

## THEMES IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

This is the first in a series of three articles on the Gospel of Luke. One theme will be presented each month.

The four Gospels in the Christian Scriptures all relate the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. But each Gospel has its own voice. In 2019, the Catholic Lectionary will draw its selections from the Gospel of Luke. I would like to offer three themes that flow from Luke's unique voice: world-affirmation, wealth and salvation for the poor. Attention to these emphases may assist us in our efforts to understand Luke's particular Gospel proclamation.

### World-affirmation

Throughout history, Christians have adopted various attitudes toward the world in which we live. The world can be seen positively as God's creation and the on-going arena of God's grace. It can also be perceived negatively as the realm of sin and the enemy of the Gospel. Writings such as the Book of Revelation and the Gospel of John adopt this latter perspective. (Opposing the way of faith to the way of "the world" is a phraseology drawn directly from the fourth Gospel.)

The Gospel of Luke pulls in the opposite direction. Luke affirms the world. It is both God's creation and the space for history and human activity. The Roman Empire, which was the political structure of Luke's time, is not associated with evil or sin. It is rather the historical framework in which the Gospel is to be preached. Luke sees Christianity as compatible with the culture of his day.

Luke goes out of his way to situate the Gospel into the historical setting of his world. His effort to do this has been made famous in the story the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem: In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town.

And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David. (Luke 2:1-4)

The names of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius lock Jesus' birth into a specific moment of human history. Luke uses the same approach to announce the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He describes the appearance of John the Baptist in this way: In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. (3:1-2)

At first, we may be perplexed by Luke's use of so many specific names. But his precision is intentional. Luke is telling his readers that Jesus came into our time, our political reality and our world. Salvation is not ephemeral or mystic. It takes place in the concrete circumstances of our lives. Luke sets his Gospel in the midst of the people and events that shape the world of his audience. In this way, he asserts that Jesus' death and resurrection were not minor occurrences in the backwater territory of Judea. They were good news for all people.

Luke is also the author of the Book of Acts. In Acts, Paul gives dramatic voice to Luke's world-perspective as he defends his ministry before the Roman procurator, Festus and the Jewish king, Agrippa: "The king knows about these matters and to him I speak boldly, for I cannot believe that [any] of this has escaped his notice; this was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). Indeed, it was not done in a corner because Luke has situated the Gospel story on the world's stage. The world is the arena of God's grace. *George Sigma, Celebration Resources*

*A new heart I will give you, and a*

## NEW SPIRIT

*I will put within you. Ez. 36:26a*

January 13, 2019

Volume 3, Issue 1



### LET'S TALK

In the late fall, we had four gatherings to reflect on various topics using the sexual abuse crisis in the US church as a jumping off point. Those who participated during those gatherings expressed an interest in have ongoing opportunities to come together to discuss various issues around church, life, faith, etc. In response to that interest, we will have evenings to talk on:

**January 24**

**February 28**

**March 21**

**from 7:00 pm—8:30 pm**

Bring your questions, your topics for discussion, your ideas for our community and Let's Talk!

### DID YOU KNOW?

We continue to follow up on some of the questions and suggestions that arose in the Pastoral Planning Survey.

#### HAVE HEALING PRAYER AFTER MASS

The Healing Ministry began a practice in November of having healing prayer available after the Saturday evening and Sunday morning liturgies the first Sunday of each month. Those who wish prayer for healing are invited to gather in the prayer space (healing centre) at the front of the church, on the left side. Members of the healing ministry will be present and you are invited to bring family and friends with you as you come for healing prayer.

#### IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR?

Spiritual directors are available. One avenue to connect with or find a spiritual director is through the Upper Room Home of Prayer, which trains and maintains a roster of directors. Information is available at [www.theupperroomhomeofprayer.org](http://www.theupperroomhomeofprayer.org). Galilee Retreat Centre is another sources of information about spiritual direction—[www.galileecentre.com/services/spiritual-direction/](http://www.galileecentre.com/services/spiritual-direction/)

#### WHAT ABOUT BIBLE STUDY?

See the poster and bulletin announcement about a study of the Letter to the Hebrews that is taking place at Canadian Martyrs Parish on Main Street.

#### Inside this issue:

Luke: A Gospel of Radical Reversals 2

Reflecting on God-With-Us 3

Baptism of the Lord—and Ours 3

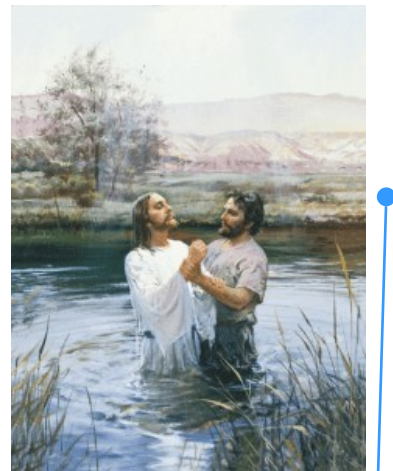
Themes in the Gospel of Luke 4

Mark your calendars 4

Mark your calendar!!!

**St. Joseph's MINISTRIES: Ours to Discover**  
**Sunday, 10 February -- 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.**  
**Parish Hall**

Join us in the parish hall after our liturgies and discover more about our parish and the various ministries that make up our community.



## LUKE: A GOSPEL OF RADICAL REVERSALS (WORDS WE NEED TO HEAR)

“He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because [God] has anointed me to bring good news to the poor’” (Luke 4:17-18, NRSV).

From a tender age, I was captivated by a call to the missionary life. To my innocent eyes, missionaries were bold adventurers, and my Celtic heart harbored a wanderlust shared by the ancient monks from my homeland. I have been blessed to cross oceans, continents and cultures; drawn by an ever-expanding vision of the elusive realm of God.

I have witnessed heart-rending human suffering, struggles, dignity, diversity and faith: in the inner-city streets of North and South America, among Native American communities on the western Plains, with campesinos in Central America, in indigenous Amazonian villages, and among farmers in Rwanda. And everywhere, amid the fringe dwellers of these oft-excluded communities, the good news of radical inclusion, embodied in the communion of food, laughter, tears and friendship, has gilded my life with hope. As in Jesus’ time, after he dispersed his disciples throughout the villages of Galilee (Luke 10:17-20), this missionary returned converted, stretched, forever changed. This is the unexpected grace that surprises pilgrims when their journey finally brings them back home with an expanded vision of their lives.

“[God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly” (1:52, NRSV).

Among the unique characteristics of Luke’s Gospel, one of the most strident challenges to engrained meritocracy (in social and ecclesial systems) is the deliberate way the author highlights individuals and groups typically treated as social outcasts. From the prophetic proclamation of Mary’s Magnificat to the disciples on the Emmaus road, Luke identifies and elevates Samaritans, foreigners, tax collectors, lepers, women, widows and poor folk. In Luke’s account, these normally untouchable, castigated and categorized groups are celebrated, named and known. Several specifically Lukan stories, parables and protagonists colorfully illustrate the revolutionary reversal promised in the reign inaugurated by Jesus.

Starting with the devout elders, Simeon and Anna (2:25-38), Jesus is pursued and recognized by humble, hungry and hopeful people. Luke records an incident in the hamlet of Nain where Jesus is moved by the sorrow of a woman burying her only son and source of support (7:11-17). In the home of a Pharisee, Jesus allows a publicly disgraced woman to tenderly wash and anoint his feet, and further

fuels the scandal by blessing this untouchable creature with forgiveness (7:36-50). Furthermore, Luke is the only evangelist to explicitly mention and name the female disciples who faithfully provided for Jesus and his entourage (8:1-3).

When dining with the well-heeled, Jesus teaches humility and unrestricted hospitality. Always seek the lower place at table, he counsels, and when hosting a meal, invite people who are penniless and peripheral (14:7-14). Luke alone includes domestic parables about a woman searching out a lost coin and a forgiving father embracing the son who had squandered the family’s resources (15:8-10; 11-31). Luke also adds the moral tale of a rich man and poor Lazarus who dies at his gate. In this parable, only the pauper is named, and he alone receives consolation after death (16:19-31).

While all four evangelists record Jesus healing lepers, only Luke describes an incident in which ten are cleansed at once. In this tale, only one, a despised Samaritan (therefore, doubly cursed) returns to give thanks and complete the cycle of healing (17:11-19).

In a Gospel that disparages the religious leaders of Jesus’ time, Luke adds two uniquely subversive reversals that highlight the prayerful attitudes of persistence and humility in an unjust world. One parable applauds the tenacity of an aggrieved widow in the face of an unscrupulous judge, and the other contrasts the arrogance of a Pharisee with the penitence of a tax collector. In both cases, it is the people deemed socially unworthy who merit a merciful hearing, forgiveness and compassionate justice.

This table-turning poignantly culminates in the redemption of Zacchaeus, a diminutive character and renowned exploiter of the inhabitants of Jericho (19:1-10). Passing through town, Jesus spies the curious figure who had climbed a tree for a better view. Shockingly, Jesus invites himself to the tax collector’s table. To the chagrin of those he had exploited, remorse and restitution follow Zacchaeus’ humble penitence.

To our ears, the predictable parables and familiar tales of this Gospel lose their shock value when we spiritualize them and take them out of context. Perhaps our ears and hearts might be honed by the question: Who would we deem untouchable, unworthy or unwelcome at our tables; in our churches and our homes? Hope indeed is found among the humble, and Luke’s Gospel is rightly named good news for the poor.

*Joseph Grant—Celebration Publications*

## REFLECTING ON GOD-WITH-US

Having come to the end of the Christmas Season, when we have celebrated the birth of Emmanuel—God With Us, I found the following reflection very relevant and thought-provoking. This really is the core of what we have celebrated and what we are called to live each day as disciples of Jesus. We are called to shift our focus in our relationship with God and to respond in love to the God who loves us and takes up a home with us:

“The truly good news is that God is not a distant God, a God to be feared and avoided, a God of revenge, but a God who is moved by our pains and participates in the fullness of the human struggle. . . . God is a compassionate God. This means, first of all, that God is a God who has chosen to be God-with-us. . . . As soon as we call God “God-with-us,” we enter into a new relationship of intimacy with him. By calling God Emmanuel, we recognize God’s commitment to live in solidarity with us, to share our joys and pains, to defend and protect us, and to suffer all of life with us. The God-with-us is a close God, a God whom we call our refuge, our stronghold, our wisdom, and even, more intimately, our helper, our shepherd, our love. We will never really know God as a compassionate God if we do not understand with our heart and mind that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14).

It might sound strange, but God wants to find me as much as, if not more than, I want to find God. Yes, God needs me as much as I need God. God is not the patriarch who stays home, doesn’t move, and expects his children to come to him, apologize for their aberrant behavior, beg for forgiveness, and promise to do better. To the contrary, he leaves the house, ignoring his dignity by running toward them, pays no heed to apologies and promises of change, and brings them to the table richly prepared for them

I am beginning to now see how radically the character of my spiritual journey will change when I no longer think of God as hiding out and making it as difficult as possible for me to find him, but, instead, as the One who is looking for me while I am doing the hiding.”

*-Henri Nouwen*

## BAPTISM OF THE LORD—AND OURS

As we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we are invited and challenged to reflect on our identity as baptized members of the Body of Christ and what that means for us in our daily lives.

Jesus is radically different than John the Baptist. John is fire and brimstone, proclaiming repentance, sure and steadfast in his mission, seemingly sure of his direction and message. We don’t have an image of John going off in silence to pray, seek guidance, reflect on his call and mission or even being affected by those around him. John seemed without doubts or hesitation.

Jesus, on the other hand, is often portrayed off by himself, praying to the Father, seeking understanding of his mission and identity. Jesus clearly spends time reflecting on the Scriptures and is formed by what is contained there, especially the words of Isaiah.

Jesus’ ministry and actions are also portrayed as being influenced by others. We begin with the incident at the marriage feast of Cana, when he responds to Mary’s observation that they have run out of wine. When confronted by the Syro-Phoenician woman who requests healing, Jesus argues with her that he came only for the chosen people, but eventually responds to her request and praises her faith. He responds to the anguish of Martha and Mary and raises Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus’ baptism was a moment—the initial spark at the beginning of his mission. So it is for us. Our baptism is the spark that begins our life of faith and sets us on our mission. Like Jesus, we are called to prayer and the reading of Scripture and reflecting on its meaning for our lives of faith. We also are challenged to reflect on our experiences and the signs of the times and then to respond accordingly.

Reflecting on our baptism and mission, we are reminded that we are God’s beloved. Through our prayer and listening to the Scriptures, strengthened by God’s love, we are sent into the mission that only we can accomplish in our own day. This mission will be the same as the mission of Jesus, but lived out in new ways, responding to the needs we recognize in our world today.

*Richard Beaudette, OMI*