



The Once and Future King

Summary and Goal

The angel told Mary not only that she would bear a holy Child but also that He would sit on the throne of His father David and that the reign of His kingdom would have no end (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus wasn't born in some safe and sanitized holiday scene but in a war zone where He died with a sign over his head that read, "King of the Jews."

Main Passages

Luke 1:26-33; 23:38

Session Outline

1. He Will Be Great (Luke 1:26-32)
2. He Will Reign (Luke 1:33a)
3. His Reign Will Have No End (Luke 1:33b; 23:38)

Theological Theme

The radical corruption of all mankind necessitates a perfect and eternal atoning sacrifice to propitiate the wrath of God. Luke 1:26-33 and 23:38 signaled the arrival and identity of the sacrifice as well as His future rule.

Christ Connection

Jesus Christ is the sacrificial lamb who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). His sacrifice wasn't like those of animals that had to be repeated day after day, year after year. Rather, "he entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

Missional Application

We have been entrusted with the good deposit of the gospel message, and now we must steward it faithfully. Stewardship of the knowledge of the arrival and work of the Messiah means both centering our lives on this message as well as laboring along with our local assembly to proclaim this message to all people.

Historical Context of Luke

Purpose

The Gospel of Luke is a carefully researched (1:3), selective presentation of the person and life of Jesus Christ, designed to strengthen the faith of believers (1:3-4) and to challenge the misconceptions of unbelievers, especially those from a Greek background. Its portrait of Jesus is well balanced, skillfully emphasizing his divinity and perfect humanity.

Author

The author of the Third Gospel is not named. Considerable evidence points to Luke as its author. Much of that proof is found in the book of Acts, which identifies itself as a sequel to Luke (Ac 1:1-3). A major line of evidence has to do with the so-called “we” sections of the book (Ac 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-37; 28:1-16). Most of Acts is narrated in third-person plural (“they,” “them”), but some later sections having to do with the ministry of the apostle Paul unexpectedly shift to first-person plural (“we,” “us”). This indicates that the author had joined the apostle Paul for the events recorded in those passages. Since there are no “we” passages in the Gospel of Luke, that fits with the author stating that he used eyewitness testimony to the life of Jesus (1:2), indicating he was not such an eyewitness himself.

Setting

Traditionally, the Gospel of Luke is believed to have been written after both Matthew and Mark. Those who date Matthew and Mark in the AD 60s or 70s have tended to push the dating of Luke back to the AD 70s or 80s.

Since Luke wrote both the Third Gospel and the book of Acts (Ac 1:1-3), it is relevant to consider the dating of both books together. The events at the end of Acts occurred around AD 62-63. That is the earliest point at which Acts could have been written. If Acts was written in the early AD 60s from Rome, where Paul was imprisoned for two years (Ac 28:30), the Third Gospel could date from an earlier stage of that period of imprisonment. The other reasonable possibility is during Paul’s earlier two-year imprisonment in Caesarea (Ac 24:27). From that location, Luke would have been able to travel and interview the eyewitnesses to Jesus’s life and ministry who were still alive.

Special Features

The Gospel of Luke is the longest book in the New Testament. Focusing on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, this Gospel is part one of a two-part history, the book of Acts being part two. Both were dedicated to “most honorable Theophilus” (Lk 1:3; Ac 1:1).

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Session Plan

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Introduction

- ❓ Can you think of some of the details that Luke and other biblical authors include concerning the announcement and birth of Jesus?
- ❓ Why do you think they included so many details?
- ❓ What do these things point to? What is the significance of these extraordinary accounts?

Everything about Luke 1:26-38 shouts Messiah! An angel visited a humble virgin with the message that the virgin would conceive. The child would be named Jesus, which means “Yahweh is salvation” And, then, this: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end” (1:32-33). Nothing more earth shattering could be uttered by man or angel than the words that Gabriel said to Mary. The implications for our lives are great.

1. He Will Be Great (Luke 1:26-32)

The angel Gabriel described the child to be born to Mary as “great” or “megas” in Greek. It’s difficult to get through the first chapter of Luke without getting the sense that something megas is on the horizon. Luke made this abundantly clear. The center and focus of this greatness rest upon the baby that would be born to a virgin. All of the events surrounding Him are great (an angel announcement, a forerunner born to an old woman, a virgin birth), and He himself is great.

- ❓ Why was Jesus great? What made His greatness of a different class than John the Baptist or anyone else in history?
- ❓ What was the purpose for which Jesus came into the world? How did this add to His greatness? Why must this have implications for our daily lives?

2. He Will Reign (Luke 1:33a)

The constant refrain and summary statement in the book of Judges is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. When we combine radical corruption with self-rule we end up with irreparable disaster, thus the need for authority. We need someone to tell us what to do. We need government and law. For the fallen world, governments are a part of God's common grace toward all humanity regardless of whether they submit their hearts to God. For born-again believers, the reign of Christ is essential to a joyful, Spirit-filled life. The lordship of Christ is a great mercy and kindness to Christians. We cling to it, cherish it, and live by it.

- ❓ Why do we need an authority in our lives? Why is Jesus' lordship over His people a kindness and mercy toward us?
- ❓ How have you seen the effect of seeking to have no authority in your life? How has this pointed to the grace of God giving His authority over our lives?

3. His Reign Will Have No End (Luke 1:33b; 23:38)

We may find ourselves hoping for a change in local, state, or federal government. We may canvass, campaign, and cast votes to try to enact change. This is because our governments are made up of fallen people living within the context of a fallen world. There must be checks and balances; we must seek change and reform. The reign of Christ, however, is different. Our King is completely free of sin. He is uncorrupted by evil. There is no darkness in Him whatsoever. This fact makes His absolute rule good. It's one thing to be under an authority with absolute power when that absolute authority is fallible. It's quite another, however, to be under an absolute ruler who is absolutely good, trustworthy, just, and holy.

- ❓ What does the fact of Christ's unending reign mean for His subjects, us?
- ❓ What does this mean for the way we live and interact with others who don't know Him?

Conclusion

- ❓ How are you awed by the identity and mission of Jesus? Do you understand it and cling tightly to it? What evidence does your life give to support your answer?
- ❓ How is the authority and lordship of Christ good news to you? Why must action accompany our faith to show it as genuine?

❓ For Further Discussion

How has Christ's reign given you rest in your life? Are you allowing the anxieties and stresses of today snuff out the rest and peace that our King offers? What is He calling you to submit to Him in this regard today?



Expanded Session Content

The Once and Future King

Introduction

There are several types of foreshadowing that exist in storytelling. For example, symbolic foreshadowing is abstract and requires a sharp eye and the ability to think outside the box. Luke, however, used a different, more straightforward sort of foreshadowing.

It doesn't take a degree in forensic investigation to piece together the overarching message of Luke's account of the announcement of the birth of Jesus. It doesn't get any more concrete or clear than, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David" (1:32).

This sort of no-nonsense foreshadowing in modern literature is referred to as "Chekhov's Gun." It originated with the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, who said, "Remove everything that has no relevance to the story. If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there."¹

Chekhov's gun in the first chapter of Luke was the identity and mission of Jesus. The angel's words to Mary heralded eternal significance of this baby, and it was no haphazard decision on Luke's part to include this information. Luke conducted careful research before writing his gospel and knew that the angel's announcement was significant. Further, Luke's writing was undergirded, inspired, and preserved by the Holy Spirit of God, so we can rest assured that every word and clause matters.

- ❓ Can you think of some of the details that Luke and other biblical authors include concerning the announcement and birth of Jesus?
- ❓ Why do you think they included so many details?
- ❓ What do these things point to? What is the significance of these extraordinary accounts?

Let's take a closer look at Luke's version of Checkhov's gun, seeking that its significance hits its mark in our hearts and minds.

Session Summary

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1. He Will Be Great (Luke 1:26-32)

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Why was Jesus great? What made His greatness of a different class than John the Baptist or anyone else in history?

The greatness of Jesus was different because He is God incarnate. Jesus, God the Son, is of the very same nature of God the Father and is very dear to Him. Jesus' greatness is tied to His identity as the second person of the Trinity. He is Himself God. We must be clear and careful here. Christians are monotheists. Our sacred book, the Bible, makes plain that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4). We reject polytheism and pantheism outright. However, the Bible also makes plain that the one true and living God expresses Himself and exists as three persons. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. But, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, nor is the Spirit the Father. This is the doctrine of the Trinity in a nutshell. The three persons of the Trinity, the one true and living God, are working in complete unity and harmony to realize our salvation. We may put it this way: The Father appointed, the Son accomplished, and the Spirit is applying.

Jesus is incontestably great, He is beyond megas and we ought to view Him as such. He was a great teacher and miracle worker, but these are simply ancillary details to His draw-dropping identity. Jesus is God incarnate. Jesus is Himself God over all and ever to be worshipped (Romans 9:5).



What was the purpose for which Jesus came into the world? How did this add to His greatness? Why must this have implications for our daily lives?

The Fully Divine Man

It's important to remember that Jesus remained fully divine even in His incarnate state. This question is critical because to deny Jesus' divinity is to deny 2000 years of orthodox Christian teaching and, more importantly, fundamentally change the gospel to a message that is powerless to save. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ in the flesh is God. Evidence for the full deity of Jesus Christ is at every turn in the New Testament (Titus 2:13; Colossians 1:19; 2:9; Hebrews 1:6; Acts 7:59-60; John 1:3; Mark 2:5; and Acts 10:42).

Jesus is fully God and fully man. Because Jesus, our Savior, came in the likeness of sinful flesh, God remains perfectly just while also being gracious. God condemned sin by placing it on Christ and removing from us the wrath that we were due. To be the true mediator between God and man, Jesus had to truly take on flesh and live as a human being. He shared human nature with us except for one thing—His flesh was not tainted by inherited sin. He was completely sinless until the Father placed the sins of the world upon Him. Because Jesus was truly God and truly man and lived a life of perfect righteousness in human flesh, He is the only sacrifice able to satisfy the demands of God the Father.

Our sin that was placed on Jesus at the cross and His righteousness credited to our account is the greatest work ever accomplished on behalf of sinful man. This is the heart of the gospel. While the imputation of our sin to Christ and His righteousness to us are the fundamental and reality-altering results of Jesus work on the cross, there are attending benefits that Christians can enjoy today.

First, we are adopted into God's family. We are given the right to become children of God because of the atoning death of Christ (John 1:12). Not only did God rescue us from the possession of the enemy, but He also made us a part of His family. Second, we are given the great gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Triune God. God Himself dwells in us to comfort, convict, empower, and lead us into truth. The Holy Spirit is a helper to us and brings to mind the things that we have learned from the Scriptures (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit aids us by interceding for us in our weakness (Romans 8:26-27). There are many other benefits that attend our justification for the redeemed to enjoy now. These can be discovered and enjoyed by consistent, humble, and prayerful study of the Scriptures.

2. He Will Reign (Luke 1:33a)

Gabriel made it clear that the greatness of Christ isn't simply something that people would stand by and observe. Rather, the coming child would reign. He would exercise authority, and His position would demand submission. Isaiah foretold this in Isaiah 9:6-7.

Jesus, God the Son, was born of a virgin in the line of David. He is the root of Jesse, and His reign is the fulfillment of what David's reign only foreshadowed (Isaiah 11:10). Jesus truly is Prophet, Priest, and King.



Why do we need an authority in our lives? Why is Jesus' lordship over His people a kindness and mercy toward us?

Many Christians have had the experience of reading the story of Israel's failure from the Old Testament and wondering how the Israelites could have been so foolish. They had witnessed the power and deliverance of God. They had the Law and the prophets. If anyone had what they needed to live in obedience to the one true and living God, surely the Israelites did.

The Israelites did not, however, have what they needed to live in perfect and perpetual obedience to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had deceitful hearts and were radically corrupted because of the sin of their first parents and their continued disobedience to the Law of God. In short, they needed circumcision of the heart. They needed God to put His Spirit in them, remove their hearts of stone, and give them a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). The same spiritual disability that plagued the Israelites also plagues our neighbors. It plagues us, too. The rottenness of sin has reached every nook and cranny of our hearts, minds, and bodies and when we read of the sin of the Israelites we may as well be looking in a mirror.

The constant refrain and summary statement in the book of Judges is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. When we combine radical corruption with self-rule we end up with irreparable disaster, thus the need for authority. We need someone to tell us what to do. We need government and law. For the fallen world, governments are a part of God's common grace toward all humanity regardless of whether they submit their hearts to God. For born-again believers, the reign of Christ is essential to a joyful, Spirit-filled life. The lordship of Christ is a great mercy and kindness to Christians. We cling to it, cherish it, and live by it.



How have you seen the effect of seeking to have no authority in your life? How has this pointed to the grace of God giving His authority over our lives?

When we have no authority, no North Star to guide us, we will do what is right in our own lives. We will even justify our own sinful actions. As Christians, Jesus is our King and our duty is to submit to Him in every way. Of course, we fail at this because we still live in a fallen world and battle against the old nature. It's for this reason that we must daily commit ourselves to submitting to His lordship by submitting to His commands in Scripture. As we read, study, meditate upon, and memorize the Scriptures we will be convicted of sin and renewed in our fervency to serve our reigning King. The Holy Spirit will enable us to reject our tendency to do what seems right in our own eyes and live in humble obedience to the word of our King.

Isaiah 9:6-7

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Armies will accomplish this.

3. His Reign Will Have No End (Luke 1:33b; 23:38)

Gabriel announced the fulfillment of what has been promised from of old. In 2 Samuel 7:16 we read, “Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever.” Further, in Psalm 89:34-36 it says, “I will not violate my covenant or change what my lips have said. Once and for all I have sworn an oath by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring will continue forever, his throne like the sun before me.”

The child to be born to a virgin, who is the one true and living God incarnate, would reign unendingly. Jesus is a sure and steady anchor. His reign will not waver or topple; He shall not be overthrown or defeated. There will be no change in regime. His rule and reign are eternal.

- ❓ What does the fact of Christ’s unending reign mean for His subjects, us?
- ❓ What does this mean for the way we live and interact with others who don’t know Him?

We may find ourselves hoping for a change in local, state, or federal government. We may canvass, campaign, and cast votes to try to enact change. This is because our governments are made up of fallen people living within the context of a fallen world. There must be checks and balances; we must seek change and reform. The reign of Christ, however, is different. Our King is completely free of sin. He is uncorrupted by evil. There is no darkness in Him whatsoever. This fact makes His absolute rule good. It’s one thing to be under an authority with absolute power when that absolute authority is fallible. It’s quite another, however, to be under an absolute ruler who is absolutely good, trustworthy, just, and holy.




Conclusion

Reading the Gospels should inspire awe in us. Luke 1 is a prime example of a passage that, when read carefully and thoughtfully, should leave us speechless. Jesus is great. He is the one true and living God in flesh. His work is also great. He came to redeem sinners by bearing their sin on the cross at Calvary. As we read Luke’s account of Jesus’ conception, we ought to be moved to bow down and worship. This text ought to draw out our hearts in reverence and loosen our tongues to proclaim, “My God and my Lord!”

The greatness of Jesus is not, however, simply about passive recognition of an extraordinary life. It’s much more than that. The testimony of Luke demands a response. Jesus came not only to redeem, but also to

reign “so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11). Christians embrace this reign; they treasure it and submit to it. King Jesus’ commands have been preserved for us to open and read now. There is no excuse to not follow His teaching completely and whole-heartedly.

Finally, Jesus’ reign is eternal. For those who love their sin and hate the light, the news of Jesus’ eternal reign will be off putting. It is unwelcomed news. But, for those that have been drawn by the Father to the Son and are being saved, it is life giving, joyful news. Our Rock of Refuge will be just that forevermore. His work of redemption will stand eternally. Our Mediator and Advocate with the Father will not cease His intercession on our behalf. All of His promises will hold true. Therefore, Christians are comforted and rest in the reality of the eternal reign of their Redeemer. There is no anxiety that this fallen world can throw at them that should be able to usurp that deep abiding rest and peace.

-  How are you awed by the identity and mission of Jesus? Do you understand it and cling tightly to it? What evidence does your life give to support your answer?
-  How is the authority and lordship of Christ good news to you? Why must action accompany our faith to show it as genuine?
-  How has Christ’s reign given you rest in your life? Are you allowing the anxieties and stresses of today snuff out the rest and peace that our King offers? What is He calling you to submit to Him in this regard today?

Prayer of Response

Pray for a deeper love and fervency in walking in relationship and obedience to Christ. Pray for the grace and ability to enjoy, rest in, and find comfort in the eternal reign of Christ.

Additional Resources

- *High King of Heaven* by John MacArthur
- *Jesus the King* by Timothy Keller
- *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Luke* by Thabiti Anyabwile

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Throne

Main Passages

- Revelation 4:1-11

Session Outline

1. A Peek Into Heaven (Revelation 4:1-2)
2. Holy, Holy, Holy (Revelation 4:3-11)
3. Priority of Worship (Revelation 4:1-11)

Memorize

³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God." ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

- Luke 1:30-31

Daily Readings

- Monday - Hebrews 1:6
- Tuesday - Philippians 2:9-11
- Wednesday - 1 Corinthians 8:6
- Thursday - Isaiah 9:6
- Friday - Colossians 1:16-17
- Saturday - Romans 11:36

Extended Commentary

Luke 1:26-33; 23:38

1:26. Six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy, God took the second step in his climactic act in salvation history. The scene of action was far from the nation's religious center where Zechariah sacrificed and met Gabriel, far even from the Judean hill country of Elizabeth. The angel Gabriel was again in action, but this time in Nazareth—an insignificant village known only as the home base for the eighteenth of the twenty-four courses of priests.

1:27. The virgin birth is Luke's central emphasis in this section. Having set the scene in verse 26, he begins the narrative with the words to a virgin. He will conclude this narrative section by telling how the virgin birth is God's possible impossibility (vv. 34-37). The epilogue to the narrative (v. 38) shows Mary's willingness to be a part of God's impossible acts.

Mary the virgin was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. The language comes from Deuteronomy 22:23. It describes an engagement, the result of a public ceremony before witnesses by which a man and woman were legally considered married but did not live or sleep together. At this stage the bride price had already been paid to the woman's family, and the man had legal responsibility for the woman. This engagement could be broken only through divorce. Engagement usually lasted about a year, with the girl living with her parents. Often the girl was only twelve to fourteen years old. In the forerunner's birth, the expectant father occupied center stage. Here it is the expectant mother. The father is mentioned at this point only to introduce his Davidic ancestry.

1:28. Mary is the highly favored one—the recipient of a special blessing from God. She has experienced God's undeserved, unmerited grace in a special way. This does not change who Mary is or give her a status beyond other people. It singles her out as a special instrument whom God chose to use in his gracious plan of salvation. The grace Mary received was God's presence with her.

1:29. The highly favored becomes the greatly troubled. Luke uses *Siata-paxi*, the only appearance of the word in the New Testament. It describes something thoroughly stirred up, confused, and perplexed. A divine messenger should be enough to stir up confusion in a young teenager. An angel who promises a special audience with God is even more confusing. So Mary stirred these thoughts around in her mind, trying to

find a meaning to them and the steps to take in light of them. She had never received such a greeting! What was she to make of it?

1:30. The heavenly messenger understood her troubled mind, so the angel repeated the comforting words Zechariah had heard (v. 13): Do not be afraid. Why should she not be afraid? Mary found favor. The Greek word is *xaris*—unmerited, undeserved grace from God. God’s grace removes all fear.

1:31-33. The angel’s message did not ease Mary’s confused mind immediately—not with a divine birth announcement for a baby named “Yahweh is salvation.” Not with an explanation that this baby would be the new David, king over all Israel, bearing the awesome title, “Son of God” (see Ps. 2:7). But what a kingdom—an eternal rule without end. No other king had such a kingdom! Who could this baby be?

23:38. Pilate had authorized a placard to be placed above Jesus’ head to describe his crime. Jesus’ crime was claiming to be king of the Jews. Again, this had both a religious and a political dimension. This mocking placard, however, proclaimed eternal truth for those who would listen. Jesus is truly the king of the Jews, the promised Messiah, and as such is the only hope for the world. Those who would be part of an eternal kingdom must believe on him as their king.²

References

1. Bill, Valentine. *Chekhov, the Silent Voice of Freedom*. New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1987.
2. Butler, Trent C. *Luke*. Edited by Max Anders. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011.