

LUKE: Certainty

🔍 Reading: [Luke 1 v 1-4](#)

Have you ever felt uncertain about whether the Christian faith really is true? Whether what you've heard about Christ can really be trusted?

If so, you've got something in common with most Christians: and with a first-century believer called Theophilus.

time out

- ❓ What kind of things make Christians doubt that the Gospels are true?
- ❓ Why might we sometimes want a section of a Gospel not really to be true?
- ❓ Are there any parts of the Gospel stories you find hard to believe?

🔍 Read [Luke 1 v 1-4](#)

Why Luke wrote

Luke is writing to Theophilus ([v.3](#)). It's probable that he was an actual person, although, because that name means "lover of God", it's possible that Luke had a more general initial audience in mind.

❓ What's Luke's purpose for writing his book to Theophilus?

What Luke wrote

❓ Luke says others have drawn up "a narrative" or "an account" (NIV) ([v.1](#)). What phrase does he use to describe what their "narratives" are talking about?

Luke's carefully drawing a link between what his Gospel will say has happened, and what the Old Testament had promised would happen. As we read his Gospel, we should expect to see the Old Testament promises that God had made being "accomplished" (or "fulfilled", NIV) on every page.

❓ How does Luke know about any of these things ([v.2](#))?

❓ Why does it matter to Theophilus, and to us, that Luke knew these kind of people?

❓ What had Luke been doing as he prepared to write his Gospel ([v.3](#))?

❓ Why does it matter to Theophilus, and to us, that Luke went about his work in this way?

To put it in 21st-century language, Luke was a historian. This is what historians do. They listen to the eye-witnesses, carefully investigate, interview, and check things out: and then write down what actually happened in an orderly, easily understandable way, so that people can know with "certainty" ([v.4](#)) what really happened.

apply

- ❓ *How should these verses affect how we read the strange parts and the tough parts of Luke?*
- ❓ *Who do you know who you could tell about [Luke 1 v 1-4](#) this week, so that they might be challenged by the historical nature of what Luke writes?*

Once in a lifetime

► Reading: [Luke 1 v 5-25](#)

Ever had a once-in-a-lifetime experience (apart from being born!)? Today we meet a man who did: and who found it was more terrifying, and more wonderful, than he could believe.

A couple's pain

► Read [Luke 1 v 5-7](#)

- ❓ What are we told about Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth ([v 5-6](#))?
- ❓ But despite his position and their godliness, what is missing from their lives ([v 7](#))?

A priest's privilege

► Read [verses 8-10](#)

Zechariah is here chosen to go into the Holy Place in the temple in Jerusalem; the area of the temple where God dwelled. He'll only do this once in his whole life of serving as a priest. It's a great moment for this old man, the highlight of his career.

God's plan

► Read [verses 11-17](#)

Zechariah gets more than he could possibly have imagined! When he goes into the Holy Place, an angel, a heavenly messenger, is standing there!

- ❓ How does Zechariah (understandably) react ([v 12](#))?
- ❓ What is the angel's message ([v 13](#))?
- ❓ What do we learn about their son's:
 - effect ([v 14, 16](#))?
 - relationship with God ([v 15](#))?
 - mission ([v 17](#))?

► Read [verses 18-22](#)

- ❓ How does Zechariah react to the angel's words ([v 18](#))?
- ❓ What is the angel's message to him ([v 19-20](#))?

Zechariah would have had plenty of time in the quietness of his head to realise that what God plans, happens: however unlikely or extraordinary it is.

A woman's pleasure

► Read [verses 23-25](#)

- ❓ Why should what happens in [verse 24](#) be no surprise to Elizabeth or Zechariah?

❓ *How does Elizabeth respond (v 25)?*

time out

Luke's Gospel begins with God bringing life to a lifeless place: a living child in a barren womb. And it will end that way too: with a living man in a burial tomb. Truly, God is the God who "gives life to the dead" ([Romans 4 v 17](#)).

apply

❓ *When God answers a prayer of yours, do you respond as Elizabeth did? Anything you need to praise and thank God for right now?*

❓ *How does this episode increase your faith in God's promises about the future?*

God sent the angel Gabriel

► Reading: [Luke 1 v 26-38](#)

Elizabeth had experienced a miracle: but her son was only the support act. He was to “make ready for the Lord a people prepared” ([v 17](#)). God was about to step onto the stage, and in the most unexpected way...

pray thru

It's said that “familiarity breeds contempt”, and this can be the case with the Christmas story. Pray now that God would enable you to be struck by this story afresh, to see new truths in it, and to be moved to praise and love God more as you read about what He has done.

Troubled

► Read [Luke 1 v 26-29](#)

- ❓ What details does Luke tell us about Mary ([v 26-27](#))?
- ❓ How did Mary react to the angel's words ([v 29](#))? Why, do you think?

Visits from heaven are not comfortable experiences. Just as Zechariah found ([v 12](#)), and just as the shepherds would soon find ([2 v 9](#)), Mary doesn't find it easy to be caught up into God's plan.

Some Son!

► Read [verses 30-33](#)

- ❓ How does the angel describe the son Mary will carry?

Trusting

► Read [verses 34-38](#)

- ❓ How does Mary's response to Gabriel in [verse 34](#) show more faith than Zechariah's ([v 18](#))?
- ❓ What details does the angel give her ([v 35](#))?

There's a glimpse here of the members of the Trinity working together to fulfil God's promises. The Father has sent Gabriel ([v 26](#)); the Spirit will cause Mary to fall pregnant; the one to be born will be “the Son of God” ([v 35](#)).

- ❓ Why would Elizabeth's experience ([v 36-7](#)) help Mary to trust the angel's words?

Mary was a young girl, probably aged about 13. In Israel, betrothal was binding, like marriage. A woman caught in adultery faced shame and possibly stoning.

- ❓ What is amazing about Mary's decision in [verse 38](#)?

Mary is a great example of faith in God's plan. Unlike Zechariah, she doesn't seem to doubt whether God's plan will happen, she simply wants to know how it will happen. And she turns her back

on any prospect of a safe, secure life in order to be part what God's doing in the world.

apply

- ❓ *How does what we see of God here encourage you today?*
- ❓ *How does Mary's attitude challenge you today?*