

“To Theophilus, With Love”
Luke 2:1-20
Scott Huie
Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Sitting at his desk writing, Luke talks to himself, writing, erasing, writing, searching for the right words.... Okay, now, how do I, Luke, explain in one sentence what I am trying to convey?

“To tell the story,” no. “To write an orderly account.” Yeah, that’s better. “So that you may be better informed...” Nah, too weak. “So that you may know the truth...” Yeah, that’s telling it like it is. I think I got it now, my introduction, my opening paragraph, to surely the most important thing I am ever going to write.

Luke picks up the scroll and reads... “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.”

Bingo. *Luke puts down the scroll and continues talking...* My first paragraph to the story I am going to tell you, Theophilus. It feels good to get that under my belt. I sure hope and pray the words that I write will give at least a glimpse to the wonder and majesty of this incredible story I have to tell. It’s a true story that burns in my heart. This scroll when complete will only tell part of the story, for I could talk about this person and what he did and the things he said for many days. I witnessed some of this personally, I’ve read what a few others have written, I’ve talked to those who walked with him daily. I have so much to tell you.

Perhaps I will write it all on two scrolls. Yeah, that’s it. The first scroll will tell of what he did while on this earth. In the second I will record what he did after he left through his Spirit in spreading the good news through his disciples to the ends of the earth. Yes, that will help make the story complete.

O God, bless me with the right words. He was your Son, and he walked among us and he blessed us. How could I ever forget his incredible compassion and how he healed people of every disease? How could I ever forget how his teachings carried such wisdom as never been heard before? How could I ever forget how he became

friends with the least of these, even women and children? Theophilus, I want you to know that he was the promised one of God, the messiah, who came not only for us Jews, but he came for the entire world. In him, there was love, peace, and joy. In him, there is eternal life. I sure hope that the truth shines forth as I write this tale.

Let me see, where do I begin? My friend Mark began his account with Jesus as a grown man being baptized. But I think I'll start with his birth. Actually, I should probably begin with the promise of his birth, with that amazing story of John being miraculously born to the old priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. I'll get to that in a bit, but for now let me write about the birth itself, the birth of Zechariah and Elizabeth's nephew and John the Baptist's cousin.

Mary was betrothed to the carpenter Joseph. I think all she wanted at that point was a peaceful home with Joseph, a sanctuary cut off from all the brutality around them, all the struggles and calls for revolution. But then her world was turned upside down that fateful day by the visit from the angel, the messenger. The angel told Mary that she was favored by God and she would bear a son by the Holy Spirit, and she would name him Jesus, and he would reign forever and kingdom would have no end.

Mary struggled to believe it. After all, she was a virgin. But to her credit, Theophilus, and to the glory of God, this young woman overcame her doubt and her fears, and she responded, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Well after that, Mary paid a visit to her cousin Elizabeth. She was there for three months before returning to Nazareth. And it wasn't long before John the Baptist was born. The stage was now set. Mary had resumed a somewhat normal life, when suddenly another event shook them.

"In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria." Huh, I should probably say, "taxed," not "registered." That was what this was all about really. Nobody likes those high taxes. Some protested. But those Romans were quick to use force to squelch any rebellion. "All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child."

That was quite a journey. You have to go around the hills of Lake Galilee, down the Jordan valley, passed Jericho, and then the long slow climb to Jerusalem, the big city, and finally down the road to Bethlehem. Normally, it's a two-day walk. But for a woman fully pregnant, it could have taken up to a week. It's amazing she didn't miscarry. And through all their stress and worry, Mary and Joseph finally arrived in Bethlehem exhausted, scared, and filthy. Looking back now on that tale, little did they recognize the irony that we today see, that a despised Roman decree about taxes would lead this couple to Bethlehem, the place where the hope of nations could be borne in the city of David.

Well having arrived to their destination, Theophilos, their problems were far from over. "While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

As I reflect on this story, I can't help but imagine an incredible, deep sense of loneliness over this story. Here this couple was far removed from family and friends and all that was familiar, and they gave birth to the king of nations, the light of the world, in a lowly manger. It wasn't in a palace, but in a musty old barn in the back of a cheap hotel that had no vacancy.

Well that loneliness was about to end for the Lord God was about to bring some new friends into Mary and Joseph's world, friends that were coming to celebrate the birth. Again, God sent messenger angels to proclaim the good news that the birth had happened. They came to a field one evening where some shepherds were tending to their sheep and told them that the long awaited Messiah had just been born down the road in Bethlehem, the one who would actually become a shepherd to the people. To express the news, all those angels could do was sing: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors." Who knows, maybe those words will echo throughout eternity.

Well of course, with that announcement, those shepherds dropped everything and scurried over to Bethlehem "with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

Well, Theophilus, that is the beginning. I'll write more later. My bones ache and I'm tired. But what a story! I'll write later about his circumcision on the eighth day and his presentation in the temple, where two old but godly people, Simeon and Anna, recognized the baby Jesus as God's fulfillment for all of humanity. I'll write more about how Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth, where the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.

I'll write more about his amazing life after he was baptized by John and began his ministry as the one anointed "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." I'll write more about his final days, how he was persecuted and falsely accused, and convicted of a crime he did not commit. And finally, I will write about how he died on a cross between two thieves and then how he was raised from the dead on the third day to open the door for humanity to enter into eternal life.

Theophilus, as I reflect back on this amazing beginning to the greatest story ever told, I am reminded of what our spiritual father Paul once said to those Corinthians, that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are."

How his words ring true in this story! And how I hope, Theophilus, whose name means "lover of God," you will love this Jesus and be shaped by him, as I have been. This world will never be the same again. *Luke walks away.*