d] of salvation for us
   in the house of his servant David
70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
71 salvation from our enemies
   and from the hand of all who hate us—
72 to show mercy to our fathers
   and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
   and to enable us to serve him without fear
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
   for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation
   through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
   by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
79 to shine on those living in darkness
   and in the shadow of death,
   to guide our feet into the path of peace."

80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Luke 2

The Birth of Jesus
1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to his own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels
8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ[e] the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
14 "Glory to God in the highest,
   and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."
When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Jesus Presented in the Temple
On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.