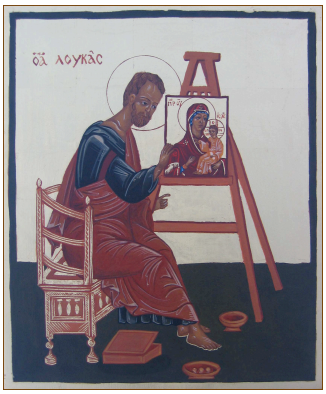
ANDREASCOURSE-6



Week 6: ´Amazing birth-story´
The Gospel of Luke 1 and 2

About the New Testament.
Over the coming weeks we are going to read the Gospel according to Luke. We have arrived at the second part of the Bible. The first part, the Old Testament, is a long preparation for the coming of Christ, the promised Messiah. The long history is *His story*. It is Gods story with people. That's what we have discovered the last five evenings, from Creation to the Babylonian exile, from Adam and Eve to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to Daniel…to Jesus.

The New Testament describes the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, and especially the last three years of His life on earth.
The New Testament contains four Gospels, four separate testimonials about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus: by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Next to the Gospels you will find the letters (the main author is Paul). The letters deeply reflect upon the meaning of all that Jesus has said and done. He is not only the extraordinary person from Nazareth, He also is the Son of God, who re-opened the path to the Father for us.
Luke wrote another book: Acts. That book tells us about the spread of the Gospel, like a wildfire, from Jerusalem to Rome, the centre of what was then the known world.
The last book of the New Testament is the book of Revelation. John, one of the disciples of Jesus and also the author of a Gospel, wrote here about his encounters with God and his visions about the end times.

About Luke and his Gospel.
Luke is, as a doctor, historian and writer, scientifically trained. He has intensely investigated the stories before he wrote them down in his Gospel (Luke 1: 3). You might then expect that he gave an accurate report, about 50 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the Netherlands you can compare it with what dr. L. de Jong did after the second World War. As a professor of history he assessed the reliability of all testimonies and stories during the war and made a final report of it, that he published in a series of books called 'The occupation' ('de Bezetting').
Luke pays a lot of attention, just like the other evangelists, to special events concerning the birth of Jesus: His preaching, teaching, and healing work in the last three years of his life on earth; His dying on the cross and finally His resurrection from death. The Gospel isn't a journalistic report. It wants specifically to pass on the words of Jesus, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. This makes the Gospel an invitation, a call to believe in Jesus.



What characterizes Luke as an author: God's attention to poor and helpless people. Wealth, in contrast, introduces a big risk: egotism and turning away from God. In addition

this is the Gospel of happiness. Here you often taste the joy over re-finding that which had been lost. See also the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal and his brother (Luke 15). Jesus says: ‘ I tell you that there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.’ (Luke 15: 7).

Here the Bible passages for reflection and preparation for 6 days

Day 1: Luke 1 verse 1 - 4. *Luke’s reliability*

- Try to order your thoughts and feelings in order to concentrate. If possible, pray that God helps you in this.
- Read and reread the passage. Make notes of your insights, questions.
- Question for further reflection:
    - Luke describes to Theophilus, a friend or an acquaintance, how he started to write the gospel. Why did Luke think that it was necessary to tell how he had collected his materials?
    - Are you already able to see here why Luke has written this book? Do you want to let yourself be convinced by what Luke, guided by the Holy Spirit, presents in his gospel?
- Maybe you want to ask God’s help, so that you will not be stuck in exploring ‘possibilities’, but that you may find and believe what is true, what is really trustworthy.

Day 2: Luke 1 verse 26 - 33. *An angel with an unprecedented message*



- Take time to concentrate, pray...
- Read and reread. Mary and Joseph were engaged. Presumably they belonged to the circle of Jewish believers that intensively prayed for the coming of the Messiah. Realize that it was a very difficult time: everywhere you could find crosses alongside the roads (public executions performed by the Roman occupier). It was a time of competing religious groups, nationalists, terrorists, collaborators...
- Questions:
    - An angel appeared to Mary and she became very afraid. What is the reason that she doesn’t run away, but that she listens to his message?
    - Have you ever waited for the message of an angel, or do you still wait for such a message occasionally? Does it make you afraid if something happens in your life what is totally unexpected or cannot be explained by any rational argument?
- If possible, say or wrote a short prayer based on what you saw and heard in this quiet moment.

Day 3: Luke 1 verse 34 – 38. *Accepting the impossible*

- Start with prayer if possible, ask for calmness and new insight.
- (Re)read, think, write…
- Questions:

- Mary is realistic. She pregnant? She knew enough about biology and sexuality to realise that it was impossible in this way. That she became pregnant is supernatural, but 'for God nothing is impossible' (vs. 37). Try to imagine how she thought and felt, also what the consequences of these words were.
- Verse 38 has caught much attention in the history of the Christian church. Could God have done this in a different way? Maybe yes! Could Mary have refused? Humanly speaking it was possible. What do you think is the secret of Mary's acceptance?

- Closing prayer: you may include in your prayer the personal acceptance of 'matters that are beyond what is rational and scientific'.

Day 4: Luke 2 verse 1 - 7. *Royal child in a manger*

- Bring before God what is difficult for you, what bothers you.
- Put (virtual or real) exclamation marks and question marks in the text.
- Questions:
  - This passage contains very well-known words. You may have heard them many times around Christmas day. What actually is the reason for Joseph and Mary leaving the city of Nazareth? Do you think that there are deeper reasons or causes that gets them moving??
  - Under what conditions is Jesus born? Why, do you think, does it happen like this and why does Luke, the author, tell the story with such detail? What he wants to convince us about? (Compare also with verse 12).
- Prayer indication: 'It might be necessary for me to ask God for humility, when I see in what conditions Jesus came into the world.'

Day 5: Luke 2 verse 8 – 20. *The first witnesses*



- Thank God that we may come in his presence from the fuss and stress that we often experience.
- Read and 'ruminate'...
- Questions:
  - Shepherds were the first to receive the message that Jesus was born. Shepherds belonged to the 'scum' of the nation. They were only good enough to herd the sheep that were kept in the fields of Efratha for the sacrifices in the temple. Efratha was about three km south of Jerusalem. But the angels seek them! What moves the shepherds to go to Bethlehem? Why do they leave their flocks behind so easily?
  - What or who moves you?
- Pray that God will get you moving, to search for and to find this Child.

Day 6: Luke 2 verse 21 - 35. *Jesus in the arms of a greybeard*

- Prayer to start with: give back to God what occupies you today.
- Questions:

    - Simeon was also one of those people who intensely looked forward to Gods intervention through the Messiah, who was promised long ago. The work of the Holy Spirit in Simeon's life is remarkable. Look for indications in the text that clarify that.
    - When he stands there with the Child on his arms, he seems to become a different person. What happens to him? Imagine you standing there (a bit younger, yes!). What do you see in this Child?
- Suggestion for prayer. Simeon is overjoyed. He found peace when he saw that this Child, the Son of man, the Son of God, had appeared. Pray for joy, and the faith that Jesus became poor, and wanted to be born on this earth, for you (see 2 Cor. 2 verses 8 and 9).