

# Lord of the lowly

For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. - LUKE 1:48 (NKJV)

## a. The basis of Luke's authority (1:1-4)



**John Charles Ryle**

(1816-1900)

The Gospel – fact, not theology;  
and, according to Godet, also  
diverse in its apostolic selectivity

**1:1,2 What does Luke consider to be the foundation of the gospel's credentials? (1 Cor. 15:1-8; 1 John 1:1,2)**

[1] [v. 2] Apostolic tradition probably had a more or less fragmentary character; the apostles not relating every time the whole of the facts, but only those which best answered to the circumstances in which they were preaching. **F. Godet, Luke p. 38**

**1:3,4 What does Luke consider the foundation of his own gospel's authority? (cf. Acts 1:21,22; 1 Cor.9:1)**

[2] [1:1-4] Christianity is a religion built upon facts. Let us never lose sight of this. It came before mankind at first in this shape. The first preachers did not go up and down in the world, proclaiming an elaborate artificial system of abstruse doctrines and deep principles. They made it their first business to tell men great plain facts. They went about telling a sin-laden world, that the Son of God had come down to earth, and lived for us, and died for us, and risen again. The Gospel, at its first publication, was far more simple than many make it now. It was neither more nor less than the history of Christ. **J.C. Ryle Luke p.2**

## b. The birth of the forerunner (1:5-25)

**1:5-7 How does this description of Zacharias & Elizabeth turn OT expectation upside down?**

[3] [v.5] The first words of the narrative bring us back from the midst of Greece, whither we were transported by the prologue, into a completely Jewish world. **F. Godet, Luke p. 43**

[4] [v.7] God delays often, but He does not forget. Blessings may come today as the result of old prayers which have almost passed from our memory and our hope. **Alexander Maclaren, Expositions: Luke p. 5**

**1:8-14 What can we say safely about the religion of this 'blameless' man?**

[5] [1:12] An attitude toward God which is not the attitude of fear and fright would only reveal that a real encounter between God and man did not occur, that the angel did not appear. God and the fear of God cannot be separated. **Karl Barth The Great Promise p.8**

[6] [1:12,29] Neither Zacharias nor Mary are accustomed to visions or voices: they are troubled by them. There is no evidence of hysterical excitement or hallucination in either case. **Alfred Plummer Luke p.22**

**1:15-17 In what will the greatness of John consist?**

[7] [v.15] How Herod or Pilate or Caesar, or philosophers at Athens, or rabbis in Jerusalem would have scoffed if they had been pointed to the gaunt ascetic pouring out words which they would have thought wild, to a crowd of Jews, and had been told that that was the greatest man in the world (except one)! The elements of

greatness in the estimate of God which is truth, are devotion to His service, burning convictions, intense moral earnestness, superiority to sensuous delights, clear recognition of Jesus, and humble self-abnegation before Him. These are not the elements recognized in the world's Pantheon. Let us take God's standard. **A. Maclaren, Luke p. 5**

[8] Let us for a moment dwell on the fact that here is told the beginning of a life, the pre-history of a man, the story of the childhood of John which then is followed by the story of the childhood of Jesus. What is the meaning of this? We know of various childhood stories in Holy Scripture. We have such a story about Moses, about Samson, and Samuel, and some allusion to it in Jeremiah. We hear Paul in the New Testament in the Epistle to the Galatians speak of his existence before he was born. All this appears to point out in principle from the very outset that we do not have before us here human personalities who have become what they are by means of certain creative forces, certain abilities or qualities or efforts of their own, or through some historic constellations. Everything else one can possibly *become*. A man of God one cannot become. Either one is or one is not. To be a



**Karl Barth  
– here with Martin  
Luther King**

“Grace one cannot  
seek, grace one can  
only find”

man of God is not the result of human energy or skill or profundity, but to be a man of God happens through grace imparted to a particular man. The Bible by relating childhood stories tells us this: the men of whom we hear are what they are totally through the *grace* of God. **Karl Barth** *The Great Promise* p.2

**1:18-25 Reflect on a parallel 400 years of ‘prophetic silence’ prior to John (Mal.2:17; 3:16-4:6)**

[9] [1:19] Gabriel, the “Man of God,” seems to be the representative of angelic ministry to man; Michael, “Who is like God,” the representative of angelic opposition to Satan. In Scripture Gabriel is the angel of mercy, Michael the angel of judgment. In Jewish legend the reverse is the case, proving that the Bible does not borrow Jewish fables. **Alfred Plummer** *Luke* p.16

## **c. The Annunciation to Mary (1:26-38)**

**1:26-30 Reflect on a most controversial subject – the relationship of Mary to grace (1:46-55)**

[10] Let us beware of despising poverty in others, and of being ashamed of it if God lays it upon ourselves. The condition of life which Jesus voluntarily chose, ought always to be regarded with holy reverence ... Let us admire the amazing condescension of the Son of God. The Heir of all things not only took our nature upon Him, but took it in the most humbling form in which it could have been assumed. It would have been condescension to come on earth as a king and reign. It was a miracle of mercy passing our comprehension to come on earth as a poor man, to be despised, and suffer, and die. Let His love constrain us to live not to ourselves, but to Him. **J.C. Ryle** *Expository thoughts on Luke* Vol. 1 p.22

[11] As is the case elsewhere (1:38,48), Mary is described as receiving grace not as endowed with the power to give grace. **E. E. Ellis**, *Luke* p. 73

[12] [1:30] Grace one cannot seek, grace one can only find. It is peculiar to such favor that God finds someone who has not sought him, but who turned away from him as once Paul turned away, and who just then heard the word of God and was turned around. The expression “to find favor” also occurs in the Old Testament, and is never the result of an endeavor on the part of man. **Karl Barth** *The Great Promise* p.26

**1:31-33 How are these promises confined to Mary’s – and Israel’s – limited horizon? (Eph.1:3-12; 2 Tim.1:8-11)**

[13] [1:30] The title [son of the Most High] expresses some very close relation between Jesus and Jehovah, but not the Divine Sonship in the Trinity; comp. 6:35. **Alfred Plummer** *Luke* p.23

[14] [vv 32,33] “The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David,” says Gabriel, “and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever.” The literal fulfilment of this part of the promise is

yet to come. Israel is yet to be gathered. The Jews are yet to be restored to their own land, and to look to Him whom they once pierced, as their King and their God ... Let us beware of spiritualizing away the full meaning of these words. The “house of Jacob” does not mean all Christians. The “throne of David” does not mean the office of a Saviour to all Gentile believers. The words will yet receive a literal fulfilment, when the Lord Jesus comes the second time, and the Jews are converted. **J.C. Ryle** *Expository thoughts on Luke* pp.24,26

**1:34-38 Remark on the remarkable humility of Mary – and the Lord!**

[15] [v. 34] The manner in which all this was effected is wisely hidden from us. If we attempt to pry beyond this point, we shall darken counsel by words without knowledge; and rush in where angels fear to tread. In a religion which really comes down from heaven there must needs be mysteries. Of such mysteries in Christianity, the incarnation is one ... We should mark how graciously the angel helps the faith of the Virgin Mary, but telling her a fact which may serve to assist her in receiving his message. This is the manner of God’s dealings. He knows our weakness. It is like our Lord calling for meat, and eating of a broiled fish and honey-comb, to satisfy his disciples of the material reality of his risen body. **J.C. Ryle** *Expository thoughts on Luke* pp.27,30

[16] [1:35] It may be doubted whether the article is omitted “because Holy Spirit is here a proper name”; rather because it is regarded impersonally as the creative power of God. **Alfred Plummer** *Luke* p.24

[17] The Protestant Church has altogether too long wronged the Virgin Mother. Mariolatry is idolatry. But in our rebound from the false position into which the Mother of our Lord has been lifted by the Roman Church, we have too often neglected her, we have been unfair to her, we have consigned her almost to oblivion. **G. Campbell Morgan**, *Luke* p. 20

## **Karl Barth on the Roman Catholic view of Mary**

[18] [1:26-38] What has happened to the figure of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church is not surprising – that she has been raised next to Christ to a second center, that a special doctrine of the Blessed Virgin was formulated, that in ecclesiastical piety the figure

of Mary could put the figure of Christ in the shade. This is not surprising because the figure of Mary is beyond question a special figure in the Holy Scripture. And yet there can be no question either that a very deep misunderstanding has occurred here if it could

happen that Mary was raised to such a position and provided with titles which even the least could imply a competition with Christ. For *particularly* Mary, *particularly* as forming the extreme end in the line of those who have received the promise and wait for the Lord, is characterized unmistakably as human, as a person who is opposite to God, who is in need of grace and receives grace. Particularly with her even if what has been promised to her is surely unique, it becomes unequivocally clear that to receive such a promise means to be *human*. And this implies to have *faith* and totally *depend* on faith, to think in faith, to act in faith. If anyone belongs to us, totally to us, in the depth of human need and promise, it is particularly Mary who is visited by the angel of God and called to occupy such an extraordinary position as she does. Particularly this extraordinary position shows and proves again unequivocally that there is nothing superhuman, no human suitability for God, no qualification for mediatorship. There is only the grace of God which attends to man. If Mary with her whole person is a testimony for the extraordinary dimension of God, it is to be said that this extraordinary dimension is God's *mercy* which concerns itself with man. Can such a figure meet with worse misunderstanding than that which has happened to her in the Catholic Church? **Karl Barth** *The Great Promise* p.19