

## FOR THE GENTILES: LUKE 1:1-2:40

Sanctuary, 19 December 2021

### *Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country*

#### NARRATOR

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 very 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.

As we begin:

- *What do you know about Luke?*
- *For whom was this story written?*
- *Who is Theophilus?*

To keep in mind:

- *'righteous' (dikaios): Torah observant*
- *Antiochus IV: Judaism banned outright*
- *Rome: destruction of the Temple in 70C.E.*
- *Holocaust ... (see [background briefing](#))*

Let us pray:

God of Elizabeth, when Elizabeth heard news of joy, she celebrated not because she was part of an important story, but because a kind story had wrapped itself around her, and the disgrace she had endured was lightened. Lighten the places of our disgraces. Lighten them. Wrap yourself and your story around us. Because you can be the great story that surrounds us. Amen.

♪ Come light, light of God // Give light to creation  
Enlighten our hearts // And remain with your world.

#### NARRATOR

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him.

#### ANGEL

Don't be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or spirits; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

#### ZECHARIAH

How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.

#### ANGEL

I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.

#### NARRATOR

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

### *Zechariah & Elizabeth's home*

#### NARRATOR

After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion.

#### ELIZABETH

This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.

### *Nazareth*

#### NARRATOR

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary, and the angel came to her.

#### ANGEL

Grace be with you, favoured one! The Lord is with you.

#### NARRATOR

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

#### ANGEL

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and

bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

MARY

How can this be, since I have never known a man?

ANGEL

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.

MARY

Here am I, the servant of the Lord;  
let it be with me according to your word.

NARRATOR

Then the angel departed from her. In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

*Zechariah and Elizabeth's house*

MARY

Shalom, Elizabeth!

NARRATOR

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry,

ELIZABETH

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why has this happened to me — to me! — that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.

MARY / ALL

1. My soul cries out with a joyful shout  
that the God of my heart is great,  
And my spirit sings of the wondrous things  
that you bring to the ones who wait.  
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight,  
and my weakness you did not spurn,  
So from east to west shall my name be blest.  
Could the world be about to turn?  
My heart shall sing of the day you bring.  
Let the fires of your justice burn.  
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,  
and the world is about to turn!

2. Though I am small, my God, my all,  
you work great things in me,  
And your mercy will last from the depths of the past  
to the end of the age to be.  
Your very name puts the proud to shame,  
and to those who would for you yearn,  
You will show your might, put the strong to flight,  
for the world is about to turn.  
My heart shall sing of the day you bring ...
3. From the halls of power to the fortress tower,  
not a stone will be left on stone.  
Let the king beware for your justice tears  
ev'ry tyrant from his throne.  
The hungry poor shall weep no more,  
for the food they can never earn;  
There are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed,  
for the world is about to turn.  
My heart shall sing of the day you bring ...
4. Though the nations rage from age to age,  
we remember who holds us fast:  
God's mercy must deliver us  
from the conqueror's crushing grasp.  
This saving word that our forebears heard  
is the promise which holds us bound,  
'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God,  
who is turning the world around.  
My heart shall sing of the day you bring ...

NARRATOR

And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home. Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father.

ELIZABETH

No; he is to be called John.

ALL

But none of your relatives has this name!

NARRATOR

Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.

ZECHARIAH

Praise be to God!

NARRATOR

Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said,

‘What then will this child become?’ For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him. Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

#### ZECHARIAH / ALL

1. O bless the God of Israel,  
who comes to set us free,  
who visits and redeems us  
and grants us liberty.  
The prophets spoke of mercy,  
of rescue and release;  
God shall fulfil the promise  
to bring our people peace.
2. Now from the house of David  
a child of grace is given;  
A Saviour comes among us  
to raise us up to heaven.  
Before him goes the herald  
forerunner in the way,  
the prophet of salvation,  
the messenger of Day.
3. Where once were fear and darkness  
the sun begins to rise  
the dawning of forgiveness  
upon the sinner’s eyes,  
to guide the feet of pilgrims  
along the paths of peace:  
O bless our God and Saviour,  
with songs that never cease!

#### NARRATOR

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel. In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

#### *Bethlehem / Paddock*

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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.

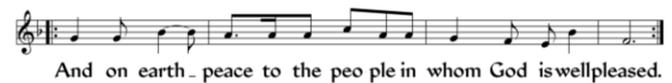
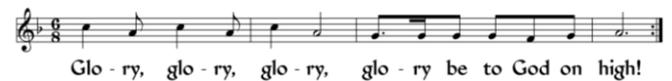
In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

#### ANGEL

Don’t be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

#### NARRATOR

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and singing.



#### NARRATOR

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds spoke.

#### SHEPHERDS

Let’s go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.

#### NARRATOR

So they rushed there and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

#### ♪ GLORY, GLORY, GLORY ...

#### NARRATOR

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord.’).

#### *The Temple*

#### NARRATOR

At the temple, they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do

for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God:

SIMEON



Lord, let your servant now rest in peace  
For you — kept — your pro - mise.  
With my own eyes I see  
the sal - va - tion you pre - pared for all peo - ples:  
— a light of re - ve - la - tion for the gen - tiles  
and glo - ry to your peo - ple Is - ra - el.

NARRATOR

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and spoke to Mary.

SIMEON

This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.

NARRATOR

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

PASTOR

- *What stands out? What do you notice? Does anything feel like direct speech?*
- *Does the background briefing and/or today's telling change anything you thought you knew about Jesus? Luke? The Messiah? Gentiles? Yourself? What?*
- *How would you describe your place in this story?*
- *What response does it call out from you?*

*After discussion:*

Let us pray:

*Prayers for the world*

Lord, hear our prayer.

♪ Come light, light of God // Give light to creation  
Enlighten our hearts // And remain with your world.

PASTOR

*A reading from Luke. Let us listen for the word of God:*

[After baptism, ministry, execution and resurrection] Jesus said to his disciples, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to the Gentiles, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised.'

(Luke 24:44-49a).

As god-lovers and Gentiles  
living in the shadow of the Holocaust,  
in a dark world where Jewish people  
are still marginalised, persecuted and whitewashed,  
where white supremacy is on the rise  
and where history is being erased,  
hear clearly the promise of the gospel:  
By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high has broken upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of shalom.  
This is good news of great joy for *all* people:  
including you, including me.  
Our sins are forgiven.  
We are Christ's witnesses.  
So go, proclaim the good news in word and deed!  
Build bridges between people.  
Live with joy in the light of love,  
and let the Spirit guide you in the way of peace.

ALL

We will.

PASTOR

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord:  
in the name of Christ: Amen.

♪ **SHALOM, MY FRIENDS**

Shalom, my friends,  
God's peace, my friends  
Go with you now  
And stay with you  
In all you do  
Shalom, shalom.

Written, sourced, edited and arranged by Alison Sampson for Sanctuary © 2021. God of Elizabeth: From Pádraig Ó Tuama *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2017: 11 + The Song of Zechariah: Michael Perry (1942-1996) © Mrs B Perry / Jubilate Hymns. All rights reserved. Reprinted under One License #A-626926 + Canticle of the Turning: Rory Cooney © 1990 GIA Publications. All rights reserved. Reprinted under One License #A-626926 + Gloria: Pablo Sosa © 1990, WGRG, Iona Community. All rights reserved. Reprinted under One License #A-626926 + Nunc Dimittis: Words: ICCEL (alt'd). Music © Judith Waldron 2006. Used with permission + Come light, light of God: Words and Music: Sisters of the Grandchamp Community, Switzerland + Shalom, my friends: Hebrew Traditional.