

# The Year of St Luke

Advent Sunday begins a new Church Year, and this means a fresh set of readings - Year C. The main gospel used for this year is Luke, which gives us all an opportunity to get to know it better. So, this article is meant to act as a short introduction to Luke and his gospel.

*Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided after investigating everything carefully from the first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. Luke 1*

This long piece of elegant Greek, is the opening of Luke's gospel, and yet he follows it with story after story. He, uniquely is the only gospel writer to give us the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. He is the only gospel writer to include the annunciation and the visit of the shepherds.

Luke's opening sentence does tell us so much. We learn that Luke himself is not an eyewitness of the events that make up the gospel, but he is a member of the early Christian community in about 80A.D, and has heard the stories of the eyewitnesses. He has participated in the "*events that have been fulfilled among us*".

He dedicates his account to the "*most excellent Theophilus*". This is a Greek rather than a Hebrew name, and so we can guess that Luke is writing for the church that is outside Israel, and one that includes many gentiles. Taking the clue further, if we look at the opening of the "*Acts of the Apostles*", we discover that this is also dedicated to Theophilus, and so we

can assume that Luke wrote this as well as his gospel. If we read *Acts* we may notice several passages that use "we" rather than "they", and so again we can deduce that Luke was a companion of Paul. Luke was with Paul when the boat was shipwrecked, when Paul was being taken as a prisoner to Rome for trial before the Emperor. Tradition suggests that he was "*the beloved physician*" mentioned in Colossians 4:14. So, though Luke did not know Jesus, he was at the centre of the world of the early church.

We learn why Luke wanted to write his gospel, even though there were already other gospels in circulation. He wanted to write an "*orderly account*". He wants to make theological sense of the "*events that have been fulfilled among us*". He sees in Jesus the fulfilment of all the promises of the Old Testament. Just read Luke's *Magnificat* and *Benedictus* (1:46, 68). A chapter later in the *Nunc Dimittus* (2:29), we read that Jesus has come to bring salvation,

*"in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the gentiles,  
and the glory to your people Israel."*

Jesus - for Luke, is the fulfilment of God's promises, not just for the Jews, but for all peoples. Luke's gospel takes us through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, while in *Acts* he continues the story of salvation into the spread of the gospel, from Jerusalem to Rome, the capital of the Empire.

As we listen to Luke's gospel throughout this year, may we catch something of the message which Luke seeks to give us, "*the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.*"

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