

Luke 1

The Testimony of St Luke

Introduction

"Luke offers his readers a polished literary account of the ministry of Jesus, presenting Jesus as the universal Savior of both Jews and gentiles. He dwells extensively on Jesus' teachings and his doings. Luke is favorable toward the gentiles and also gives more stories involving women than do the other records." (*Bible Dictionary*, "Gospels")

"[Luke] was born at Antioch in Syria, and was taught the science of medicine...He was not born a Jew, for he is not reckoned among those 'of the circumcision' by St. Paul." (William Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Luke, Gospel of") "Luke was Paul's fellow-traveler. He was born of gentile parents, and practiced medicine. He may have become a believer before our Lord's ascension, but there is no evidence of this. The identification of him with one of the disciples to whom our Lord appeared on the way to Emmaus is picturesque but historically unsupported. The first information about him is when he joined Paul at Troas (Acts 16:10)...It is uncertain when or where the Gospel was written; it was specially intended for gentile readers. The Acts was a continuation of the gospel, and deals mainly with the growth of the gentile churches. History tells us nothing of Luke's later years, but tradition says he died a martyr." (*Bible Dictionary*, "Luke")

"Through the eyes of Luke, we see the Savior, but we see aspects of His life and ministry that would have been lost to us without this Gospel. Luke teaches us that the gospel is for all persons, be they Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, men or women, shepherds or kings. Nobody is left out. Israel continues to be special in its relationship to God, but the Church draws Gentiles into Israel, as well as others who may have been considered to be outside the pale of God's chosen, or elect, people. We also learn that the gospel is built upon the eyewitness reports of people who saw all that Jesus did and heard all that He said. Thus, they were true witnesses for Him, people who told what they had experienced and knew.

And finally Luke teaches us, through Jesus' own example, about the essential nature of prayer and the critical role of the Holy Ghost.

"What beauty would have been lost had Luke been left out of the scriptures! A diamond truly sparkles when all of its facets can be seen. How much brighter the gospel of Jesus Christ shines because of the insights of Luke the beloved physician." (Roger R. Keller, "Luke: One Facet of a Diamond," *Ensign*, Feb. 1999, 35)

Luke 1:1 many haven taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration

"Luke's method of writing was to gather the oral testimony of eyewitness accounts and create a narrative 'of all things...accurately from the first.' He would have had Matthew's account as well as other written accounts including interviews with the mother of Jesus and others... His purpose was to present Jesus as the Son of God to an educated Gentile audience as 'a messenger of Jesus Christ' (JST Luke 1:3, Luke 1:103)" (*Church News*, Jan. 9, 1993 as taken from *Latter-day Commentary on the New Testament: The Four Gospels*, by Pinegar, Bassett, and Earl, p. 1)

Bruce R. McConkie

"Many of the early saints recorded their testimonies or gospels, bearing eyewitness accounts of the divinity of our Lord and of his ministry among men, just as many with personal knowledge of Joseph Smith and his work of restoration have written journals, letters, and histories delineating what took place in the ushering in of this dispensation. Luke had access to many of these ancient gospels." (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:69)

Matthias F. Cowley

"As proof that writings of the disciples of Jesus have been lost to the world, I would call special attention to several passages of the Scripture. The writings of the New Testament are from eight authors-Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, James and Jude. Luke says: 'Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of these things which are most surely believed among us.' (Luke 1:1) While there is no definite proof in this statement as to how many had written their testimonies concerning the Messiah, it is evident they were not few, but many. That there was opportunity and material upon which to write respecting this glorious subject, the life and ministry of Jesus, is very apparent from the last verse of the twenty-first chapter of St. John, as follows: 'And there are

also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.' With such a statement, it is to be wondered at that the world who believed in the Redeemer should rest contented with the narrow view that we have all that is important." (*Cowley's Talks on Doctrine* [Chattanooga: Ben. E. Rich, 1902], 88.)

Luke 1:3 Luke is writing his epistle to Theophilus

What epistle is of greater worth to Christian theology than the gospel of Luke? To Theophilus, we owe a debt of gratitude for preserving this priceless testimony. His was the privilege to receive two lengthy letters from Luke: the first was the Gospel of Luke and the second was the Acts of the Apostles (see Acts 1:1).

"...This Theophilus was probably a native of Italy and perhaps an inhabitant of Rome, in tracing St. Paul's journey to Rome, places which an Italian might be supposed not to know are described minutely, Acts 27:8, 12, 16; but when he comes to Sicily and Italy this is neglected. Hence it would appear that the person for whom Luke wrote in the first instance was a Gentile reader; and accordingly we find traces in the Gospel of a leaning toward Gentile rather than Jewish converts." (William Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Luke, Gospel of")

Luke 1:5 a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron

If we were able to ask Zacharias about the significance of John's lineage, what would he say? Robert J. Matthews suggests the following:

"INQUIRER. Why do you think you and Elisabeth were selected to be the parents of John?

"ZACHARIAS. We don't know why it was us, but one thing we do know. The office of the forerunner was a preparatory role and therefore came under the jurisdiction of the Aaronic Priesthood. In order for John to be a legal heir and hold the keys to that priesthood, he had to be a firstborn son of the family of Aaron. As you know, I am a priest, which means I am of that lineage. Elisabeth also was a direct descendant of Aaron. Our son John was the first-born of just the right lineage in order to be fully representative of the Aaronic Priesthood and the law of Moses. [See Luke 1:5-7; Ex. 30:30-31; 40:15.]" (Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet,

eds., *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*[Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1986], 162.

This lineage is significant in that it is the source of John's priesthood. John was never ordained to the office of a priest in the Aaronic priesthood because he held the priesthood by lineage through Zacharias and Elisabeth.

Luke 1:9 his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord

Bruce R. McConkie

"Twice each year, in April and October, the priests of the course of Abia, named for Abijah, traveled from their village homes to the House of the Lord in Jerusalem, there to take their week-long turns at performing those sacred rites and ordinances which for fifteen hundred years had been the center of Israel's worship. One of these priests, Zacharias, whose wife, Elisabeth, was both barren and past the childbearing age, dwelt in a village in the hill country of Judea, believed to be Hebron. It was the very locale where Abraham had lived with Sarah, who also was both barren and past the childbearing age when the Lord himself saw fit to tell the Father of the Faithful that his beloved Sarah would conceive and bear Isaac, through whom the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant would continue.

"It was October, the autumn of the year, when Zacharias left his beloved Elisabeth-both of them being in the autumn of their lives-to travel the some twenty lonely miles to Jerusalem. At least it was the custom to leave family members at home, for the priests dwelt in the temple itself during their week-long ministry. But perhaps he went with other priests of his course, and if so, as was common among them in that era of great expectation, they would have discussed the Consolation of Israel who was to come and deliver his people...With his fellow priests, he then drew lots, as was the custom, so that each of the sons of Aaron serving that week might be assigned his duties. There was one service, favored above all others, that a priest to whose lot it fell might perform but once in a lifetime. It was the burning of incense on the altar of incense in the Holy Place, near the Holy of Holies where the very presence of Jehovah came on occasion. And, lo, this time the lot fell to Zacharias; he was chosen of the Lord to perform the great mediatorial service in which the smoke of the incense, ascending to heaven, would symbolize the prayers of all Israel ascending to the divine throne. That Zacharias was to be the central figure in the temple, through this service, all the assembled worshippers knew; and that heaven itself was to respond with divine approval shining forth, they would soon learn."

(*The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979-1981], 1: 306-307.)

Luke 1:13 Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard

"All righteous prayers are answered, but in the due time of the Lord. There may be some delay until his time is due, as a man well-stricken in years learned when Gabriel appeared to him and said: 'Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard.' (Luke 1:13.) Though the answer was much-delayed, the prayer was answered in God's time. This experience says much about God's need and his timing." (Keith H. Meservy, *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, ed. by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1986], 349.)

Neal A. Maxwell

"Faith in God includes faith in His timing. Frankly, some of us have some difficulty with this significant dimension of faith. We clearly prefer our own time to His 'own due time.'

"...Patience stretches our capacity to bide our time while both wondering and sustaining. This vital elasticity will be especially needed as part of maintaining faith in God's timing in the last days, during which 'all things must come to pass in their time' (D&C 64:32)." (*That Ye May Believe* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992], 51-53.)

Luke 1:15 Was John a Nazarite?

Anciently, a Nazarite (not to be confused with a "Nazarene," meaning from Nazareth) was an individual whose life was dedicated completely to the Lord. They were to follow a strict moral and dietary code: separating themselves from all unclean things, abstaining from wine or strong drink, and never shaving or cutting their hair (see Num 6:1-12). Bible commentators have debated whether or not John the Baptist had taken the vow of a Nazarite. Although the term is never used to describe him, the similarities between him and Old Testament Nazarites are impressive.

First, John had separated himself from the world, spending his days preparing in the desert. Luke records he 'was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel' (Lu 1:80). Just as the Nazarites, the angel declared, he 'shall drink neither wine nor strong drink' (Lu 1:15). Whether or not John ever cut his hair is not stated but certainly his appearance was wild, 'his raiment of camel's

hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins' (Matt 3:4). Both of the Old Testament Nazarites, Samson and Samuel, like John, were born to women previously barren of children (Judg 13:2; 1 Sam 1:2, Lu 1:7). That they were the firstborn is significant, 'Because all the firstborn *are* mine; *for* on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be' (Num 3:13). With Samson and John, their birth was announced by an angel and, in the case of Samuel, by prophetic promise (Judg 13:3-5, 1 Sam 1:17). Samson even ate wild honey (Judg 14:8-9). Thus, the scriptural evidence argues convincingly that John was indeed a Nazarite like Samson and Samuel. For him, the desert became a holy place, a dry and dusty temple where he was set apart from the world.

Luke 1:17 he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children

No verse in all of the scriptures has confused the author as much as this one. For me, it has been the subject of more study and prayer than any other passage of scripture. The passage is confusing because it prophesies of John's role in the turning of the hearts of the fathers to the children—a mission assigned to Elijah the Tishbite (Mal. 4:5-6) not Elias the forerunner. The interpretation, born of the Spirit, is as follows.

The timing of John's death is a key to understanding this passage of scripture. John the Baptist, the great forerunner of the Messiah, died nearly 3 years before Jesus was crucified. But death did not end John's mission. This scripture (Luke 1:17) has reference to a mission that John would perform among the spirits in paradise. There, John continued to preach as an Elias. He preached deliverance to the righteous saints in the Spirit World. He told them that Christ would soon minister among them. Joseph F. Smith saw multitudes of righteous spirits gathered in a great assembly, 'awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death' (DC 138:16). How did they know Jesus was coming if it weren't for a messenger sent to prepare them for his advent among them? These are the 'people prepared for the Lord' which John made ready.

Furthermore, John prepared the way for Christ who would establish, among other things, a system of missionary work among the spirits of the dead (see DC 138). That missionary work would inspire the hearts of the fathers to turn to their children as they sought for the blessings of the temple. In time, 'the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient' (1 Peter 3:19-20) would turn their hearts toward the 'wisdom of the just'. In this connection, we must

assume that Elijah the Tishbite also performed a mission in the Spirit World. We know nothing of this mission but assume that it involved the administration of keys whereby the vicarious work could be administered on the other side of the veil. The Lord's servants there, as well as here, must be 'clothed with power and authority' (DC 138:30). Some of this authority must have come through Elijah.

Joseph Smith taught that if any man ministers "having the spirit and power of Elias, he will not transcend his bounds. John did not transcend his bounds, but faithfully performed that part belonging to his office [under the Aaronic Priesthood]" (*Teachings*, 336). In contrast, "the spirit, power, and calling of Elijah is, that ye have power to hold the key of the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood" (*Teachings*, 337). Therefore, John acted under the spirit and power of Elias as a forerunner to prepare the way for the missions of Elijah and Jesus Christ among the spirits of the dead.

Joseph Smith

"The spirit of Elias is first, Elijah second, and Messiah last. Elias is a forerunner to prepare the way, and the spirit and power of Elijah is to come after, holding the keys of power...then Messiah comes...which is last of all." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 340)

Theodore M. Burton

"Because of a misunderstanding of Luke 1:17, which states that the child later to be named John the Baptist would come in the spirit and power of Elias to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, many persons have thought that John the Baptist who held the office of an Elias, or messenger, was the Elijah who was to return. This verse explains that John's work was a preparatory work to 'make ready a people prepared for the Lord' and not the work of sealing or completion, which keys Elijah held." (*Conference Report, April 1965, Third Day-Morning Meeting 110.*)

Luke 1:18 Whereby shall I know this?

At the time of this miraculous manifestation by the angel Gabriel, Israel as a whole was in a state of general apostasy. The righteousness of Zacharias and Elisabeth is rather remarkable. The scripture says, 'they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless' (v. 6). However, there had been no true prophets for hundreds of

years. Zacharias lived at a time when personal revelation was not emphasized. Like in the days of Samuel, 'there was no open vision' (1 Sam. 3:1). With this background, we can understand that Zacharias must have been completely taken off guard by his angelic visitation. His diligence and obedience far exceeded his natural faith, for when the declaration was given, his words were, 'Whereby shall I know this?' In other words, he said, "show me a sign!" The old adage states, "be careful what you ask for!" Zacharias was given a sign-he was struck dumb (and possibly deaf-see v. 62) for 9 months.

Contrast his response with that of humble Mary. It may have seemed impossible for a couple so old to give birth, but what about Mary giving birth as a virgin? That certainly seems impossible, but Mary's response was not to ask for a sign. She faithfully responded, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word' (v. 38). Such should be our response whenever the Lord's plans for us seem beyond the possibilities of mortality, 'For with God nothing shall be impossible' (v. 37).

Luke 1:19 I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God

Joseph Smith taught that the identity of the angel Gabriel is Noah (*Teachings*, 157).

"Noah was like a second Adam, the father of all who came after the flood. It is stated in Doctrine and Covenants 27:6-7 that a prophet named Elias holds the keys of 'bringing to pass the restoration of all things' in the last days. This Elias is further identified in these verses as the angel who visited Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and who gave him the promise of a son. (See Luke 1:11-13.) Since Luke identifies this angel as Gabriel (Luke 1:19), and Gabriel is Noah, we conclude that the Elias of Doctrine and Covenants 27 is Noah. [D&C 27] It therefore appears that Noah has a major role, under the direction of Adam, in bringing about the restoration of the gospel in the fulness of times; he therefore has a special relationship with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." (Robert J. Matthews, "The Fulness of Times," *Ensign*, Dec. 1989, 50)

Luke 1:27 a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph

"As we begin reading their story, we learn immediately that Joseph and Mary are 'espoused' (Matt. 1:18). Espousal among the Hebrews was significantly more binding than are our engagements today. The couple entered into it by written agreement and considered it the formal

beginning of the marriage itself. While the couple might not actually live together for as much as a year after the betrothal—a time designed to allow the bride to prepare her dowry—the espousal was as legally binding as the formal marriage." (Gerald N. Lund, *Selected Writings of Gerald N. Lund: Gospel Scholars Series* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1999], 136)

Luke 1:27 the virgin's name was Mary

"One of the most common feminine names in the New Testament is Mary—*Miryam* (Miriam) in Hebrew. One Bible concordance identifies at least seven different Marys in the New Testament, so it is not surprising to find a virgin of that name in the village of Nazareth. But perhaps there is more to it than that. Among Book of Mormon prophets, even a hundred years before the birth of the Savior, the actual name of the woman who was to mother the Messiah was known: It was to be Mary. (See Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10.)...Mary's mother fulfilled prophetic promises when she named her child, little dreaming that her daughter indeed would be the one [who would give birth to the Messiah]." (Gerald N. Lund, *Jesus Christ, Key to the Plan of Salvation* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1991], 8.)

Bruce R. McConkie

"As there is only one Christ, so there is only one Mary. And as the Father chose the most noble and righteous of all his spirit sons to come into mortality as his Only Begotten in the flesh, so we may confidently conclude that he selected the most worthy and spiritually talented of all his spirit daughters to be the mortal mother of his Eternal Son." (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-73, 1:85.)

Luke 1:32 the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David

Bruce R. McConkie

"Isaiah, in one of his greatest Messianic utterances, acclaims: 'And the government shall be upon [Messiah's] shoulder. . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.' (Isa. 9:6-7.) Isaiah's words, thus given, are but the foundation for the angelic proclamation of Gabriel to the Virgin of Nazareth of Galilee. Of the child Jesus whom she should bear, the angelic word promised: 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father

David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.' (Luke 1:31-33.) Thus, Christ shall provide the government. He shall reign on the throne of David forever. Peace shall prevail, and justice and judgment shall be the order of the day. And it is Israel, the chosen ones, over whom he shall reign in a kingdom that shall never cease. There is nothing figurative about this; it is not something that can be spiritualized away. It is the coming reality; it shall surely come to pass." (*The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982], 597.)

Luke 1:35 The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee

Ezra Taft Benson

"The most fundamental doctrine of true Christianity is the divine birth of the child Jesus. This doctrine is not generally comprehended by the world. The paternity of Jesus Christ is one of the 'mysteries of godliness' comprehended only by the spiritually-minded.

"The apostle Matthew recorded: 'Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.' (Matthew 1:18.)

"Luke rendered a plainer meaning to the divine conception. He quoted the angel Gabriel's words to Mary: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and *the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee*: therefore also that holy [being] which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' (Luke 1:35; italics added.)

"Some six hundred years before Jesus was born, an ancient prophet had a vision. He saw Mary and described her as 'a virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins.' He then saw her 'carried away in the Spirit . . . for the space of a time.' When she returned, she was 'bearing a child in her arms . . . even the Son of the Eternal Father.' (Book of Mormon, 1 Ne. 11:15; 1 Ne. 11:19-21.)

"Thus the testimonies of appointed witnesses leave no question as to the paternity of Jesus Christ. God was the Father of Jesus' mortal tabernacle, and Mary, a mortal woman, was His mother. He is therefore the only

person born who rightfully deserves the title 'the *Only Begotten Son of God*.'

"From the time of Christ's heaven-heralded birth, heresies have crept into Christianity intended to dilute or undermine the pure doctrines of the gospel. These heresies, by and large, are sponsored by the philosophies of men and, in many instances, advocated by so-called Christian scholars. Their intent is to make Christianity more palatable, more reasonable, and so they attempt to humanize Jesus and give natural explanations to those things which are divine.

"An example is Jesus' birth. The so-called scholars seek to convince us that the divine birth of Christ as proclaimed in the New Testament was not divine at all and that Mary was not a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception. They would have us believe that Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus, was His physical father, and that therefore Jesus was human in all attributes and characteristics. They appear generous in their praise of Him when they say that He was a great moral philosopher, perhaps even the greatest. But the import of their effort is to repudiate the divine Sonship of Jesus, for on that doctrine rest all other claims of Christianity.

"The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!" (*Come unto Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983], 2-4.)

Elder Eldred G. Smith

"Jesus Christ was the literal Son of God the Father by his spirit body and also by his physical body. The difference between Christ and us is that he had the same Father for his spirit body that he had for his physical body. But He had a mortal mother on earth. The scriptures say that she was overshadowed by the Holy Ghost. (See Luke 1:35.) Of course there had to be some means of making this possible while she was still in mortality. Further details are not necessary, but Christ himself declared all his life that he was the Son of God, and he meant it. That is the reason He had power to break the bonds of death and bring about the resurrection. It was not because He was crucified on the cross. Many people have been crucified on a cross. There were two crucified on crosses at the sides of him, but

they did not have the power to be resurrected. But Christ had the power to be resurrected." (March 10, 1964, *BYU Speeches of the Year, 1964*, p. 8)

Luke 1:37 with God nothing shall be impossible

"Nathan seemed like a miracle. After ten years of marriage and three miscarriages, I marveled at his very existence as I held him for the first time.

"Later, when a nurse brought Nathan to me again, I examined him more closely. There were ten fingers, ten toes, and the limbs were properly formed, but his face seemed a bit misshapen. When I questioned the pediatrician about it, he said, 'Babies' heads often become misshapen during the birth process; it will straighten out in a few days.' But it did not straighten out.

"When I took Nathan to the clinic for his two-week checkup, the doctor determined that something was indeed wrong. He arranged for us to see a plastic surgeon, who informed us that Nathan had been born with an incomplete jawbone on the left side of his face. He explained to us that nothing could be done until Nathan was about eighteen years old, when he could undergo an extensive operation to reform his jawbone. Until that time, there would be a noticeable disfigurement.

"We were heartbroken and feared the ridicule he might have to face from other children when he was old enough to attend school. We sought a second opinion and received the same diagnosis.

"I believed that our Father in Heaven could heal our son. I prayed, seeking earnestly to know Heavenly Father's will in the matter. I wanted to know if this was a trial for Nathan's benefit-if it would give him strength, courage, and great character-or if it could be resolved through our faith and prayers. After several weeks, I felt assured that it was not necessary for Nathan to bear this burden. My husband and I began a process of showing our faith in God through our actions.

"Nathan received several priesthood blessings, each including a blessing that he would 'grow perfectly in every way.' I prayed night and morning and kept a prayer in my heart all day, every day. I also put Nathan's name on the prayer roll of the temple and fasted regularly. I had to develop patience and a submissive spirit as I waited, hoped and prayed, and then allowed the Lord's will to be done.

"It did not happen right away, but eighteen months after Nathan was born he had a jawbone where none had existed. By the time Nathan started school, his teeth were straight, his speech was unimpaired, and his face showed no deformity. He has grown perfectly in every way.

"I came to learn for myself that 'with God nothing shall be impossible' (Luke 1:37). I know this type of miracle does not always happen, and that each circumstance is different. But we know that in this instance, the Lord's hand was manifest and we feel it appropriate to rejoice in the Lord's blessing to us." (Juliann Johnson Bradshaw, "Nathan's Jawbone," *Ensign*, Apr. 1996, 62)

Russell M. Nelson

"I applaud the efforts of Latter-day Saints throughout the world who willingly serve in building the kingdom of God. Likewise, I respect those who quietly do their duty though deepening trials come their way. And I admire those who strive to be more worthy by overcoming a personal fault or who work to achieve a difficult goal.

"I feel impressed to counsel those engaged in personal challenges to do right. In particular, my heart reaches out to those who feel discouraged by the magnitude of their struggle. Many shoulder heavy burdens of righteous responsibility which, on occasion, seem so difficult to bear. I have heard those challenges termed *impossible*.

"As a medical doctor, I have known the face of adversity. I have seen much of death and dying, suffering and sorrow. I also remember the plight of students overwhelmed by their studies and of those striving to learn a foreign language. And I recall the fatigue and frustration felt by young parents with children in need. Amidst circumstances seemingly impossible, I have also experienced the joyous relief that comes when one's understanding is deepened by scriptural insight.

"...Isaiah had made this prophetic utterance: 'The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' (Isa 7:14)

"When Mary was notified of her sacred responsibility, the announcing angel reassured, 'For with God nothing shall be impossible.'

"...We are children of the noble birthright, who must carry on in spite of our foredetermined status to be broadly outnumbered and widely opposed. Challenges lie ahead for the Church and for each member divinely charged toward self-improvement and service.

"How is it possible to achieve the 'impossible'? Learn and obey the teachings of God. From the holy scriptures, heaven-sent lift will be found for heaven-sent duties." (*Perfection Pending, and Other Favorite Discourses* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1998], 105-108.)

Luke 1:38 Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word

The scriptures contain certain monumental moments of faith. They are the defining declarations of discipleship. At the crucial impasse, Nephi declared, 'I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded' (1 Ne. 3:7). Joshua's monumental moment was defined by the following, 'as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15). Peter stood firm, declaring, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life' (John 6:68). None of these statements is any greater than that of humble Mary, who knew not a man nor how the Lord could make a mother out of a virgin, and yet declared, 'behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.'

Neal A. Maxwell

"The marvelous, spiritually submissive Mary likewise expressed it (true submissiveness) in few words. Though filled with wonderment about the miraculous impending birth of Jesus, she said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word' ("luke 1:38Luke 1:38).

"Her words can guide us when we too are puzzled by what is impending or unfolding in our lives. When we cannot explain all that is happening to us or around us, we can adopt Nephi's position: 'I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things' (1 Nephi 11:17)." (*Sermons Not Spoken* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985], 8-9.)

Thomas S. Monson

"In our selection of heroes, let us nominate also heroines...I speak of Mary of Nazareth, espoused to Joseph, destined to become the mother of the only truly perfect man to walk the earth. Her acceptance of this sacred and historic role is a hallmark of humility. 'And Mary said, Behold the handmaid

of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.' (Luke 1:38.) Surely Mary qualifies.

"Could we ask, What makes of these men heroes and these women heroines? I answer: Unwavering trust in an all-wise Heavenly Father and an abiding testimony concerning the mission of a divine Savior. This knowledge is like a golden thread woven through the tapestry of their lives." (*Be Your Best Self* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979], 40.)

Luke 1:38 And the angel departed from her

Chieko N. Okazaki

"Mary's example teaches us much about giving the answer of faith when things happen that we don't understand, about trusting in the Lord when things happen that try us and challenge our faith, about having confidence in his goodness at seasons of loss and sorrow.

"We are so used to thinking of the annunciation as the beginning of the joyous celebration of Christmas that we focus on Mary's joy, which I'm sure she felt, and on the great gladness of the Savior's birth. We are not used to thinking of this season as a time of loss for Mary. But it was a loss. She was a righteous young woman, but she was bound to lose her reputation among her family and friends and those who knew her in Nazareth. What else could they think, when they saw her pregnant, but that she had been unchaste? The last line in the annunciation is, 'And the angel departed from her' (v. 38). In other words, the angel didn't take the rabbi aside for a quiet chat about this very special young woman he had in town. He didn't whisper to the chief merchants that Mary was going to be remembered till the end of time, while their names would barely survive their own generation. The angel was not there at the well when Mary went for water, after she came back from visiting Elisabeth, her body already rounded with a sixth-month pregnancy. He didn't explain to the other women, shocked and scandalized and whispering to each other behind their hands, that Mary was the chosen vessel of the Lord. Nobody explained to the girls younger than Mary that she was the living embodiment of faith.

"Furthermore, *Mary* didn't explain it either. She obviously didn't explain it even to Joseph, because Joseph was the one person to whom the angel did come, to tell him that his faith in Mary was not misplaced. So, yes, I think we have to admit that despite the joy this was also a season of loss

and mourning." (*Disciples* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1998], 165 - 166.)

Luke 1:39-40 Mary arose...And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth

"I have always been touched that in her moment of greatest need, her singular time of confusion and wonder and awe, Mary went to another woman. She knew she could go to Elisabeth. I have also been touched that age was no factor here; in God's love there is no generation gap. Mary was very young-probably in her mid-teens at most-and Elisabeth was well beyond her childbearing years. The scripture says she was 'well stricken' in years. (Luke 1:7.) Yet these two women came together, greeting one another in a bond that only women can know. Indeed, it was their very womanhood that God used for his holiest of purposes. And in the special roles they were destined to play, these two beloved women-representing both personally and dispensationally the old and the new-sang to each other even as the babe in the womb of one leapt in recognition of the divinity of the other.

"Elisabeth was not petty or fearful or envious. Her son would not have the fame or role or divinity that had been bestowed on Mary's child; but her only feelings were of love and devotion. To this young, bewildered kinswoman she said only, 'Blessed art *thou* among women, and blessed is the fruit of *thy* womb. And whence is this to *me*, that the mother of my Lord should come to *me*?' (Luke 1:42-43. Italics added.)

"...This exchange between these two different yet similar women seems to me the essence of love and peace and purity. Surely the challenge for our day is to be equally pure in our womanhood. When we pollute the powerful potential for love with our pettiness and our fears, then disease replaces emotional health, and despondency replaces peace.

"As women, we have the choice and privilege to connect ourselves to God in a way whereby we draw his nourishing love down to our very roots. Such peace and power can then be extended to others. Like Mary, whose sweet joy and terrible burden could not be self-contained, each of us could find an Elisabeth to turn to if we would live for that relationship." (Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989], 33.)

Aileen H. Clyde

"Mary and Elisabeth, faced with momentous but deeply personal events that shook their lives and even their perceptions of themselves, turned to each other for confirmation, reassurance, and comfort. In each other, the cousins found empathy and strength as part of their blessing from the Holy Spirit.

"I am convinced there are Elisabeths for every Mary. Such relationships are so worth having that women have long found ways to come together in combinations from two to twenty to hundreds, seeking light for their minds and nourishment for their feminine souls. In one another, we discover rich sources of spirituality, understanding, and comfort." (*Hearts Knit Together: Talks from the 1995 Women's Conference* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1996], 172 - 173.)

Barbara B. Smith

"For the next three months, Mary remained with Elizabeth. From Mary, in her youth and with a special mission few others could comprehend, there was surely understanding and support. And from Elizabeth, there surely came wisdom shared from the experiences of a long life. Women the world over appreciate the closeness Mary and Elizabeth felt and the strength they each gained together.

"This account allows us to see clearly that sisterhood may be both individual and shared. As the Savior would later say, 'My mother and my brethren [and we may add sisters], are these which hear the word of God, and do it.' (Luke 8:21.) In that sense, Mary, as well as Elizabeth, enjoyed a sisterhood that had to do with personally qualifying through faithfulness to be counted among the followers of righteousness-the sons and daughters of God." ("The Bonds of Sisterhood," *Ensign*, Mar. 1983, 22)

Luke 1:41 when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb

Certainly, when Luke recorded this unique encounter, he did not mean to make a comprehensive statement regarding when the spirit enters the body of an unborn child. However, this passage has traditionally been used to address that subject. Elder James E. Talmage wrote that the babe leaping in Elisabeth's womb signified that moment when the John's spirit entered the body, "she experienced the physical thrill incident to the quickening spirit of her own blessed conception" (*Jesus the Christ*, 83). Elder McConkie has said, "In this miraculous event the pattern is seen which a spirit follows in passing

from his pre-existent first estate into mortality. The spirit enters the body at the time of quickening, months prior to the actual normal birth." (*DNTC* 1:84). Brigham Young noted, "when the mother feels life come to her infant, it is the spirit entering the body." (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 768)

However, it would seem that Jehovah did not enter his mortal tabernacle three months prior to birth. The scriptures suggest that he entered the body within 24 hours of his birth, based on his comment to Nephi, 'Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand...and on the morrow come I into the world' (3 Ne. 1:13). In spite of this scripture, the student should be aware that Elder McConkie and institute teachers have traditionally taught that the spirit of Jehovah was already in the womb at the time of this announcement to Nephi. They teach that this message was delivered by the power of the Holy Ghost who was speaking on behalf of Jehovah (see McConkie, *DCTC* 1:85). Certainly, our understanding of this subject is inadequate, and we would hope for more instruction in the future.

Luke 1:42-55 Elisabeth and Mary prophesy

By the spirit of prophecy, Elisabeth wonders why she is so lucky to have the mother of her Lord visit her. Clearly filled with the Holy Ghost, Elisabeth speaks as with the tongue of an angel (2 Ne. 31:13). This is an expression of the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Can a woman prophesy? Certainly! Elisabeth did and so did many other women in the Bible, including: Miriam (Ex. 15:20-21), Deborah (Judges 4:4-17), Huldah (2 Kgs. 22:14-20), Mary (Lu. 1:46-55), Anna (Lu 2:36-38), and Phillip's daughters (Acts 21: 8-9).

There is a big difference between the spirit of prophecy and the calling of a prophet. The spirit of prophecy is a gift of the spirit (DC 46:22) not a product of the priesthood. Hence, this gift can and should be developed among the sisters, for 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev. 19:10). If we expect the sisters to have a testimony, then we should expect them to prophesy.

Mary's prophecy (v. 46-55) is as profound and prophetic as any of the psalms. She knows that 'all generations shall call [her] blessed' (v. 48), that the Lord will exalt 'them of low degree' (referring in part to herself), and that the Lord is about to fulfill promises given to the fathers (v. 54-55). No mortal on the earth had a clearer understanding of the Messiah's mortal mission than did humble Mary. This knowledge only comes by the spirit of prophecy and revelation—a gift of the spirit—available to all those who have been given the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Dallin H. Oaks

"...spiritual gifts obviously bless the lives of those who do not themselves hold the priesthood.

"Moroni speaks of the spiritual gift of 'beholding of angels and ministering spirits.' (Moro. 10:14.) Alma and Amaleki both list this among the various gifts of the Spirit. (See Alma 9:21; Omni 1:25.) Mary had such an experience when she was visited by the angel who told her that she was to become the mother of the Son of God. (See Luke 1:26-38.)

"A more familiar gift of the Spirit is personal revelation. Alma described the universal character of this spiritual gift: 'And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men *but women also*. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned.' (Alma 32:23.)" ("Spiritual Gifts," *Ensign*, Sept. 1986, 70)

Luke 1:45 **blessed is she that believed**

Joseph Smith

"...every blessing which is obtained in relation to [the plan of salvation] is the effect of faith, whether it pertains to this life or that which is to come. To this all the revelations of God bear witness. If there were children of promise, they were the effects of faith, not even the Saviour of the world excepted. 'Blessed is she that believed,' said Elizabeth to Mary, when she went to visit her, 'for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.' (Luke 1:45.) Nor was the birth of John the Baptist the less a matter of faith; for in order that his father Zacharias might believe he was struck dumb." (*Lectures on Faith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985], 7:17.)

Luke 1:67-79 Zacharias' prophetic psalm

"His last words had been those of unbelief, his first were those of praise; his last words had been a question of doubt, his first were a hymn of assurance...this hymn of the Priest closely follows, and, if the expression be allowable, spiritualises a great part of the most ancient Jewish prayer: the so-called Eighteen Benedictions...a great portion of these prayers was said by the Priests before the lot was cast for incensing, or by the people in the time of incensing, it almost seems as if, during the long period of his

enforced solitude, the aged Priest had meditated on, and learned to understand, what so often he had repeated. Opening with the common form of benediction, his hymn struck, one by one, the deepest chords of that prayer... 'Speedily make to shoot forth the Branch of David, Thy servant, and exalt Thou his horn by Thy salvation, for in Thy salvation we trust all the day long. Blessed art Thou, Jehovah! Who causeth to spring forth the Horn of Salvation'...

"It was all most fitting. The question of unbelief had struck the Priest dumb, for most truly unbelief cannot speak; and the answer of faith restored to him speech, for most truly does faith loosen the tongue. The first evidence of his dumbness had been, that his tongue refused to speak the benediction to the people; and the first evidence of his restored power was, that he spoke the benediction of God in a rapturous burst of praise and thanksgiving." (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, [Hendrickson Publishers, 1993], 111-112)

Luke 1:80 the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing

"As John grew to maturity, the Holy Ghost prepared the young man's mind for his ministry. John received the Holy Ghost while he was in his mother's womb (see D&C 84:27; Luke 1:15), and no one can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelation (see Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 328). John was 'baptized while yet in his childhood,' was set apart for his mission by an angel when he was only eight days old (see D&C 84:28), and later received the full keys of the Aaronic Priesthood, including the keys of the ministering of angels. (See D&C 13.) It follows that he would have received the visitation of angels during these preparatory years.

"**Elder James E. Talmage** wrote that John 'had been a student under the tutelage of divine teachers; and there in the wilderness of Judea the word of the Lord reached him; as in similar environment it had reached Moses and Elijah of old.' (*Jesus the Christ*, 3d ed., Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1916, p. 122.)

"The training of this great Elias required the finest spiritual education possible and included study of the scriptures, lessons in Israel's history, the workings and revelations of the Holy Ghost, and the ministry of angels. When John came forth preaching at the age of thirty, he was ready. He knew what his mission was and what he was to do, and he had the

authority to go about it." (Robert J. Matthews, " 'There Is Not a Greater Prophet': The Ministry of John the Baptist," *Ensign*, Jan. 1991, 15)