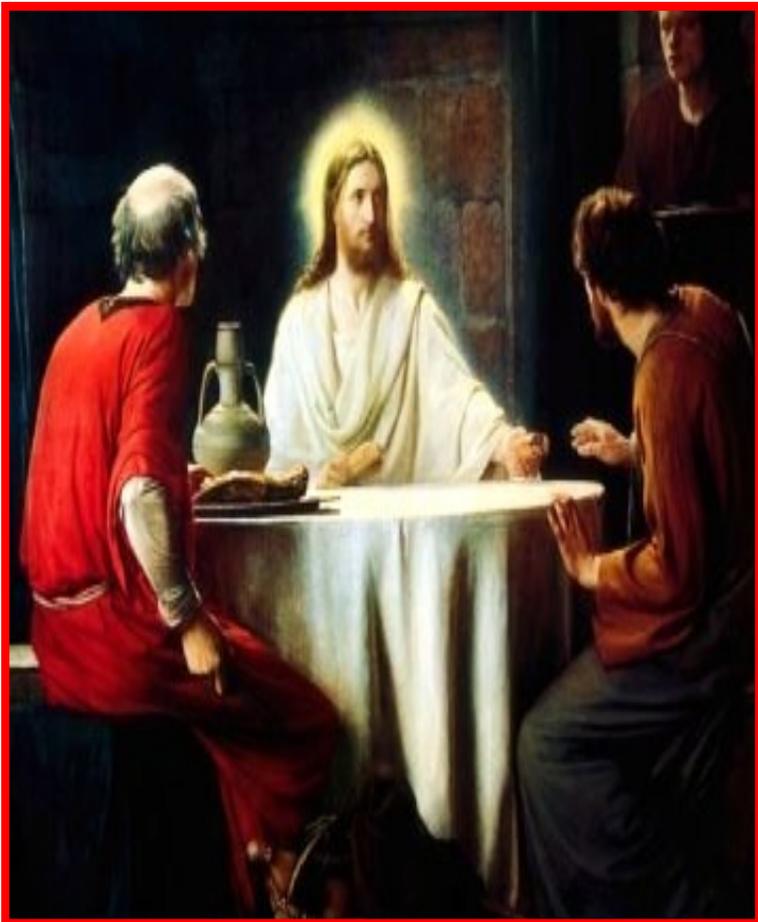
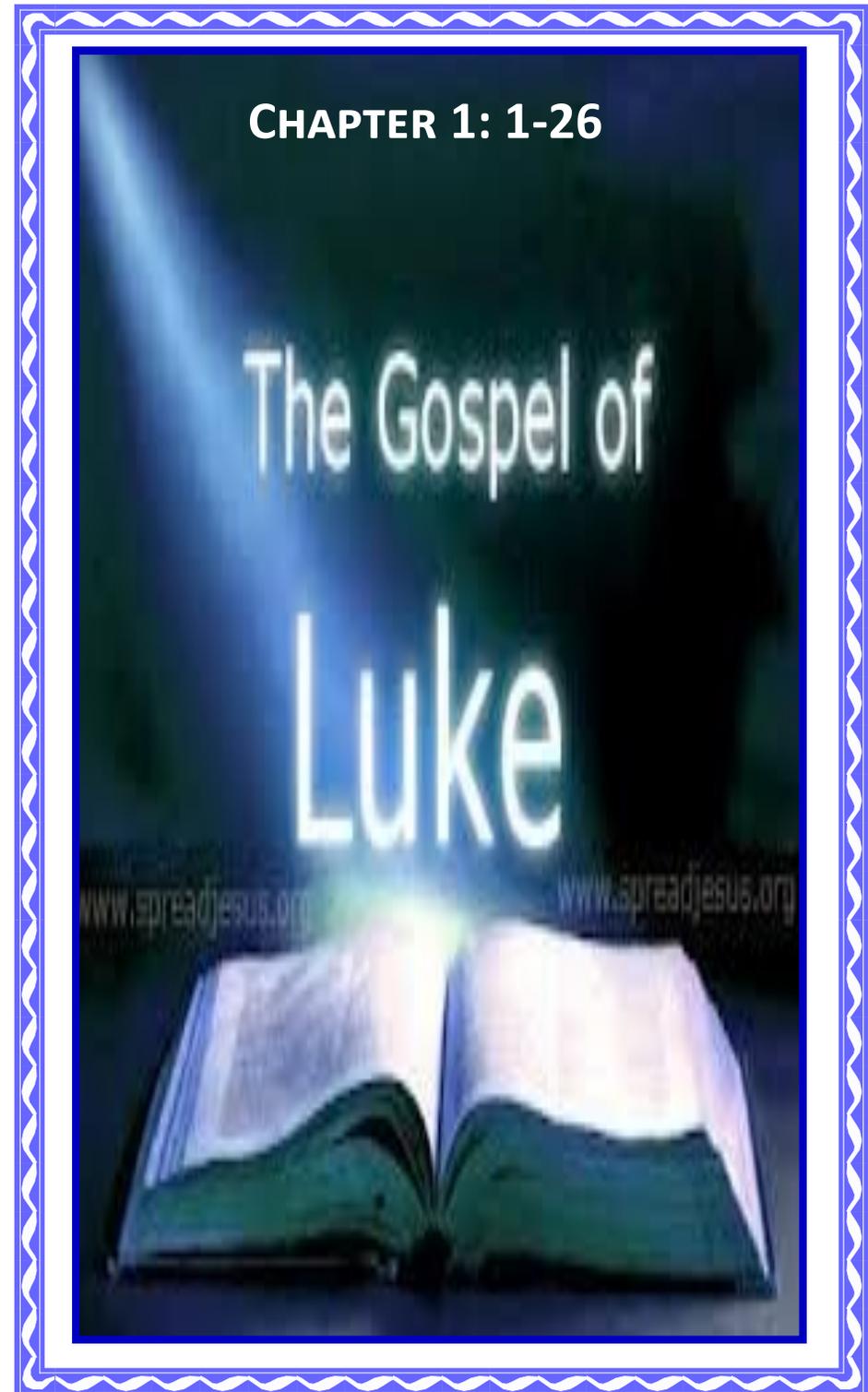


there with Joseph, to whom she was betrothed. The house or chamber in which she conceived Christ was consecrated by S. James and the other Apostles as a church. After three hundred years S. Helen built a temple there. Also S. Paula, S. Louis, and other travellers visited it. After a thousand years it was translated by angels from Nazareth to Dalmatia and thence to Italy, to Loretto, where it even now stands, and is visited by pilgrims from the whole world; so that Erasmus himself thus addresses the Virgin of Loretto, "Hail to thee, O noble offspring of kings, the beauty of priests, the glory of patriarchs, the triumph of the heavenly hosts, the terror of hell, the hope and solace of Christians; thou art next to the Divine nature; do not, we pray thee, be wanting to us; I prostrate myself at thy feet, preserve my poor soul, I beseech thee."



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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.*

Luke's gospel is a compilation of various interviews with eye-witnesses and close followers of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). The author, Luke, probably did not become a Christian until several years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is first mentioned (implicitly) in Acts 16:10 (Acts is another book of the New Testament which Luke wrote). He did not, therefore, meet Jesus in the flesh and he himself was not an eye-witness.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

### **Luke 1: 1-26**

Douay Rheims Version

*The conception of John the Baptist, and of Christ. The visitation and canticle of the Blessed Virgin. The birth of the Baptist and the canticle of Zachary.*

- 1., FORASMUCH as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished among us,
2. According as they have delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word:
3. It seemed good to me also, having diligently attained to all things from the beginning, to write to thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,
4. That thou mayest know the verity of those words in which thou hast been instructed.

*She hid herself five months, &c.* This hiding was a sign of shame and modesty; for she blushed at her child-bearing on account of her age, says S. Ambrose; but in the sixth month when she heard and saw that kinswoman the Blessed Virgin had conceived without losing her virginity (which was a much more strange and wonderful thing), then she laid aside her shame and went forth openly.

*My reproach.* Among the Jews in that age, barrenness was a great reproach, and was considered as a sign of the malediction of God.

Ver. 26.—*In the sixth month.* That is the sixth month of the conception of John. Christ was therefore six months younger than John the Baptist. We ought to understand that this six month was not beginning but ending, or rather ended; for from the 24th of September, when John was conceived, to the 25th of March, when Christ was conceived, there are six whole months. The Annunciation therefore by Gabriel, and consequently the Incarnation of the Word, took place on the 25th of March; on which day likewise, Christ, after completing the thirty-fourth year of His life, was crucified. Many are of opinion that the world was created on the same day; so that it was created by God on the same day on which it was afterwards recreated and restored by Christ in His Incarnation and Cross. Whence it is that from this day of March, the English, the Venetians, the Pisans, and several other nations reckon the years after Christ.

*The Angel Gabriel.* S. Jerome remarks on Daniel viii. that there are three angels, Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel, who are especially mentioned in Scripture; of whom Michael presides over the prayers and offerings of the faithful and is therefore called Michael (that is, who is like God); for it is the prerogative of God alone to hear the prayers of penitents: while Raphael presides over the healing of men's bodies, and he therefore restored sight to Tobias when he was blind; whence he is called Raphael (that is the Healer or the Healing, of God); and thirdly Gabriel (or the strength of God) presides over the conflicts and wars of the faithful (as is clear from Dan. xii. &c.). Wherefore he is sent to announce the birth of Christ, who was to carry on a most severe war against Lucifer, and the rest of the demons and impious men. Again Gabriel in Hebrew means *man of God*; the meaning of which is that God will be incarnate, and will be a child as to nature and age; but yet He will also be a man, because from the first instant of His to the saying of Jer. xxxi. 22, *a woman shall compass a man.* Again, Toletus following Basil, Dionysius and others, is of opinion that Michael was one of the principalities, which S. Dionysius places as the first order of the third hierarchy of angels, but that Gabriel was of the order of archangels; but it is more probable that Michael was of the order of the seraphim, and that Gabriel was next to him.

*Nazareth.* Whence Christ was called a Nazarene, being, as it were, the country in which he was conceived. The Blessed Virgin therefore dwelt

is the highest of all the angels, and the Antagonist of Lucifer. Apocal. xii. 7.

Gabriel in Hebrew means *God hath strengthened me, or the strength of God, or God is my strength*. He is therefore fitly sent to announce the birth of John and to bestow upon him the spirit of power.

Ver. 20.—*And behold thou shall be dumb, &c.* Theophylact and S. Ambrose translated, “thou shalt be deaf,” and so make a distinction from what follows, “and not able to speak.” For although the Greek word *σιωπῶν* properly signifies one who is dumb, yet one who is deaf may be understood by the same word; for dumbness and deafness are naturally connected, for those who are born dumb are also deaf, and *vice versa*. Wherefore the Greeks alike call a dumb and a deaf man *κῶφον*.

Zacharias therefore was made deaf as well as dumb. Whence in verse 22 he is called *κῶφος*. Hence at verse 62 his friends and neighbours do not speak to Zacharias as being deaf, but signify to him by signs that he should write the name by which he wished his son to be called. “He rightly,” says Theophylact, “suffered these two things, the loss of hearing and the loss of speech; for because he had been disobedient, he incurs the punishment of deafness; and because he had objected, of silence.”

*Until the day that these things, &c.* Zacharias not believing the promises of the angel, had asked for a sign to be given him of the birth of John; the angel therefore complying gives him a sign which at the same time shall be a punishment.

Ver. 23.—*The days of his ministration, &c.* *λειτουργίας*, Greek. That is of his sacred ministration in the Temple. His house was situated in the mountains of Judæa, where his wife Elizabeth was.

Ver. 24.—*After those days his wife conceived.* Elizabeth conceived about the 24th of September, on which day many Christian Churches celebrate the conception, of John. So that the incense was offered by Zacharias, and his vision and the promise of the angel concerning the birth of John seem to have taken place a little earlier, during the feast of Tabernacles. By this it was signified that John would be born, who was to be the herald of Christ, and through Him the cause of common joy to the whole world; for he would teach men that they were strangers upon the earth, and that they dwelt in it as in a temporary tabernacle, and that they were enrolled by God as citizens of heaven, where they would obtain an eternal and most blessed home. For the Feast of Tabernacles was a sign of all these things, during which the Hebrews with branches of palm trees used to celebrate dances joyfully, because they had been brought in by God into the promised land, after they had been dwelling in tents in the wilderness. Hence it seems that John was conceived about the time of the autumnal equinox, and born about the time of the summer solstice, after which the days decreased in length; while on the other hand, Christ was conceived at the vernal equinox, and born at the winter solstice, after which the days increase; because, as John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

*She hid herself five months*  
, &c. This hiding was a sign of shame and modesty; for she blushed at her child-

5. There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zachary, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name Elizabeth.

6. And they were both just before God, walking in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame.

7. And they had no son, for that Elizabeth was barren: and they both were well advanced in years.

8. And it came to pass, when he executed the priestly function in the order of his course before God,

9. According to the custom of the priestly office, it was his lot to offer incense, going into the temple of the Lord.

10. And all the multitude of the people was praying without, at the hour of incense.

11. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

12. And Zachary seeing him, was troubled: and fear fell upon him.

13. But the angel said to him: Fear not, Zachary, for thy prayer is heard: and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son. And thou shalt call his name John.

14. And thou shalt have joy and gladness: and many shall rejoice in his nativity.

15. For he shall be great before the Lord and shall drink no wine nor strong drink: and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

16. And he shall convert many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

17. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias: that he may turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children and the incredulous to the wisdom of the just, to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people.

18. And Zachary said to the angel: Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.

19. And the angel answering, said to him: I am Gabriel, who stand before God and am sent to speak to thee and to bring thee these good tidings.

20. And behold, thou shalt be dumb and shalt not be able to speak until the day wherein these things shall come to pass: because thou hast not believed my words, which shall be fulfilled in their time.

21. And the people were waiting for Zachary: and they wondered that he tarried so long in the temple.

22. And when he came out, he could not speak to them: and they understood that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he made signs to them and remained dumb.

23. And it came to pass, after the days of his office were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

24. And after those days, Elizabeth his wife conceived and hid herself five months, saying:

25. Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he hath had regard to take away my reproach among men.

26. And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth,  
27. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David: and the virgin's name was Mary.  
28. And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.  
29. Who having heard, was troubled at his saying and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be.  
30. And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.  
31. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus.  
32. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father: and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever.  
33. And of his kingdom there shall be no end.  
34. And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man?  
35. And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.  
36. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren.  
37. Because no word shall be impossible with God.  
38. And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.  
39. And Mary rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda.  
40. And she entered into the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth.  
41. And it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.  
42. And she cried out with a loud voice and said: Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.  
43. And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?  
44. For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.  
45. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.  
46. And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord.  
47. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.  
48. Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.  
49. Because he that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is his name.  
50. And his mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear him.  
51. He hath shewed might in his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.  
52. He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble.  
53. He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away.

consists in the fear and love of God and of heavenly things, and not perishable, according to the teaching of Christ (Maldonatus). Or, John will cause the unbelieving Jews to consider the signs of the coming of the Messiah given by God to the fathers, and from them to know and believe that Christ has already come, and that this Jesus, whom John pointed out as such, is He.

*A people prepared, &c. Perfectam, Vulgate; κατασκευασμενον, Greek; that is well and perfectly prepared and made ready for receiving the teaching and faith of Christ, and the perfection of grace, justice, and the Christian life brought by Christ from heaven.*

Ver. 18.—*And Zacharias said to the angel, &c.* That is, give a sign or a miracle for a proof to me that the great things which you are promising will surely come to pass. This hesitation on the part of Zacharias seems to have proceeded from want of deliberation and reflection, and therefore was only a venial sin, for which he was punished by being deprived of the power of speech. For otherwise did Abraham, who, when the angel promised that Isaac should be born to him from Sarah who was barren, immediately believed, “for he was strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform,” Rom. iv. 20, 21.

Ver. 19.—*I am Gabriel, who stand.* That is, “I am wont to stand, ready to minister to the will of God in all things; I am not indeed now standing before Him in heaven, for I have been sent thence to thee to the earth.” Although on the earth angels may also stand before God, and behold His Face; for God is everywhere (S. Matt. xviii. 10). Hence we may gather that the same angels stand before God and minister to Him, although S. Dionysius the Areopagite and S. Gregory deny this; for Gabriel stands before God and ministers to Him, and is sent to Zacharias.

Moreover, the words “stand before” signify that Gabriel is one of the seven angels who are the chiefs of the heavenly court, as are also Michael and Raphael (Tobit xii. 15). Of these seven angels I have spoken at length on Apocal. i. 4. Wherefore although some, as Toletus, are of opinion that Gabriel belongs to the last order but one, which is that of archangels, because he is elsewhere called an archangel, yet he more truly seems to be one of the first order which is that of seraphim, and therefore is called by many an archangel; and there are not wanting some who think that he is the first of all among the seraphim. Cardinal Vignierus (in *Decachordo Christ. Cord* i. 2) proves this by eight reasons which I have enumerated on Dan. ix. 21. All of which are reduced to this one. For the highest work it is fitting that the highest angel should be sent; but the Incarnation of the Word is the highest work of God, therefore Gabriel, who was sent to announce that, is the highest angel. But this reason is not conclusive, as I have there shown. For the common opinion of theologians is that Michael

womb; for then as he is born in original sin so also he can by grace be born again and even baptized, as is clear from the practice of the Church in certain cases.

*Ver. 17.—He shall go before Him.* John went before Christ. 1. In his birth, for he was born six months before Christ. 2. In his baptism, for he baptized before Christ did; yea, he even baptized Christ. 3. In preaching, of repentance that he might prepare the way for Christ. 4. By pointing out Jesus as the Messiah and Lamb of God who should take away the sin of the world. 5. By suffering martyrdom before Christ. 6. In descending to the fathers in limbus, and announcing to them that Christ would soon come and set them free.

*In the spirit and power of Elias.* As Elias did excel and in the end of the world will excel in a spirit steadfast and powerful for contending against Antichrist, so that he will convert Jews and others from him to Christ; so in the same powerful spirit John will excel, and by his preaching and holy example move the hardened Jews to repentance, and so prepare them for the baptism of Christ.

The spirit of power in John was like that in Elias; 1. In the austerity of his life. 2. They both lived in solitude. And 3, in poverty and contempt of the world. 4. In zeal, and in fervour of preaching, by which both of them converted many Israelites to repentance, and Elias will again do so in the last days, according to the saying (Ecclesiasticus xlvi. 1), "Elias stood up like fire, and his word burned like a lamp." In the same way Christ says of John, "He was a burning and a shining light," S. John v. 35. 5. In fortitude and suffering: for as Elias contended against the priests of Baal, and their patrons Ahab and Jezebel, and again in the last days will contend against Antichrist and his followers and will suffer many things from them and at last be slain as a martyr; so John contended against Herod and Herodias, and being beheaded by them obtained the crown of martyrdom.

John here is rather compared to Elias in his future coming than in his past; because, as Elias will precede the second coming of Christ with great spirit and power, so likewise John with the same spirit, and power will precede the first coming of Christ. S. Ambrose says that he will go before Him "in the spirit and power of Elias, because Elias had great power and grace, so that he turned back the hearts of the people to faith, power of abstinence, and patience and the spirit of prophecy. Elias was in the wilderness; so also was John. . . . The one sought not the favour of Ahab; the other despised that of Herod. The one divided Jordan; the other brought men to the laver of salvation. The one was the forerunner of our Lord's first advent, the other of His second," &c.

*To turn the hearts of the fathers,* &c. John did this when he urged them by word and example to imitate the faith and piety of their fathers; for thus the fathers acknowledged their children as the worshippers of the true God. These words are taken from Malachi, who speaks literally of Elias, typically of John.

*And the disobedient,* &c. Greek ἀπειθεῖς, Vulgate, *incredulos*. That is, he will turn them to the faith and wisdom which the just had and have concerning Christ, which

54. He hath received Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy.
55. As he spoke to our fathers: to Abraham and to his seed for ever.
56. And Mary abode with her about three months. And she returned to her own house.
57. Now Elizabeth's full time of being delivered was come: and she brought forth a son.
58. And her neighbors and kinsfolks heard that the Lord had shewed his great mercy towards her: and they congratulated with her.
59. And it came to pass that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child: and they called him by his father's name Zachary.
60. And his mother answering, said: Not so. But he shall be called John.
61. And they said to her: There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.
62. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.
63. And demanding a writing table, he wrote, saying: John is his name. And they all wondered.
64. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed: and he spoke, blessing God.
65. And fear came upon all their neighbours: and all these things were noised abroad over all the hill country of Judea.
66. And all they that had heard them laid them up in their heart, saying: What an one, think ye, shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him.
67. And Zachary his father was filled with the Holy Ghost. And he prophesied, saying:
68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel: because he hath visited and wrought the redemption of his people.
69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation to us, in the house of David his servant.
70. As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets, who are from the beginning.
71. Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us.
72. To perform mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy testament.
73. The oath, which he swore to Abraham our father, that he would grant to us.
74. That being delivered from the hand of our enemies, we may serve him without fear:
75. In holiness and justice before him, all our days.
76. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt, go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways:
77. To give knowledge of salvation to his people, unto the remission of their sins.
78. Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us:
79. To enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death: to direct our feet into the way of peace.

80. And the child grew and was strengthened in spirit: and was in the deserts until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Ver. 1.—*Forasmuch as many*. Maldonatus is of opinion that the Evangelists Matthew and Mark are intended; but these were not *many*, but only *two*. S. Luke rather seems here to allude to the Apocryphal Gospels, which were circulated under the names of Matthias, Thomas, and other apostles.

*Most surely believed. Completæ sunt*, Vulgate. *πεπληροφωζήμενων*, Greek. This word signifies—1. *fully accomplished*; 2. *surely ascertained*: as it is rendered by S. Ambrose, Theophylact, Euthymius.

Ver. 2.—*Which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, &c. Ipsi viderunt*, Vulgate. *αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηζέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου*, Greek: that is who were eyewitnesses (*oculares spectatores*) and ministers of the word: which we may understand—1. of Christ, for He is the Word of the Eternal Father; the meaning then will be, “As the Apostles who saw Christ Himself and ministered to Him delivered them to us.” 2. Of ordinary preaching; the meaning then will be, “As they delivered them who saw the deeds of Christ, and were sent by Him to preach the Gospel.”

Ver. 3.—*Having had perfect understanding. παζηκολουθηκότι*, Greek: that is “carefully investigating,” and therefore “having understood.”

*In order. καθεξῆς*, Greek; that is—1. successively, 2. distinctly, in order so as to relate, first the conception of Christ, then His nativity, afterwards His life, and lastly His death and resurrection.

*Theophilus*. Theophilus was a noble and chief man of Antioch, who was converted by S. Peter and dedicated his house as a church in which S. Peter held assemblies of Christians, and placed his chair as primate, as S. Clement relates *Recog. lib. 10, cap. ult.* Baronius conjectures that S. Luke, who was a physician and painter of Antioch, wrote to Theophilus as a citizen and as his own intimate friend; Theophylact adds that S. Luke was a catechumen of Theophilus, for S. Peter by himself was not able to instruct the multitude who came together to be taught the faith of Christ, and therefore he made use of the labours of many others for instructing the faithful. He is called *most excellent*, which was a title given to governors and magistrates; he seems therefore to have been a senator or governor of Antioch.

Ver. 4.—*That thou mayest know the certainly. Veritatem, truth*, Vulgate. *ἀσφάλειαν*, Greek, *certainty, stability*.

Ver. 5.—*There was in the days of Herod*. S. Luke begins by mentioning the name of Herod to point out the time when John the Baptist and Christ were born; and also to show that the sceptre had now departed from Judah, and had passed over to an alien, and therefore that the time for the advent of the Messiah was at hand according to the prophecy of Jacob, *Gen. xlix. 10*. This Herod was the first of that

Ver. 14.—*And thou shalt have joy and gladness*. Thy son shall be to thee and to many others the cause of the greatest joy and exultation.

Ver. 15.—*Great in the sight of the Lord*: to Whom alone it belongs to determine what is great, what is ordinary, and what is small. Many, says S. Theophylact, are called great in the sight of men, who, being little, esteem little things as great; but John was great in the sight of the Lord, who, being great, weigheth things that are great.

He was great on account—1. of his sanctification in his mother’s womb; 2. the depth of his humility; 3. his extraordinary charity; 4. his exemplary penitence; 5. his seraphic zeal; 6. his whole life, which was as much human as angelic; 7. the sublimity of his prophesying; 8. his solitary life; 9. his office of forerunner of Christ; 10. his most noble martyrdom. See the twenty eight privileges ascribed to John, which Baradius enumerates here.

*And he shall not drink wine nor strong drink*. Strong drink (*Sicera*) is everything that intoxicates. To abstain from wine and strong, drink was peculiar to Nazarites; and from this place it appears that John was one during the whole of his life.

*And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother’s womb*. This was when, on the entrance of the Blessed Virgin he leapt in his mother’s womb, and, as far as he could, fulfilled his office of forerunner. John, therefore, was born again of the Spirit before he was born of his mother.

Was John then truly cleansed from original sin in the womb and justified? S. Augustine (*Ep. 57*) and S. Jerome (*in Jerem. i.*) maintain that he was not; for they say that John and Jeremiah are both said to have been sanctified in the womb not really, but according to the predestination of God; for they were ordained to future sanctity so that the same is said here concerning John that the Apostle says of himself, *Gal. i.*, “Who separated me from my mother’s womb.” The reason that S. Augustine gives is, that to be born again presupposes being born; but John when in the womb was not yet born; therefore he could not have been born again in reality, but only according to the predestination of God.

But the common opinion of the Fathers is contrary to this (S. Athanasius, Cyprian, Ambrose, Gregory, and others) which I approve of—First, because the angel here most clearly promises “he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother’s womb.” Secondly, because at the salutation of the Blessed Virgin he believed in Christ when in the womb. For at that time it was when he was visited and saluted by the Blessed Virgin, in the sixth month from his conception that this wonderful sanctification took place. To the argument of S. Augustine I answer, that a man in order that he may be born again may be considered as born when he has been conceived in the

Ver. 11.—*There appeared unto him an angel* (Gabriel, as is clear from v. 19), *standing on the right side of the altar*. 1. Because he had come to announce good tidings. Euthymius. 2. Because he brought down the token of Divine mercy, for the Lord is on my right hand, therefore I shall not be moved. S. Ambrose. We may learn from this that angels stand by altars, priests and sacrifices, and co-operate with them in the worship and adoration of God. Of this there are many instances in the lives of the saints, some of which I have mentioned, Exod. xxix. 38; Lev. ix. 24.

Ver. 12.—*Zacharias was troubled*. Both because of the unusual sight, and because of the majesty in which he appeared, which human weakness could scarcely endure to behold: “for man is not strong enough to bear such a strange and unusual sight without alarm.” Titus. So Daniel, when the same angel appeared to him, says, “There remained no strength in me, and my comeliness was turned into corruption.” Hence it is the sign of a good angel if at first he causes fear and afterwards joy; but of a bad angel if he makes a man sorrowful after causing joy; whence S. Antony says, “If joy has succeeded to fear we may know that the vision is from God; for the peace of the soul is a sign of the Divine presence; but if the fear remains unshaken it is an enemy who is seen.”

Ver. 13.—*Thy prayer is heard*. Not his prayer for offspring, S. Augustine says, of which he now so despaired that he did not believe the promise of the angel (verse 20), but thy prayer as a priest for the sins of the people and for the coming of the Messiah. But God, who goes beyond the merits and the prayers of suppliants, promised him a son who should be the prophet and forerunner. So Bede, Theophylact, S. Augustine, S. Chrysostom.

Some, however, are of opinion that this prayer of Zacharias was for offspring, only that it had been offered not at this time, but formerly when he was younger.

*Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John*. Because *John*, according to Maldonatus, is the same in Hebrew as *beloved*: or, according to Pagninus, *the gift of mercy of the Lord*. This is not, however, the precise meaning; for then he would have rather been called Hananiah than John. Properly, therefore, the name John signifies, *God hath had mercy*. And He did this first when He heard the prayer of Zacharias; and secondly by appointing John as the forerunner of the Messiah, and soon after by sending the Messiah Himself; for it was by Christ, and not by Moses and the law, that grace came. So the son of Anna was called Samuel, that is *asked and obtained from God* by the tears of his mother for the salvation of the whole people, 1 Sam. i. 20. Thirdly, God also showed mercy on John himself (Bede, Jansen, Maldonatus), by filling him with His manifold grace, by which He made him a Doctor in Israel, a Prophet, an Anchorite, a Martyr, a Virgin, and the Forerunner of Christ. John therefore was, as it were, the Son of Charities and Graces, in whom all the Graces of God seem to have blended together.

Mark here the threefold mystery of the three names: for Elizabeth, that is, the oath of God who promiseth, and Zacharias, God’s remembrance of His promise, are the parents of John, that is, the mercy and grace of God.

name, surnamed the Great, the father and grandfather of the others. He was a native of Ascalon, an Idumæan by nation, in character a tyrant. By the favour of Caesar he held the kingdom of Judæa; but Christ thrust him and his descendants out of this kingdom, and claimed for Himself the kingdom over Israel which by right was due to Him, though it must be understood as a spiritual kingdom.

Hence he is rightly called Herod, for Herod in Syriac is the same as “a fiery dragon.” According to Pagninus, Herod signifies in Hebrew “the conception of threshing,” for הרה to conceive, and שוט to thresh, because he slew the infants in Bethlehem.

*Zacharias*. He was a priest and also a prophet, as will appear from verses 64 and 67. Whence his name is enrolled among the saints in the Roman Martyrology for the 5th of November: where Baronius, following Origen, Nyssen, Cyril, and Peter Alexander, is of opinion that this Zacharias was the martyr who was slain by Herod between the Temple and the Altar, and therefore that he was the one whom Christ mentions, S. Matt. xxiii. 35. His head is preserved and shown at Rome in the Lateran Basilica, from which there is a tradition that formerly blood trickled during several days. I have seen it there and venerated it.

*Of the course of Abia*. Of that class of the priests of which in the time of David Abia was the head. For David, seeing that the priests, the sons of Aaron, had increased to a large number, so that all could not at once minister in the Temple, distributed them into twenty-four classes, so that each class might minister in the Temple during one week in succession. And that there might be no strife among them as to which course should be the first, second, or third, &c., these families cast lots, and obtained the first place or second, &c., according as the lot came out. In this drawing of lots the eighth place fell to Abia and his descendants. All this is clear from 1 Chron. xxiv. Josephus (*Antiq.* vii. II) says of David, “He found twenty-four families of priests, and he appointed that each family should minister before God during eight days, from Sabbath to Sabbath,” in order to avoid confusion and strife among the priests.

*And his wife was the daughter of Aaron*. Priests could marry a wife from another tribe because they had no inheritance in the land of Israel, which by the marriage of the wife (if she through the failure of male offspring were the heir of her father) passed over to her husband’s tribe, and so a confusion was caused of inheritances and tribes which was forbidden by the law. But Zacharias having more regard to religion, married a wife not only of the daughters of Levi but of Aaron. Wherefore S. Ambrose says, “Not only from his parents but from his ancestors the illustrious descent of S. John is derived, a descent not exalted by secular power, but venerable from its sanctity. She was called Elizabeth from the wife of the first high priest Aaron, Exod. vi. 23. This Elizabeth was holy, and a prophetess:

whence her memory is observed in the Roman Martyrology on the 5th November. From her S. Elizabeth, daughter of Andrew, king of the Hungarians, surnamed the mother of the poor, and her niece S. Elizabeth, the queen of Portugal took, their name together with her sanctity.

*And her name was Elizabeth.* Zacharias in Hebrew is the same as “God remembered;” and Elizabeth, “the oath of God,” or “the sceptre and dominion,” or “rest,” or “fulness of God.” So that the meaning is that God, mindful of His oath, united these two in marriage, that He might raise up the sceptre of the house of David, and bestow rest and plenty and abundance on His own.

Ver. 6.—*Righteous (just) before God.* Many appear just before men, but few before God, because men look upon the countenance, but God on the heart and conscience. S. Francis says truly, “Each man is what he is before God, and no more.”

*Walking in all the commandments, &c. Commandments, i.e.* the moral precepts of the Decalogue. *Ordinances, i.e.* the ceremonial precepts.

God gave to the Hebrews by Moses precepts of three kinds. 1. Moral precepts, which are contained in the two tables of the law. 2. Judgments which relate to justice and human polity, and chiefly concern princes. 3. Statutes, decrees ceremonial, pertaining to the sacrifices and rites observed in the worship of God. These are called here and elsewhere *Justifications*, Vulgate: first, because those who observe them do what is most right and just, that is to say, perform the service and worship which is most rightfully due to God. Secondly, because by the observance of these men formerly under the old law were justified legally; for those who fulfilled them were considered just persons by the Synagogue, and that not only before man but before God, if they performed those things from the true love of God. *For the doers of the law are justified*, Rom. ii. 13.

*Blameless. Sine querelâ*, Vulgate; *ἀμεμπτοι*, Greek. Mark here that the faithful can, yea, ought to observe all the commandments of God; wherefore it is possible to keep them, and not impossible, as Calvin blasphemously asserts, who in this place makes a wonderful exhibition of himself, and all but says that Luke the Evangelist is a liar. Further, *blameless* may be interpreted as “without mortal sin,” for no just man in this life can avoid all venial sins.

Ver. 7.—*Well stricken in years.* He says this to show that John was born of them, not in the way of nature, but by the gift of God and by a miracle, like other eminent saints, as Isaac, Joseph, Samuel. S. Augustine (Serm. iii. *on John the Baptist*) says Elizabeth was barren in body but fruitful in virtues; her child-bearing was not taken away from her, but it was delayed, until the time of fleshly desire had passed away. . . . In short, when all that causes blame as regards the body was quenched, and they became altogether blameless, all that speaks of barrenness is gone; old age springs into new life, faith conceives, chastity brings forth, one greater than man, one equal to the angels is born, the trumpet of heaven, the herald of Christ, the mystery of the Father, the messenger of the Son, the standard-bearer of the heavenly King,

the pardon of sinners, the correction of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, and, so to say, the uniting bond of the Law and Grace.

Ver. 9.—*According to the custom of the priesthood his lot was.* That is, according to Bede, in his own course, which was the eighth in order, mention of this course has been made in verse 8; and therefore the lot spoken of in verse 9 is different from the course, and more particularly limits the course. The meaning, therefore, is that when Zacharias, in the order of his course, was ministering in the temple, among the various offices of the priests the office of burning incense fell to him by lot. For because there were many priests of the course of Abia, it was appointed to them by lot what office each of them should perform in the Temple. For there were four principal offices (see Exodus xxx.)—1. To sacrifice. 2. To light the lamps on the seven-branched candlestick. 3. On the sabbath-day to place twelve new loaves on the table of shewbread. 4. To burn incense on the altar of incense. This fourth office, therefore, had fallen by lot to Zacharias, while the three others had fallen to other priests of the same class of Abia. This is clear from the Greek *ἐλαχε τοῦ θυμιάσαι*, “he had obtained by lot to burn incense.”

Some, as S. Ambrose, Bede, Theophylact, and S. Augustine think that Zacharias was the high priest, because he burnt incense on the altar of incense, for they think that this was in the Holy of holies, which no one except the high priest might enter. But I have shown (Exod. xl. 24), that this altar was not in the Holy of holies, but in the Holy place, which the common priests used to enter daily. The expression here used, *it was his lot (sorte exiit.* Vulgate) confirms this; for the high priest was superior to all lots, and, whenever he chose, used to minister in the temple. Besides, at this time, not Zacharias but Joazar was the high priest, as Josephus tells us (*Antiq.* xvii. 8).

Morally, we may learn that angels appear while we are engaged in sacred things, and that God either Himself or by an angel speaks with the soul when we are engaged in prayer or sacrifice, as the angel appeared to Zacharias when he was burning incense.

Ver. 10.—*And the whole multitude were praying without.* That is in the court outside the Holy place or Temple, which the priests alone, might enter. There were two courts; the inner one, of the priests, containing the altar of burnt-offering; and the outer one, of the people, who from it beheld the sacrifices offered by the priests: but the altar of incense which was in the Holy place they could not see.

*At the time of incense.* That is to say, when the priests burnt the incense; for according to the religious usage of all nations incense was burnt in the worship of God.