Luke
Acts

Two books, one story

Good News Bible

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Hello!

Welcome to your new copy of **Luke|Acts**.

This book is an action-packed account of the life of Jesus and his diverse band of followers, taken directly from the Bible. It tells the story of how the brokenness of creation, human society and individual lives can be healed. We hope you enjoy reading it and getting into that story!

Inside you'll find some **tips** for reading the Bible and its real-life message of love and hope for all. As you go, you'll also find ten **Pause** moments, designed to help you explore the meaning behind some of what you're reading. We've also **highlighted** some words which might be unfamiliar, and you'll find an explanation of these at the back of the book.

At Bible Society, we believe that when people read the Bible, their lives can be changed, for good. I hope that this extract, the story of Jesus' birth through to the creation of the Church and God's mission of healing and reconciliation we're all invited to join, starts you on a deeper journey with the Bible.

Paul Williams
Chief Executive, Bible Society

“Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people.”

The Gospel of Luke
Chapter 2, verse 10

Dear Theophilus:

Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message. And so, your Excellency, because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you. I do this so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught.

The Birth of John the Baptist is Announced

During the time when Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife's name was Elizabeth; she also belonged to a priestly family. They both lived good lives in God's sight and obeyed fully all the Lord's **laws** and commands. They had no children because Elizabeth could not have any, and she and Zechariah were both very old.

One day Zechariah was doing his work as a priest in the Temple, taking his turn in the daily service. According to the custom followed by the priests, he was chosen by lot to burn incense on the altar. So he went into the Temple of the Lord, while the crowd of people outside prayed during the hour when the incense was burnt.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right of the altar where the incense was burnt. When Zechariah saw him, he was alarmed and felt afraid. But the angel said to him, “Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John. How glad and happy you will be, and how happy many others will be when he is born! He will be a great man in the Lord's sight. He must not drink any wine

or strong drink. From his very birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the people of **Israel** to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the **prophet** Elijah. He will bring fathers and children together again; he will turn disobedient people back to the way of thinking of the righteous; he will get the Lord's people ready for him."

Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know if this is so? I am an old man, and my wife is old also."

"I am Gabriel," the angel answered. "I stand in the presence of God, who sent me to speak to you and tell you this **good news**. But you have not believed my message, which will come true at the right time. Because you have not believed, you will be unable to speak; you will remain silent until the day my promise to you comes true."

In the meantime the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he was spending such a long time in the Temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them, and so they knew that he had seen a vision in the Temple. Unable to say a word, he made signs to them with his hands.

When his period of service in the Temple was over, Zechariah went back home. Some time later his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and did not leave the house for five months. "Now at last the Lord has helped me," she said. "He has taken away my public disgrace!"

The Birth of Jesus is Announced

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David.

Her name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, “Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!”

Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. The angel said to her, “Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end!”

Mary said to the angel, “I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God. Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. For there is nothing that God cannot do.”

“I am the Lord's servant,” said Mary; “may it happen to me as you have said.” And the angel left her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Soon afterwards Mary got ready and hurried off to a town in the hill country of Judea. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby moved within her. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said in a loud voice, “You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear! Why should this great thing happen to me, that my Lord's mother comes to visit me? For as soon as I heard your greeting, the baby within me jumped with gladness. How

happy you are to believe that the Lord's message to you will come true!"

Mary's Song of Praise

Mary said,

"My heart praises the Lord;
my soul is glad because of God my Saviour,
for he has remembered me, his lowly servant!
From now on all people will call me happy,
because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me.
His name is holy;
from one generation to another
he shows mercy to those who honour him.
He has stretched out his mighty arm
and scattered the proud with all their plans.
He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away with empty hands.
He has kept the promise he made to our ancestors,
and has come to the help of his servant ***Israel****.*
He has remembered to show mercy to ***Abraham***
and to all his descendants for ever!"

Mary stayed about three months with Elizabeth and then went back home.

The Birth of John the Baptist

The time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard how wonderfully good the Lord had been to her, and they all rejoiced with her.

When the baby was a week old, they came to circumcise him, and they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. But his mother said, “No! His name is to be John.”

They said to her, “But you have no relatives with that name!” Then they made signs to his father, asking him what name he would like the boy to have.

Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” How surprised they all were! At that moment Zechariah was able to speak again, and he started praising God. The neighbours were all filled with fear, and the news about these things spread through all the hill country of Judea. Everyone who heard of it thought about it and asked, “What is this child going to be?” For it was plain that the Lord's power was upon him.

Zechariah's Prophecy

John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he spoke God's message:

*“Let us praise the Lord, the God of **Israel**!*
He has come to the help of his people and has set them free.
He has provided for us a mighty Saviour,
a descendant of his servant David.
*He promised through his holy **prophets** long ago*
that he would save us from our enemies,
from the power of all those who hate us.
He said he would show mercy to our ancestors
*and remember his sacred **covenant**.*
*With a solemn oath to our ancestor **Abraham***
he promised to rescue us from our enemies
and allow us to serve him without fear,
so that we might be holy and righteous before him
all the days of our life.

*"You, my child, will be called a **prophet** of the Most High God.*
You will go ahead of the Lord
to prepare his road for him,
to tell his people that they will be saved
by having their sins forgiven.
Our God is merciful and tender.
He will cause the bright dawn of salvation to rise on us
and to shine from heaven on all those who live in the dark
shadow of death,
to guide our steps into the path of peace."

The child grew and developed in body and spirit. He lived in the desert until the day when he appeared publicly to the people of **Israel**.

The Birth of Jesus

At that time the Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own town.

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger — there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with **good news** for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Saviour was born — Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them back 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."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

Jesus is Named

A week later, when the time came for the baby to be circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name which the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

Jesus is Presented in the Temple

The time came for Joseph and Mary to perform the ceremony of purification, as the **Law** of Moses commanded. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the **law** of the Lord: "Every firstborn male is to be dedicated to the Lord." They also went to offer a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as required by the **law** of the Lord.

At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for **Israel** to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised **Messiah**. Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the **Law** required, Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God:

"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,
and you may let your servant go in peace.
With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples:
A light to reveal your will to the ***Gentiles***
and bring glory to your people ***Israel****."*

The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in **Israel**. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart."

There was a very old **prophet**, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now 84 years old. She never left the Temple; day and night she worshipped God, fasting and praying. That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

The Return to Nazareth

When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the **law** of the Lord, they returned to their home town of Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upon him.

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the **Passover** Festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to the festival as usual. When the festival was over, they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed in Jerusalem.

His parents did not know this; they thought that he was with the group, so they travelled a whole day and then started looking for him among their relatives and friends. They did not find him, so they went back to Jerusalem looking for him. On the third day they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers. His parents were astonished when they saw him, and his mother said to him, “My son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been terribly worried trying to find you.”

He answered them, “Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?” But they did not understand his answer.

So Jesus went back with them to Nazareth, where he was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favour with God and people.

PAUSEONE
#BEGIN

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His parents were astonished when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been terribly worried trying to find you.'

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REWIND

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon and Anna all recognised that something unique had begun to happen with the arrival of Jesus.

As a young boy, Jesus instinctively understood his relationship with his Father. He knew who he was because he knew where he had come from.

Do you find it easy to feel or seen signs of God's activity in your life, and does this help you know where you came from? Where do you find support for who you are, and how do you find where you truly belong?

PLAY

Try keeping a picture, note or symbol that reminds you of God's love for you and who you are, on your phone, in your wallet or in your car.

Pray to God your Father, asking for a deeper understanding of who you are to him, and how he made you to be.