

# WELCOME TO A NEW CHURCH YEAR AND THE "YEAR OF LUKE"

## Reflection for the First Sunday in Advent, Cycle C

This weekend we begin a new liturgical or church year. Each year we begin our new church year with the Advent/Christmas season. The four weeks of Advent prepares us to celebrate the season of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

### Cycle C-The Year of Luke

As most of you know in our liturgical calendar we have three cycles, A, B and C. During Cycle A we listen to the gospel of Matthew, in Cycle B we listen to the gospel of Mark and in Cycle C, we listen to the gospel of Luke.

The following is an introduction to Luke taken from a liturgy resource called *Living Liturgy*.

*This liturgical year our scriptural guide to living the paschal mystery is Saint Luke. From the First Sunday of Advent to the Last Sunday of the Year (The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King), the universal Church will walk in the company of Saint Luke whose lively narratives, vivid characters, and poignant scenes unfold the mission, message, and meaning of Jesus, the Savior.*

*Yet our journey with Luke is not a mini-course in Luke's gospel, that is, the liturgy is not a classroom in which we will study the theology and themes of this year's gospel. To approach the gospel in this way would be a serious misunderstanding of liturgy. The liturgy is not a forum in which to present the gospel; instead, the gospel is placed at the service of the liturgy where we encounter the living Lord Jesus and, through word, ritual, and sacrament, enter more deeply into the pattern of his dying and rising. This introduction will describe, first, some of the characteristics of the gospel so that our proclamation of individual passages will benefit from the context of Luke's work and, second, how the Lectionary (the assigned readings) makes us of the Gospel according to Luke, drawing the worshiping community into deeper union with Jesus.*

### **Luke and his gospel.**

*Luke was an extraordinary writer whose monumental two-volume work (the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles) fills almost one-quarter of the New Testament. It seems likely that Luke was a Gentile (perhaps a convert to Judaism) who wrote in the mid-eighties. It is possible, though not certain, that he was a companion of St. Paul (Phlm 24: Col 4:14). Luke himself acknowledges that he is not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus but he assures readers that he has spoken to eyewitnesses and has carefully examined other written accounts of Jesus' life (Luke 1:1-4).*

*While we may not know a lot about Luke, most people know a good deal about his gospel. Some of the most cherished stories about Jesus are reported by Luke: the annunciation to Mary, the birth in a manger, the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Some of the New Testament's most memorable characters are found in Luke: the diminutive but resourceful Zacchaeus, the aged and astonished Elizabeth and Zechariah, the hospital Martha and the attentive Mary. Some of Jesus' most beloved parables-brimming with poignancy and compassion, and universal in their broad religious and humanitarian appeal-are jewels of Luke's gospel: the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the rich man and poor Lazarus, the Pharisee and the tax collector. The backbone of the Church's daily prayer comes from Luke's gospel: Zechariah's Canticle at morning prayer, Mary's Magnificat at evening prayer, and Simeon's Canticle at night prayer.*

*His gospel is such a treasure trove of themes that it has invited numerous nicknames, such as "The Gospel of Joy," "The Gospel of the Holy Spirit . . . Of Prayer . . . Of the Poor." among others. Other obvious themes include warnings against wealth; frequent meals with sinners; the inclusion of women; and concern for tax collectors, lepers, and outcasts. Luke's portrait of Jesus is perhaps the most beloved and easily approachable of all the gospels: Luke's Jesus is the embodiment of divine compassion. Indeed, Luke's portrayal of Jesus is at the heart of his proclamation of the "good news".*

*Luke advances his understanding of Jesus in two noteworthy ways. One way is in the titles he uses of Jesus. While Luke follows other gospel writers in calling Jesus "Son of God," "Son of Man," and "Messiah," Luke is distinctive among the synoptic gospels in calling Jesus the "Savior" (2:11). Jesus' work as Savior is anticipated in many healing stories in which one is "saved" (7:50/Sunday 11; 8:36, 48, 50; 17:19/Sunday 28; 18:42). Discussion about Jesus as Savior appropriately dominates the crucifixion (23:35, 37, 39). Another favorite title Luke uses of Jesus is "Lord". In the New Testament "Lord" is typically a post-Easter title; its occurrence throughout the Gospel, especially its use by the narrator, serves to present the entire Gospel as an Easter proclamation of faith in Jesus.*

*A second distinctive feature of Luke's portrayal of Jesus is his presentation of Jesus as compassionate and merciful. Early in the gospel the Cantic of Mary (the Magnificat) indicates that God is acting now because "he has remembered his promise of mercy . . . Of Zechariah makes clear, "tender mercy" of God "promised through the holy prophets of old" and sworn "to our father Abraham" is a promise of "redemption" and a "horn of salvation" (1:68-79). For Luke "mercy" means "salvation." Jesus, born "within the house of David," is the fulfillment of that ancient promise.*

*This theme of divine mercy/compassion is evident throughout the gospel, from beginning to end. At the outset angels announce to shepherds the Savior's birth; at the close of the gospel Jesus assures the thief who was crucified with him "today you will be with me in Paradise" (23:43). In between these enactments of salvation Jesus uses the image of a father welcoming the return of the prodigal son to describe the compassion of God; in the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus urges his disciples to extend to others a similar compassion and mercy. The astounding and confounding compassion of God is announced programmatically by Mary who declares that God "has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly; the hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty" (Luke 1:52-53). The ministry of Jesus is the realization of this compassion for the lowly and the poor, the outcast and the sinner.*

*Jesus' ability to embody such a tender divine compassion is rooted in his profound prayer, an aspect of Jesus' personal life which Luke develops more completely than any other evangelist. Not surprisingly, then, this prayerful Jesus devotes particular attention to instructing his disciples in prayer (the friend at night, 11:5-8/Sunday 17: the persistent widow, 18:1-8/Sunday 29; the Pharisee and the tax collector, 18:9-14/Sunday 30). The inner strength that comes from prayer is showcased in the passion narrative which describes Jesus at prayer no fewer than six times. Luke further shows Jesus ending his life by praying from the cross that his executioners be forgiven-the consummate extension of mercy. Finally, Jesus serenely commends his life into God's hands. Jesus ministry of mercy and compassion, grounded in his prayer, is the basis of the "good news" that God, in Christ, is fulfilling the ancient promise of mercy to Jews and Gentiles alike.*

### ***Barclay's Commentary on Luke***

When writing their gospel, each evangelist offers us his own particular perspective and purpose just as each journalist gives us his perspective on a particular event.

Matthew's audience was primarily Jewish so he seeks to show his audience that Jesus was very Jewish. He fulfilled what was prophesied in the Old Testament. In Matthew's Gospel, we frequently find the words: "*This was to fulfill what was written . . .*" Luke, on the other hand, was a Gentile writing mainly for Gentiles. One of his big purposes was to show that Jesus came not just for Jews but also for Gentiles. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus often praises the faith of the Gentiles.

Because Cycle C is the year of Luke, this is a good time for us to study this beautiful gospel. As you probably know, there are now many commentaries available on each book of the Bible. As many of you know by now, one of my favorites is William Barclay's commentary - Barclay, (1907-1978) was a world renowned New Testament interpreter. He was Scottish and Anglican. His commentaries continue to be a favorite amongst all mainline churches. The late Bishop Fulton Sheen was a great admirer of Barclays commentaries.

Barclay's commentaries are very *readable*, something that cannot be said about many commentaries.

He offers lots of interesting background about many of the stories.

I believe his biggest plus is that he uses stories, quotes from famous people and illustrations to connect the passages to everyday life.

Barclay's weakness is that he is not steeped in our Catholic tradition and doctrinal belief system. Also, he sometimes downplays the miraculous element in the miracle stories. If interested in a Catholic commentary on Luke you might want to check out *The Collegeville Bible Commentary-New Testament*. This \$20 book has a brief commentary on each of the 27 books of the New Testament. It is published by the *Liturgical Press* , 1-800-858-5450.