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LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



# The Gospel *of* Luke

**SALVATION FOR ALL HUMANITY**

**WILLIAM A. ANDERSON, DMIN, PHD**



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This series is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my parents, Kathleen and Angor Anderson, in gratitude for all they shared with all who knew them, especially my siblings and me.



# Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

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READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our heads. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

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## **Group and Individual Study**

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



# *Lectio Divina* (Sacred Reading)

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BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, a study of the Bible is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a spiritual adventure that should influence our dealings with God and neighbor.

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## **The Meaning of *Lectio Divina***

*Lectio divina* is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on the Scripture passages.

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## **Prayer and *Lectio Divina***

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 14 includes an Opening Prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

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## Pondering the Word of God

*Lectio divina* is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our hearts and consciences to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

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## Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.

3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



# How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

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THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' message. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of the Gospel of Luke and realize how that gospel offers spiritual nourishment. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

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## Context

When the author wrote his gospel, he didn't simply link random stories about Jesus—he placed them in a context that often stressed a message. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

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## Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of the Gospel of Luke, the book is divided into ten lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 10 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers passages from Luke 2:1 through 4:13. The study group reads and discusses only Luke 2:1–52 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on Luke 3:1 through 4:13 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the format at the top of page 12. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the format at the bottom of page 12, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

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## Part 2: Individual Study

The gospel passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into three to six shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

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## A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

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Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio*

*divina* (see page 7) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

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## GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

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### 1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

*About ninety minutes of group study*

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

*To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 7.*

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### 2. Bible Study

*About one hour of group study*

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

---

## Notes to the Leader

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✘ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✘ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✘ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✘ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✘ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✘ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✘ Use a clock or watch.
- ✘ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✘ Ask participants to read "Introduction: The Gospel of Luke" (page 15) before the first session.
- ✘ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✘ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

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## Notes to Participants

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Read "Introduction: The Gospel of Luke" (page 15) before the first class.
- ✘ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✘ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

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## Opening Prayer

*Leader:* O God, come to my assistance,

*Response:* O Lord, make haste to help me.

*Leader:* Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

*Response:* ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

*Leader:* Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

*Response:* Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

*Reader:* (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

---

## Closing Prayer

*Leader:* Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

*Response:* Our Father...

*Leader:* Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

*Response:* Amen.

*Leader:* May the divine assistance remain with us always.

*Response:* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



## INTRODUCTION

# The Gospel of Luke

*Read this overview before the first class.*

When a teenager asked his grandfather what book he was reading these days, the grandfather said, “I’m reading a book about my life.” The youth, enthused that his grandfather would have a book written about himself, asked anxiously, “What’s the name of the book?” The teenager laughed when his grandfather responded, “It’s called the Bible!”

Although the Bible is the Word of God, it is not only about God and God’s dealings with the people of the past; it is also a collection of stories about us. As we understand the Bible more fully, we will understand its application to our lives.

---

### **The Historical Climate**

After Jesus ascended into heaven, his followers thought they would continue to live as faithful Jews who believed the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus, with the expectation that all Jewish people would eventually accept that belief. Little did Peter and the other disciples realize at the time that the followers of Christ would eventually be rejected by the Jewish leadership of the era and become a faith apart from Judaism. Christianity would gain a far greater number of converts from among the Gentiles than among the Jews. Gentile Christian communities sprouted up rapidly in areas outside Jerusalem.

In time, Paul the Apostle became the Apostle of the Gentiles. Paul recognized the difficulties encountered by Gentiles in attempting to live a faith that had its roots in Jewish laws and customs. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul eventually convinced the leadership of Jewish Christian converts

that the Gentiles should not be obligated to follow Jewish dietary laws and customs, but ought to be free to follow the message of Christ in a manner familiar to their culture. After many years of struggle and confrontation, the Gentiles were eventually able to live as faithful followers of Christ without the burden of Jewish dietary laws and customs. Paul was beheaded around 64, and approximately twenty years later, the author of the Gospel of Luke penned a gospel addressed to Gentile believers in the Christian Way.

---

### **Who Was Luke?**

Like other gospel writers, the author of the Gospel of Luke fails to identify himself. By studying the style and cultural traits of this gospel, we can gain some insight into the author's background, but we must look toward later writings to discover the author's name. In reading the gospel, we can assert that the author was a Gentile Christian who lived outside of Palestine and, according to most commentators, seems to be a Syrian from Antioch. He has a perfect grasp of the Greek language and its classical usage, and he shows a greater knowledge of the world of Asia Minor than he does of Palestine.

The author omits the extensive use of Old Testament prophecies as found in the Gospel of Matthew. He shows his great literary skills when he declares in his opening statement that his aim is to present "in an orderly sequence" the gospel so that the reader may "realize the certainty of the teachings" presented.

An early third-century catalog of the books of the New Testament, known as the Muratorium Fragment, names Luke as the author of this gospel. The Muratorium Fragment apparently had some authority in Rome around the year 200, and it states that the author of the Gospel of Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. Another ancient writer named Irenaeus, who wrote around the same period in which the Muratorium Fragment was written, also names Luke as the author of this gospel. Although other writers support this view, the Muratorium Fragment and Irenaeus are the earliest writings to identify Luke as the author. Despite the evidence of ancient writings that identify Luke as the author of the gospel, a question still remains, namely: Who was Luke?

Besides this early evidence, similarities between the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles point to the same author for both books. The open-

ing lines of both writings address a certain “Theophilus” as the recipient of the book, and Acts speaks of a previous book about Jesus Christ. The Acts of the Apostles begins where the Gospel of Luke ends. With this evidence, some look to the Acts of the Apostles to discover the identity of Luke. The evidence seems to point to a companion of Paul as the author of this gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, but the evidence is weak and inconclusive.

In his letters, Paul does speak of a companion named Luke, who is later identified as “the physician” (2 Timothy 4:11; Colossians 4:14). Although the author of the Acts of the Apostles never gives his own name, the author identifies himself as a companion of Paul the Apostle in Acts 16:10–17, where he uses the term “we,” as though he, Paul, and others traveled together. Many commentators find this use of “we” inconclusive, since it could be a literary device used to strengthen the author’s writing, or it could be the author’s use of a source from another writer who traveled with Paul. Although no one is certain about the true identity of the author of this gospel, we will refer to him as Luke throughout the following pages.

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### **Who Was Luke’s Audience?**

While Matthew wrote for converts from Judaism, Luke wrote for converts from among the Gentiles. Matthew presents Jesus as a true Israelite whose ancestry reaches back to Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation. Wanting to show Jesus in a more universal light, Luke traces Jesus’ family line back to Adam, the first human mentioned in the Bible. As stated above, he addresses his gospel to “Theophilus,” a Greek, non-Jewish name. Luke writes not only for those outside Judaism but also for all outcasts: the poor, the sick, sinners, women, foreigners, and conquerors. He writes a gospel filled with compassion and mercy for the downtrodden.

---

### **When Was the Gospel of Luke Written?**

The Gospel of Luke was written somewhere between 80 and 90. Since the author uses Mark as one of his sources, we must assume the Gospel of Mark had some time to become known and accepted within the early Church. Mark wrote his gospel about the year 70. Luke, like Matthew, shows a clearer knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem than Mark does. The destruction of this great city took place in 70, which gives further evidence

that the author wrote his gospel after this well-known event in Jewish and Christian history.

No evidence shows that Matthew or Luke had any knowledge of the other's gospel, though both used another written source commonly referred to as "Q" by modern Scripture scholars. The letter comes from the first letter of the German word *Quelle*, which means "source." Luke, like Matthew, is also said to have had an oral source that came to him from his community, from which he drew some passages not found in the other gospels.

---

### **What Are Some Characteristics of Luke's Gospel?**

Mark develops an image of Jesus also incorporated in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, since they both use Mark as one of their sources. (See *The Synoptic Problem* in the introductory book of this series, *Introduction to the Bible*.) As a result, many of the characteristics of Mark's Gospel will appear in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but they will sometimes be used to emphasize a different message than the applications made by Mark. In investigating how the Gospels of Matthew and Luke apply the Gospel of Mark, the reader can better understand the purpose of Matthew and Luke in writing their gospels and how their use of Mark shows the difference between the Gospel of Matthew and that of Luke. (See *Redaction Criticism* in the introductory book of this series). Matthew uses Mark as his source almost twice as much as Luke does.

### ***Jesus as a Universal Savior***

A major characteristic of the Gospel of Luke is that it was written for all people. As insignificant as this might sound today, it was most significant for the early Church, as at that time many people from all nations were accepting the teachings of Jesus Christ.

How did Jesus, a Jew, show his concern for all people, and what right did others outside of Judaism have to accept Jesus as their savior? Luke answers these questions by placing Jesus at the center of creation rather than at the center of the Jewish faith. The Gospel of Luke continually reminds the reader that the Good News is to be brought to the entire world, and not only to the Israelites. Jesus is the savior of all creation.

### ***Concern for the Outcast***

In Luke's story of the birth of Jesus, we immediately catch a glimpse of the direction of the gospel. The weak shepherds (not the wise Magi of the Gospel of Matthew) pay homage to Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus shows concern for the poor, the sinful, the rejected Samaritans, the sick, and women. To the Jewish mind of Jesus' day, the people comprising these groups were the outcasts and downtrodden of society. At best, they were the second-class citizens of the day.

### ***Jesus' Journey Toward Jerusalem and His Death***

Luke introduces us to Jesus and his ministry in the first part of the gospel and dedicates the second part to detailed events of the long journey of Jesus toward Jerusalem. The message tells us that Jesus knew of his destiny and followed the will of God to the end. It was fitting for Jesus, the great prophet, to die in Jerusalem, the place where many of the prophets of the past faced their death. The gospel ends with the final triumph of Jesus' resurrection in Jerusalem and a short summary of the Ascension of Jesus. (A more detailed version of the Ascension can be found at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, which explains how the message of Jesus spread from Jerusalem to the whole world.)

### ***A Spiritual Gospel***

Luke emphasizes the place of prayer in Jesus' life. Before important events in his life, Jesus goes off by himself to pray. The Spirit becomes very active in the life of Jesus. And the true lover and disciple of Jesus is the one who abandons all material goods for the sake of God. Luke calls his readers to spiritual surrender and complete trust in a loving God.

### ***The Structure of the Gospel***

At the beginning of his gospel, Luke promises that he will present a well-ordered narrative of the life of Jesus and his message from the material gained from other witnesses. The structure fulfills the promise of the writer who wrote, "I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you...so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received (1:3–4).



## LESSON 2

# Preparation for Jesus' Public Ministry

LUKE 2:1—4:13

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*She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (2:7).*

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**Opening Prayer** (SEE PAGE 14)

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### Context

**Part 1: Luke 2:1–52** Luke tells of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, which include the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the homage paid to Jesus by the shepherds, the circumcision and presentation of Jesus in the Temple, and Mary's and Joseph's finding the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple after searching for him for three days.

**Part 2: Luke 3:1—4:13** Luke describes the mission of John the Baptist, the events surrounding Jesus' baptism, the genealogy of Jesus, and Jesus' temptations in the desert.

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## PART 1: GROUP STUDY (LUKE 2:1–52)

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Read aloud Luke 2:1–52.

### *2:1–20 The birth of Jesus*

Earlier in his gospel, Luke placed the birth of John the Baptist at the center of the Jewish world by revealing Herod as the king of Judea. He now broadens his scope to include the whole known world when he speaks of the birth of Jesus. Jesus is born for all people, not just for the Jewish world. Luke states that a decree from Caesar Augustus ordered that a census of the “whole world should be enrolled.”

When Luke writes his gospel some eighty or more years after the birth of Jesus, he does not seem to realize the difficulties presented in the historical names he uses. Herod, who is mentioned at the birth of John, died in 4 BC, while Quirinius, who is mentioned at the birth of Jesus, did not become governor of Syria until the year 6. A later census was taken when Jesus was about ten years old, and this would coincide with the time that Quirinius was governor of Syria. Luke, who is writing a religious message rather than a historical account of the birth of Jesus, was not concerned about this inaccuracy in his infancy narrative. The main purpose of the story is to show that Jesus' life touches the whole world.

Another purpose of citing the census in Luke's Gospel is the author's need to get Jesus from Nazareth to Bethlehem, which was the birthplace accepted by members of the early Church. In the Gospel of Matthew, Mary and Joseph reside in Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Jesus; only later do they go to Nazareth. Luke has the family of Jesus going from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the birth. Bethlehem is the town of David, from whose line the Messiah would come. Both gospels agree that Jesus is born in Bethlehem.

Luke mentions that Mary is engaged to Joseph, perhaps to further emphasize that a marriage had not yet taken place and that the birth was truly a virgin birth. Jesus is born and placed in a manger. The manger tells us that Jesus lives among the poor. Just as some of the Israelites would reject him throughout his life, they now reject him by refusing him lodging at the time of his birth. Mary gives birth to Jesus, who is called the

“firstborn.” The title does not mean Mary had other children. According to Jewish Law (Deuteronomy 21:15–17), the firstborn referred to the oldest male child who inherited all the gifts and traditions of the family. This was the position of privilege in the family. The title makes no statement concerning any future children or lack of children on the part of Mary and Joseph.

Just as Zechariah and Mary had received heavenly visitations from the angels of God, shepherds tending their sheep in a field now receive a similar visitation. Because they worked on the Sabbath and grazed their sheep on foreign land, the shepherds were considered outcasts by many of the Jews of Jesus’ day. Luke has these outcasts become the heralds of Jesus’ birth. The reaction of the shepherds to the heavenly visitation of an angel is described in the usual form used by scriptural authors in reporting such events. They react with fear, and the angel must calm their fear. The angel proclaims the joyful news that a savior, who is the Messiah and Lord, is born in Bethlehem. The sign given to the shepherds is the condition of lowliness in which Jesus is born, wrapped in bands of cloth and placed in a manger. The event is so great that all of the heavenly hosts join in the praise of God and proclaim that those who find favor with God will experience peace. This peace is a harmony and contentment that comes to those who know they are living in God’s presence.

The shepherds, as symbols of the outcasts and sinners whom Jesus will meet during his life, respond as quickly as Mary did when she rushed to visit Elizabeth. They go to Bethlehem “with haste” and find Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. When they see the Holy Family in this situation, they understand the message of the angel. The shepherds spread the word to others, who are equally astonished at their message. Luke tells us that Mary ponders all that is happening and concludes with the shepherds returning to the fields, praising God for all they have heard and seen.

### ***2:21–40 The Presentation***

On the eighth day, in accordance with Jewish Law, the Child is circumcised and given the name Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew, the name, which means “God saves,” is strongly emphasized. Luke, however, simply mentions that the name Jesus is given to the Child as the angel had directed

before his conception. Luke confuses the story of the Presentation of Jesus with another ceremony, the purification of Mary. The presentation took place on the eighth day after the birth of a child. The author quotes from the Book of Exodus (13:2, 12) where Moses passes on the word of the Lord exhorting that the firstborn belongs to the Lord. Although the firstborn son belonged to the Lord, he could be ransomed by making an offering (13:13).

The purification of Mary should have taken place forty days after the birth of the male child, not on the eighth day after the child's birth (Leviticus 12:1–8). According to the Law of Moses, a woman who gives birth to a male child is considered unclean and must not touch anything sacred or enter the sanctuary for forty days. At the end of the forty days, she must present an offering to the priest, who will make an offering to the Lord for her, and she shall then be declared clean. The usual offering would be a lamb and a dove, but a poor person could offer two doves in place of the usual offering. Mary and Joseph make the offering of the poor. Luke portrays this offering as the ransom paid to the Lord for Jesus. In the First Book of Samuel (1:28), Samuel's mother, Hannah, does not ransom her child but leaves him in the Temple to serve the Lord.

Simeon, a prophet who lived in Jerusalem, recites the third canticle found in the infancy narrative. He has received the revelation by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he saw the Messiah. The Spirit leads him to the Temple when Mary and Joseph come with Jesus. Commentators refer to Luke's Gospel as the Gospel of the Holy Spirit due to passages such as this where the activity of the Holy Spirit guides the people. When Simeon sees the child, he prays that God may now let him die. He does not name Jesus, but he declares that he has now witnessed the salvation God has prepared for the people. Simeon proclaims that the child has come as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." He further prophesies that Jesus will be responsible for the fall and rise of many in Israel, perhaps referring to the religious leaders who will reject Jesus and the disciples who will accept him. He prophesies to Mary that she will suffer along with Jesus, as she does by witnessing his struggles in ministry and his passion and death.

Anna, an elderly prophetess who has spent most of her life in the

Temple fasting and praying, also gives witness to the ministry of Jesus. Throughout this gospel, Luke will emphasize the special role of women in the life of Jesus. Anna is just one of many women who recognizes Jesus and his mission. She thanks God for Jesus and becomes an evangelist for those who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem by faith in God.

The passage ends with Mary and Joseph's returning home with Jesus, who grows in the normal manner, physically and spiritually, and who (Luke tells us) is "filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."

### ***2:41–52 The boy Jesus in the Temple***

Many of the Jews who lived outside Jerusalem returned each year to the holy city for the major feast of Israel, Passover. Mary and Joseph, who were accustomed to going to Jerusalem for the feast, take Jesus with them when he reaches the age of twelve. On their way home, Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus is missing, and they return to Jerusalem in search of him. They find him "after three days," alluding to the resurrection of Jesus that will occur three days after his death.

Jesus seems surprised that his parents should be looking for him. He apparently is experiencing the early impulses of his mission, and he implies that his parents should have realized where he was, namely, in the house of God. The ease with which Jesus refers to God as his Father is significant, but it is beyond the grasp of Mary and Joseph. Although Jesus will remain obedient to his parents, he is here showing a greater call to follow the will of God the Father. Mary stores these mysteries in her mind. The Scriptures tell us that Mary "kept all these things in her heart." Jesus returns home with Mary and Joseph and lives in obedience to them, growing in wisdom, age, and grace according to Luke.

### ***Review Questions***

1. Name some parallels between the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus.
2. What hints in the infancy narrative lead us to believe the story was written after the resurrection of Jesus?
3. What lessons do we learn from the story of Jesus who remained for three days in the Temple at the age of twelve?

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**Closing Prayer** (SEE PAGE 14)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

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**Lectio Divina** (SEE PAGE 7)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 7 for further instruction.)

***The birth of Jesus (2:1–20)***

Jesus comes for all people. The shepherds, considered sinners in the eyes of the people of Jesus' day, are the first to receive the good news of the birth of Jesus. The outcasts are suddenly the rewarded ones. Throughout the gospel, we will learn that sinners are a priority in Jesus' mission. He said he came to call sinners, not the just. This is good news for all of us.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

***The Presentation (2:21–40)***

When parents celebrate the baptism of their child, a joyful experience could turn into a chilling experience if someone were to predict that the child would be accepted by some but rejected and contradicted by many others. After receiving Simeon's dire message, Jesus' parents return home to Nazareth, undeterred in their commitment to God.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

***The boy Jesus in the Temple (2:41–52)***

Pondering, as Mary often did, is a part of commitment. When we commit ourselves to the Lord, we do not receive a clear map of our life ahead. Rather, true commitment requires deep trust and is often accompanied by confusion and even periods of doubt. Like Mary, we might wonder where God is leading us. We can follow her example by complete surrender to God's will.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

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## PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (LUKE 3:1—4:13)

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### Day 1: The Preaching of John the Baptist (3:1–20)

In the third section of Luke's Gospel, the author speaks of Jesus' preparation for his ministry by introducing the reader to John the Baptist and his mission. This is followed by Jesus' preparation for his baptism and temptations in the desert. Through the genealogy of Jesus, the author shows that Jesus' ancestry can be traced back to Adam, since he depicts Jesus as a universal savior.

Continuing to use his framework of a universal salvation during the ministry of Jesus, Luke places the ministry of John within the context of the history of the Roman world. The Word of God comes to John in the desert in the "fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius," which places the date somewhere between the years 27 and 29. After naming the ruler of the entire Roman Empire, Luke narrows the scene to the Roman rulers in and around Palestine.

After the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the land of Palestine was divided among his sons. One son, Archelaus, ruled so badly that his portion of the lands, mainly those of Judea, were turned over to a Roman procurator. At the time of John's preaching in the desert, the procurator was Pontius Pilate. Other lands around Palestine were ruled by Herod, Philip, and Lysanias.

Luke names two high priests for this period, but the actual high priest was Caiaphas. Caiaphas's father-in-law, Annas, held the position until the year 15, when he turned it over to his daughter's husband. Annas, however, kept such control over the office that many considered him an acting high priest. For this reason Luke names the two of them as high priests.

When Luke tells us that the Word of God came to John, he again declares that John is the son of Zechariah, thus linking this part of the story with the infancy narrative. Luke follows Mark in much of his presentation about John. The Baptist calls the people to a baptism that demands a change of heart. Luke identifies John as the one foretold by Isaiah who will prepare the way of the Lord. Luke adds two more verses

to those found in the parallel passages in Mark and Matthew. He states that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God,” thus adding a reference to a central message of his gospel, namely, that Jesus came for the salvation of all people (Isaiah 40:5).

John addresses his audience as a “brood of vipers,” a dreadful and insulting accusation in John’s era. He challenges them to produce good fruit, performing good works as a sign of their repentance. They should not make the false assumption that they are favored by God simply because they are descendants of Abraham. By telling them that God can raise up children to Abraham from the abundance of stones in the desert, he is teaching them that anyone can be a child of Abraham, but the real challenge is to live in the spirit of Abraham. The time of reckoning is near for “the ax lies at the root of the trees,” and the people must show some signs that they have reformed their lives.

John’s words begin to influence many of his listeners who now ask what they should do. His first response to the crowd is to share what they have, whether clothing or food. His words are so powerful that even tax collectors and soldiers ask what they should do. John does not tell them to abandon their trade, but he tells tax collectors to be fair in collecting taxes; soldiers that they should avoid extortion, false accusations, and become satisfied with their wages. Luke alone mentions these groups, thus showing the importance of outcasts in his gospel. It is significant that Luke does not reject the tax collectors and soldiers whom the Jewish people generally hated. Rather, he portrays John as someone who allowed them to remain in their trade as long as they were fair. This is the good fruit they must produce as a sign of their repentance.

John declares that one mightier than he will come who will baptize them not only with water, but with the Holy Spirit and fire. The allusion is to show the power of the Spirit and the cleansing power of fire. Yet some see these words as pointing to the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples in the form of tongues of fire. John explains that the one who is to come is so far superior to him that he is not even worthy to perform the act of a lowly servant, namely, to loosen the thongs of Jesus’ sandals. The time of judgment has arrived when God will gather the good (wheat) into the barn and burn the evil ones (chaff) with unquenchable

fire. The discourse of John in this gospel is completed with the notion that John preached the good news to the people.

This section ends with John's imprisonment by Herod the tetrarch because John accused Herod of an improper marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and rebuked him for his other crimes.

### *Lectio Divina*

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

John is preparing the people for the coming of Christ by calling those who have been blessed with gifts to share them with others and those who have worked to perform their tasks well. John does not tell tax collectors and soldiers to quit their work, but he admonishes them to perform their tasks justly and well. John's words sound very much like the directions given by Jesus in the gospels. In doing this, John is preparing the way of the Lord.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

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### **Day 2: God's Beloved Son (3:21–38)**

Luke does not describe the baptism of Jesus but shows Jesus at prayer after he was baptized. In the midst of this prayer, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus, and a voice from heaven proclaims Jesus as "the beloved Son" of the Father. In this gospel, Jesus is portrayed as a man of prayer, especially before important events. Jesus prays: before he chooses the Twelve (6:12); when he prays in solitude with his disciples (9:18); at the time of the transfiguration (9:28); before he teaches his disciples to pray (11:1); at the Last Supper when he declares that he has prayed for Peter (22:32); during his agony in the garden (22:41); and on the cross (23:46). The gospel writer does not indicate whether anyone besides Jesus saw the descent of the Holy Spirit and heard the voice from heaven.

Matthew puts the genealogy of Jesus at the beginning of his gospel. Luke, however, places it after Jesus' baptism, perhaps to show the importance of Jesus' commitment to his mission. The genealogies found in Matthew and Luke differ from each other, an indication that the gospels are primarily religious books with a message and not history books in a strict sense.

Matthew shows that Jesus is a true Israelite, and he traces his family tree back to Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation.

Luke, however, wishes to show that Jesus came for all people, so he traces the family line of Jesus back to Adam, the father of all people and then to God, the creator of all. The genealogies do not agree with each other at all points, showing that each writer chose the names in the genealogy to fit the purpose of their narratives. Luke does not end with Adam, but adds that Adam is a son of God, perhaps to emphasize Jesus' divine sonship. Both genealogies link the line of Jesus with that of his foster-father, Joseph. In accepting Jesus as his own, Joseph gave him the right to the line of Abraham and David.

Matthew begins his genealogy moving down the line from Abraham to Jesus, whereas Luke begins with Jesus and moves up the line to Adam and then to God. He mentions that Jesus was about thirty years of age when he began his ministry. When he identifies Jesus as the son of Joseph, he adds the phrase "as was thought," thereby remaining faithful to his message that Jesus was of a virgin birth. Since Luke presents Jesus as the prophet in his narrative, he names Nathan the prophet as the son of David instead of Solomon, thus emphasizing Jesus' role as a prophet.

### *Lectio Divina*

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Just as the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in his prayer after his baptism by John, so the heavens open at every baptism, joining all the baptized to Jesus as brothers and sisters. Just as parents can say to their child, "Make me proud of you," so God can say to each of us, "Make me proud of you!"

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

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**Day 3: Temptations in the Desert (4:1–13)**

Luke uses the same source (“the sayings of Jesus”) as Matthew does for his story of the temptations of Jesus in the desert, although he reverses the order of the second and third temptations. Luke states that the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert for forty days to be tempted by the devil, as though the temptations were the reason for Jesus’ sojourn in the desert. The forty days are reminiscent of the forty years’ sojourn of the Israelites in the desert after their escape from Egypt. Where the Israelites failed, Jesus will succeed.

During the time of Jesus, the desert was considered the abode of demons, so it would be the logical place for the devil to tempt Jesus. At the end of Jesus’ forty days of fasting, Luke mentions that Jesus is hungry. The devil is aware that the voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism by John proclaimed, “You are my beloved Son” (3:22), so he uses the sonship of Jesus as the challenge in his temptations. He will begin with the words, “If you are the Son of God.”

Taking advantage of Jesus’ identity and of his hunger, he challenges Jesus to show that he is the Son of God by tempting him to change the stones in the desert to bread. Jesus responds with a quote from the Book of Deuteronomy (8:3), declaring that a person does not live on bread alone.

The devil then showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, remarking that they all belong to him, and then offering them to Jesus if he were to bow down and worship the evil one. As the Son of God, Jesus will spiritually rule all the kingdoms of the world in his glory, but he will reach this eternal glory through his passion, death, and resurrection. Jesus has no desire for worldly glory, fame, or wealth. He quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy (6:13) by declaring that all people are called to worship and serve the Lord alone.

The devil then takes Jesus to the parapet of the Temple and challenges him as the Son of God to throw himself off. The devil quotes from Psalm 91:11–12, reminding Jesus that the Scriptures declare that the angels will guard him lest he even dash his foot against a stone. Jesus responds that the Scriptures also say that a person should not put the Lord, your God, to the test (Deuteronomy 6:16). In Jesus’ day, a rabbi would debate with

another rabbi by quoting a text from Scripture to prove his point. The other rabbi would respond by quoting from another part of the Scriptures to refute him. In this last temptation, the devil quotes from Scripture, and Jesus refutes him by quoting from another part of the Scripture, which has more force. With this last temptation, the devil departs, but Luke adds the words “for a time,” thus showing that Jesus and the devil will have a later confrontation in the gospel.

### *Lectio Divina*

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

In many ways, we experience the same temptations endured by Jesus. We will be tempted to abandon God for worldly desires or to make material goods and prestige something we worship more than God. Like Jesus, we have our calling and must respond to it, expecting worldly temptations, struggles, disappointments, and confusion to be always a part of our life. Jesus calls us to remain faithful as he did.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

### *Review Questions*

1. What is the mission and message of John the Baptist?
2. Why is it significant that John baptized Jesus?
3. How does Luke's genealogy differ from the one found in Matthew's Gospel?
4. How do the temptations of Jesus compare with our own temptations?