

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For Christmas reading, St. Luke's gospel is the richest of the three synoptic gospels. Here we find the story of the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Nativity of the Lord. Luke tells us about the shepherds of Bethlehem and the angel choirs that herald the coming of the Christ. Here we find the stories of the Presentation in the Temple and the Finding of the boy Jesus in the Temple.

St. Luke was a traveling companion of St. Paul, the author of The Acts of the Apostles, a physician, and from his style of writing, a well-educated and cultured person. Luke, like Mark, is not one of the apostles, but is a friend and companion of the Apostles. In Mark we hear the echoes of Peter's life and preaching. In Luke we hear echoes of Paul's life and preaching. Because they are one step away from the inner circle of apostles, Luke and Mark offer the necessary distance to record the stories about Jesus with some thought and analysis that comes with that slight distance. This balances well with Matthew and John's gospels which are by the apostles themselves.

How did Luke access the stories of the Lord's nativity? The ancient traditions teach that he actually knew the Blessed Virgin and she related the stories about Jesus' birth and childhood herself. If the traditions are correct, Luke was a native of Antioch in Syria and became a disciple under the ministry of St. Paul. If so, when would he have met the Blessed Mother? We can only speculate, because he does not record such a meeting in any of his writings.

It is possible that during his travels he was in the Jerusalem area when the apostles met in council and that he met the Blessed Virgin then. It is also possible that he gathered the traditions about the birth and boyhood of Jesus from the Jewish Christians living in and around Jerusalem in the early days.

In Luke's writings we can trace not only the stories that are unique to his gospel, but also the stories that he has in common with Matthew and Mark. We believe that Luke therefore had access to both the early versions of Matthew's gospel and Mark's gospel. He gathered those stories and sayings along with the results of his own research and composed the gospel to fulfill a purpose that he makes clear at the beginning of his work:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker