

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke 1:1-25

We all know how important the first sentence of a book is. Those well-chosen words could make us want to either read on or move on to another book. Imagine, then, how carefully the author of Luke's Gospel must have chosen his words, knowing the importance of his subject. The opening phrase lets us know that the Book of Luke is one of several accounts of the Good News. As Luke explains to Theophilus ("lover of God"), he intends to write an orderly version of the events that have been handed down. He clearly wants his readers to fully understand the real meaning of all the things they have heard about Jesus the Christ. And so, Luke starts from the beginning with the miraculous births of John the Baptist and his cousin Jesus of Nazareth and, true to his word, he uses an orderly structure to do it.

Think About . . .

Compare the opening sentence of Luke to the opening sentences of the other Gospels. What impressions do you have of each author?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke 1:26–80

The heart and soul of this part of chapter 1 is verses 46–55, referred to as the *Magnificat*. Perhaps the similar word *magnificent* best describes this eloquent prayer of praise that Christians around the world recite every day in the Liturgy of the Hours. This prayer captures a major theme of Luke's Gospel: those who possess much in the world's eyes will find themselves with very little; the Savior will turn everything upside down. Mary realizes her own humility by expressing her lowliness, and yet she knows she will be called blessed. She proclaims that through Jesus's growing in her womb, God is fulfilling an ancient promise, and that this fulfillment will quite literally change the world. And indeed it does!

Think About . . .

What would you say to praise God's actions in your own life? Write down your words of praise.

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke 2:1-21

Whenever we see a crèche at Christmastime, it doesn't seem complete without a shepherd or two. It is important to understand that at the time of Jesus, shepherds were outcasts that were generally despised. They were definitely not part of the Jewish mainstream. Luke continually focuses on the Good News being given to those who are poor and downtrodden. Think about it: the first ones to hear the news of the birth of the long-awaited Messiah are the lowly shepherds out in their fields. The angel points them to the manger so they can be the first to witness the birth of the Lord. And it is entirely fitting that they should encounter a poor couple forced to lay their newborn in a manger, a feeding trough for cattle. This is just the opposite of what would be expected for the birth of the Savior.

Think About . . .

If Jesus were born today, to whom would the news of his birth be given and where would he be born?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke 2:22-52

Here Luke provides us with the only Gospel story of Jesus as an adolescent. And, as so often is the case between adolescents and their parents, it involves worrying and misunderstanding. By deliberately staying behind in Jerusalem, Jesus put his parents through several days of fear and anxiety. When they finally find him, his response to their understandable concern is a very challenging one. Mary speaks of Jesus's earthly father, Joseph, but Jesus replies by referring to his heavenly Father. As all adolescents do, Jesus is beginning to explore the meaning of his own identity, one that will continually be misunderstood by people who are expecting a very different kind of Messiah. Jesus does, however, return home with his parents, obedient to them for many more years before beginning his public ministry.

Think About . . .

Spend some time reflecting on your own struggles with your parents or guardians as you grow into your identity. Ask Jesus to help you with your "growing pains."

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 3

Eighteen years have passed, and now Jesus is about to begin his public ministry. This chapter gives us a vivid portrait of Jesus's cousin, John the Baptist. John is preaching the need for repentance, and in verses 10–14, three times he is asked, "What should we do?" What is really being asked, of course, is, "What should we do to be saved?" And in each case, John gives very practical advice. Simply put, he tells his listeners to do the right thing and, especially for the tax collectors and soldiers, not to abuse their positions to become richer. As he does many times in his Gospel, Luke raises the point that wealth and possessions can easily keep us from growing in our faith. John is also clear that he is the forerunner to the Messiah, that he is only preparing the way by urging people to repent and be forgiven.

Think About . . .

What advice might John the Baptist give you if you asked him, "What should I do?"

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke 4:1–13

After forty days of fasting in the wilderness, who wouldn't be hungry? And really, what would be the harm in turning a stone into a loaf of bread? It would be kind of a cool trick, wouldn't it? Actually that's the problem here. If Jesus were to give in to this temptation, along with the other two he faces, he would be a totally different Messiah. He is essentially being asked to show off, to perform tricks that would be very impressive and would, no doubt, win people over. But Jesus is ready to begin his public ministry as a human being, as someone who has to deal with life and its temptations and distractions just as we do. By choosing to be one of us, he is also rejecting special treatment, or the easy way out. Jesus wants to show us the way of a servant who seeks to do good for others, not for himself.

Think About . . .

Why does it seem so much more appealing to be a celebrity rather than a servant?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke 4:14–43

Where better for Jesus to begin his mission than in his hometown of Nazareth? After all, he grew up there, and everyone knows he is Joseph's son. So how does Jesus go from being the hometown hero to almost being thrown off a cliff within a couple verses? The answer probably has more to do with his listeners than with him. Clearly Jesus really impressed them in the synagogue with his message of the Good News. When he tries to get his old friends and neighbors to think bigger than just Nazareth, however, sparks begin to fly. It seems rather abrupt, but perhaps Luke is foreshadowing what will happen to Jesus in Jerusalem: initial acceptance and enthusiasm followed by rejection and rage.

Think About . . .

Why is it that the people who know you best can sometimes be your harshest critics when you take a different path than they think you should?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 5

It is hard for us to really imagine what it was like to have leprosy in the time of Jesus. Lepers were feared and were outcasts, banished to the fringes of society. No one wanted to be around them; they were considered unclean. It was best to just look the other way and not even get near someone with leprosy. Notice how much Luke tells us about Jesus in only a few short verses (see verses 12–16). The leper approaches Jesus, which was a bold move, and requests to be healed. Clearly he has heard that Jesus can work wonders. Not only does Jesus immediately respond to the man's request, but he actually touches the leper—an equally bold move and a powerful sign of how Jesus intends to break through barriers and stereotypes to let people know they are worthy of dignity and attention.

Think About . . .

In your neighborhood or school, to whom would Jesus reach out? Could you do the same?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 6

The last part of this chapter (verses 43–49) deals with quality. Typical of Jesus, he uses everyday images—fruit trees and house foundations—to make his point. Have you ever noticed how most people pick out fruit in a grocery store? They generally pick up and put back a few before they find what they are looking for. They want the best looking fruit because they assume it will taste the best. And before people purchase a home, they generally check the basement or lower level to make sure it has a good foundation. If it doesn't, they look somewhere else, unless they are careless or in a hurry. The point is clear: quality matters. The foundation of a structure is the key to its strength and ability to last. Good trees bear good fruit. Solid foundations resist the forces of nature.

Think About . . .

What kind of foundation are you built on?
What happens when times get rough?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 7

Hospitality. That really is the crux of the last section of this chapter. Jesus is invited into the home of a Pharisee named Simon. Then this woman shows up, and in an almost embarrassing display of affection, she bathes and kisses Jesus's feet. She is of course a woman "with a reputation." Simon can't believe Jesus doesn't know this. Ah, but that's precisely the point: Jesus *does* know this, and he uses this woman's repentance to drive home an important point in Luke's Gospel: even though Simon invites Jesus into his home, it is this sinful woman who makes Jesus feel welcome. Her emotional response to Jesus sharply contrasts with Simon's response. By welcoming this woman, Jesus reflects God's generosity and God's lavish love for us, especially when we seek forgiveness.

Think About . . .

Why is judging others a barrier to hospitality?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 8

How can Jesus sleep that soundly? The boat is filling with water and obviously rocking heavily, and yet he is still fast asleep. What is this scene all about? For people in biblical times, water, especially a stormy sea with big waves, was a symbol of chaos. A boat often symbolized the early Church. Add to that the image of Jesus's commanding the wind to cease, which casts Jesus in the role of the Creator. The message is clear: No matter how dangerous or threatening things may seem to be in our faith journey, Jesus is always with us and will not let us go down. Even when it appears that Jesus is asleep or dormant, we can't forget that he is a powerful force in our lives and can calm any turbulence we may feel.

Think About . . .

Consider a tough time you've had recently. Now try to picture yourself with Jesus during that time. What might he say to you?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 9

In verses 46–48, Jesus teaches his followers a vital lesson. At this point in the Gospel journey, they have been with him long enough to have seen him do some pretty amazing things. Three of them have just witnessed Jesus's Transfiguration. He has spoken about his suffering and death. And yet his followers really don't get it. We often see pictures of Jesus with children, and it's not hard to imagine that he loved to be in their presence, and they in his. And so he places a child next to himself to drive home the point about who is first, who is last, and who is the greatest of them all. Jesus came to upend all our assumptions about what is important. It is not one of the Apostles that Jesus puts by his side, but rather a little child. End of discussion. Status means nothing. Sincerity and trust, the qualities of childhood, mean everything.

Think About . . .

Reflect on the difference between being childlike and being childish.

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 10

The familiar parable of the good Samaritan appears only in Luke's Gospel. The problem is that the word *Samaritan* doesn't mean much to us. To the followers of Jesus, however, it is definitely not a neutral word. What Jesus is doing here is trying to vastly expand the concept of neighbor. The first two who pass by the nearly dead man do so out of a sense of following the Law and not wanting to be made unclean by having contact with someone who might be dead. So who stops to help? Who proves to be the true neighbor? It is the person we instinctively cast as an enemy, as a bad person. And suddenly the idea of loving your neighbor gets more challenging and unpleasant. The question becomes not what is the correct thing to do, but what is the right thing to do.

Think About . . .

Whom in my life, or in the world, do I have the hardest time seeing as my neighbor? Why?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 11

This chapter begins with Luke's version of the most familiar prayer uniting all Christians: the Lord's Prayer. If you compare Luke's version with Matthew's (see 6:9–13), you'll notice that Luke's is more concise, although the same basic elements are in both. Luke focuses his attention solely on how to pray. He makes two points in his story about the friend who wants to borrow bread. The first point is that persistence is valuable. We don't hesitate to pester our parents or friends if we really want something. We shouldn't hesitate to "pester" God either. The second point is that as parents we would never deliberately give something harmful to our children. We are far from perfect, but we do know how to give our best to those we hold dear. Imagine, then, how much more eager and willing God is to do the same for us.

Think About . . .

Make a point of asking God every day to send you the Holy Spirit. How can you best remind yourself to do this?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 12

Why is it that in our world the rich get richer? Why are so many of us obsessed with the rich and famous? What is it that causes the wealthy to want to accumulate more and more? It's a big problem in our society. We don't have to look far for examples of corporate greed, of top executives acquiring much more than they'll ever need. The story of the rich fool drives home the point of how foolish it is to let greed take us over. Our first priority should be God. If we are greedy for anything, we should be greedy to acquire a deeper relationship with God, for the ability to trust in God above all else. Easier said than done, of course, especially in a world so obsessed with security and inheritance. Jesus tells us our hearts will follow our riches. Where is our true wealth?

Think About . . .

Make a list of your priorities in life. How many of them involve money?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 13

Mustard seed and yeast. It's pretty clear what they have in common. Both are small and seemingly insignificant. Both also hold tremendous potential for growth. Of course, they have to be given a chance by either being planted or activated. Without an agent—someone to plant the seed or mix the yeast into the dough—nothing will happen. So what do these two parables tell us about the Kingdom of God? Perhaps that each of us has a vital role to play in bringing about the Reign of God. Also perhaps that the Reign of God grows in a quiet, barely noticeable way. It's the little things that count. It's the small gestures that can make a huge difference. Slowly, steadily, the little things add up. The seed becomes a tree. The yeast transforms dough into bread. The world changes for the better because we have done something good.

Think About . . .

Reflect on some small acts of kindness that have made a difference in your life or in the life of someone you know.

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 14

There certainly is a focus on eating and feasts in this chapter. What is going on here? For one thing, it is necessary to understand how important hospitality is in Jesus's time. The sharing of meals occurs over and over throughout the Bible because eating is such a basic and vital part of being human and meals are meant to be shared. So who gets invited and how they respond and where they are seated all come into play here as Jesus weaves a couple parables into his teachings. One speaks of humility and how Jesus reverses what seems proper. Typical of Luke's Gospel, it is those who are poor and marginalized—"the least"—who end up coming to the banquet and being seated in the best seats. Jesus challenges us to seek out and invite those very people into our lives rather than all the people who can and will repay us with an invitation in turn.

Think About . . .

How well do you make others feel "at home"? Whom do you know that is an expert at hospitality?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 15

This chapter of the Book of Luke features three parables with the same theme of lost and found: a sheep, a coin, and a son. The third parable, unique to the Book of Luke, is a familiar and rich one, but it really is much more complex than it first seems, mainly because of the older son and his resentment. Note how in each parable, there is great joy and celebration when what was lost is found. In fact, it actually seems a bit extravagant, doesn't it? A woman throws a party because she finds a lost coin. The father actually runs out to greet his son and doesn't even let him finish his apology. He throws a huge party. It's the extravagance here that Jesus is emphasizing. Could it be true that God is really that accepting and loves us that much, especially when we have strayed and returned again? Yes, it's true!

Think About . . .

Try to picture God with arms wide open to embrace you and welcome you back. Try also to understand the older son's resentment at the extravagant love of his father.

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 16

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is about the have's and the have-nots, and the great gap that exists between the two. Typical to Luke, the order is reversed upon death. Now Lazarus has it all, and the rich man has nothing. It's not that the rich man is a bad man; rather, it's simply that he never even notices Lazarus. He is so insulated from anything but his own luxury that he can't see beyond all he has. Therein lies his downfall. He simply doesn't notice a poor man at his gate. He never crosses over the great divide. When he dies, he so wants to warn his brothers to notice those who are poor among them, but they have the same opportunities he had. How can we truly follow Christ if we are so caught up in the things of this world that we don't even notice those who go without?

Think About . . .

Being a Christian means being attentive. Try to make that your mantra today. Notice. Pay attention.

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 17

The parable of the grateful Samaritan appears only in the Book of Luke. Notice that once again, it is a Samaritan who stands apart as the righteous one. Back in chapter 10, we read the parable of the good Samaritan. Now we read about ten lepers who are cured by Jesus. Only one returns to thank Jesus, and this one is a detested Samaritan. Talk about being an outsider. First, he has leprosy, which means he is automatically shunned and avoided. Then he is a Samaritan, which means he is automatically shunned and avoided by all Jews. Yet it is this man, the ultimate outsider, who comes back to fall at Jesus's feet, who is full of gratitude. Why is Luke so intent on portraying Jesus as the one who reaches out to the most marginalized? In many ways, the early Christians Luke was writing for were also outsiders.

Think About . . .

Make a point of being grateful today, and expressing your gratitude, especially to those people who often go unnoticed by others.

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 18

By now you have probably figured out that Luke loves to show how earthly standards and expectations are reversed by God. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is another prime example of Luke at his best. Clearly the Pharisee is doing everything right and following the Law. And just as clearly, the tax collector, by his profession, is collaborating with the Romans, the enemy. Imagine how shocked the Pharisee would be to learn that God favored the tax collector! The theme of humility appears again as well. Really, who can brag about being good before God, who knows us better than we know ourselves? People who are convinced of their own righteousness end up losing out to those who admit before God that they have a long way to go.

Think About . . .

Why is it that some people who call themselves good Christians often become so judgmental of others? What is the attitude of a true follower of Jesus?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 19

Jesus is getting very close to Jerusalem and his final days. He is passing through Jericho, the last town before his triumphal entry into his city of destiny. It is there that he encounters an interesting little man named Zacchaeus, who is determined to catch a glimpse of the now famous Jesus. However, it seems a bit much for someone of Zacchaeus's profession and wealth to climb a tree. That's the point. Even though Zacchaeus is small in stature, he clearly has a big heart. Jesus senses this and once again confounds everyone around him by inviting himself to Zacchaeus's home. Zacchaeus is happy with and touched by Jesus's attention to him. It's almost as if Jesus has radar for the big sinners who have big hearts. Though everyone grumbles, Jesus has just expanded the Reign of God a little further.

Think About . . .

What role has determination played in your life so far?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 20

Jesus is now in Jerusalem for Passover. In verses 1–8 and again in verses 19–26, Jesus is confronted by the Jewish authorities, who try to undermine him. They ask him loaded questions, hoping to trap him. It doesn't work, of course. Both times Jesus gets the better of them, either by asking them a question in return or by refusing to be forced into a simple answer, as in the case of paying Roman taxes. Keep in mind that these confrontations occur in public places in a crowded city, so many people hear the exchange. It is not hard to see why the authorities are getting so frustrated with Jesus. His cleverness and refusal to be backed into a corner are impressing people. He's clearly the man of the hour.

Think About . . .

How have you dealt with confrontation?

Would you handle it differently next time?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 21

This is a challenging chapter, as Jesus speaks of destruction and suffering and the Son of Man. It's important to realize that Luke wrote his Gospel sometime after AD 80, which is after Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. In verses 7–19, Jesus speaks words of encouragement for his followers. Rough times are ahead. Lots of people will hate you. You'll be arrested and imprisoned. But don't worry about a thing. It's going to be okay. Hang in there. All of us need to hear those words at times, but imagine how much they mean to the early Christians, who are surrounded by hostile forces.

Think About . . .

What advice do you think Jesus would give to his followers today?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 22

Let us focus our attention on Luke's version of what is commonly called the agony in the garden. For Luke, the theme of prayer is very prominent here. The word *prayer* is mentioned several times in the seven verses that describe the scene. Clearly this episode, more than any other in the Passion stories, shows Jesus's humanity. He prays hard that he can accept his Father's will. We see the intensity of prayer with Jesus's sweat becoming like drops of blood on the ground. Sweat is a sign of deep anxiety, and to sweat this much proves that Jesus is indeed struggling with what lies ahead. He prays to prevail, and he does. But notice that it is in prayer that he accomplishes the strength to go on. At the beginning and end of the scene, he tells his disciples to pray so that they can avoid temptation.

Think About . . .

We usually turn to prayer during times of great stress. Why is that? Is that true for you?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 23

Let us focus on Luke's account of the Crucifixion and death of Jesus. Notice the words of Jesus in verses 27–46. They are all words of compassion and forgiveness and prayer. There are no words of despair or sorrow. Luke is showing us a Jesus and a Messiah who is in control until the end. He survived the temptation to back away from his fate, and now he surrenders to his Father's will. Luke downplays Jesus's suffering so that even at the moment of his death, Jesus is able to cry out to his Father in a loud voice before taking his last breath. As soon as Jesus dies, a Roman centurion is the first to acknowledge his innocence. This is important because the Christians that Luke was writing for were mainly Gentiles, or non-Jews, so he is conscious of Jesus's being recognized as the Messiah by all people.

Think About . . .

Spend some time reflecting on Jesus's last words in verse 46. Why is this a powerful prayer for all Christians?

Today's Scripture Passage

Luke, Chapter 24

Luke is at his best here. The heart of the story is that these two disillusioned followers of Jesus recognize him, finally, in the breaking of the bread. At that moment, their eyes are opened and their hearts are burning, knowing they have had an encounter with the risen Lord. So why does Jesus vanish at that moment of recognition? What is the message to Luke's readers, and to us? Most of us are so used to the Eucharist that we don't give a lot of thought to what it really is and what it means. Even though Jesus is not physically present in our lives, he is nonetheless very much with us, as he was with the early Christians. Often the Eucharist is described by Catholics as the "Real Presence." This is a powerful way of saying the truth of this story. In the sharing of the Eucharist, Jesus is with us.

Think About . . .

Consider a time when your eyes were opened, when you realized a truth you had not grasped before. What opened your eyes?