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COMMENTARY

A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture

LUKE
1:1–9:50

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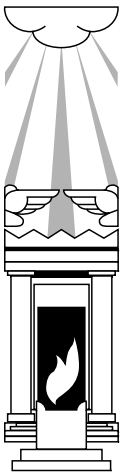
the essence of the kingdom in all its poverty and humility. This horrible rejection was overcome by the resurrection, which proclaimed to the world that God in Christ was making all things new.

Table Fellowship and Real Presence[27]

In the OT, God communicated his desire to save his people in the setting of table fellowship, as with the Passover meal; the meal on Mt. Sinai in Ex 24:9–11, where Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders "beheld God and ate and drank"; and the meals that often accompanied sacrifices. In many of the covenants Yahweh made with his people, a meal of sacrificial food was eaten. All these meals looked forward to communion with God at the eschatological table when the saints will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God (Lk 13:29). Meals were one of the ways God provided for intimate communion with himself in a context of salvation.



The theme of divine presence is an important one in the OT,[28] and this theme continues into the NT with the birth of Jesus. In his infancy narrative, Luke accents that God's presence is moving from the temple to the infant conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The OT prepares for this movement of God's presence. God's presence in fire and cloud led the people during the exodus (Ex 13:21) and took up residence in the tabernacle (Ex 40:34–38) and later the temple (1 Ki 8:10–11). Shortly before the first temple was destroyed, God's presence left it (Ezekiel 10). God promised that there would be an even greater incarnation that would supersede the second temple (Haggai 2; Zechariah 8–9). The Jerusalem temple would be destroyed in A.D. 70. No longer would God be present in the temple. The new temple is Jesus (Jn 1:14; 2:19–22), and wherever Jesus is, there is God offering the eschatological gifts that Israel received through the sacrifices at the dwelling place of God. Luke portrays Jesus as the final, eschatological prophet journeying to Jerusalem. Along the way, he sits down with all manner of people at meals and Sabbath evening Seders, teaching them about the kingdom of God and giving them a foretaste of the messianic feast as he breaks bread with them. This table fellowship was the combination of teaching and eating in the presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

Jesus' table fellowship was a form of self-revelation. Jesus would teach about himself as the journeying Prophet, and so the theme is part of Luke's prophet Christology. Table fellowship was an occasion for fellowship with God, who was present to teach about the kingdom and to offer the gifts of that kingdom at a table of reconciliation.

In each of Jesus' table fellowship meals, three elements are found: the presence of Jesus Christ; his teaching as proclamation of the kingdom; and eating that demonstrates fellowship and reconciliation.

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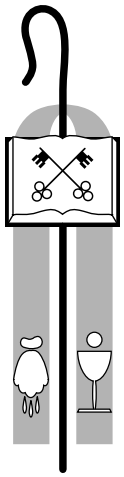
[27] See also the excursus "Jesus' Table Fellowship."

[28] See S. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978).

During his earthly ministry Jesus was present at table *in the flesh;* at the Last Supper (Lk 22:14–23) he was present for the first time *in the flesh and in the Sacrament;* at Emmaus (Lk 24:28–35) he was present for the first time *as the crucified and risen Lord;* after Pentecost in celebrations of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7; 1 Cor 11:23–34), he is present *in the Sacrament as the crucified and risen Lord, who gives his flesh and blood for the forgiveness of sins.*



At the Last Supper (Lk 22:14–23), Jesus established the liturgical pattern of Word and Supper. Jesus reinforced this pattern by his *teaching* on the road to Emmaus and his self-revelation *in the breaking of the bread* (24:28–35). ***This pattern set by Christ himself became the structure of early church liturgies: Word and Sacrament.*** The prophetic pattern of teaching and miracles is recapitulated in today's liturgies as they proclaim that in Christ the kingdom is present and active for salvation. In the Liturgy of the Word, Christ *teaches* his people that even "today" these words are fulfilled in their hearing as he continues to be present to absolve sin and release from bondage. In the Liturgy of the Lord's Supper, Christ *performs the miracles* of today as he is present in the bread and wine to feed his church with his very body and blood for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Through the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, the resurrected Christ is present with his church, conferring the benefits of his death for the sin of the world and his victorious resurrection to new life.

These three motifs merge to produce a consistent picture: the journeying Jesus reveals himself as the suffering, righteous Prophet in teaching and signs, including meals. He calls together and gives instruction at the ongoing feast to a pilgrim band of disciples.

The Trajectory from Luke into Acts

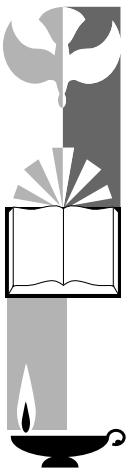
Jesus' own ministry, as recorded by Luke, shows Jesus' careful training of his disciples, "and this Gospel itself contains material for such training."[29] Luke indicates his purpose in 1:4, when he says he wrote his gospel so that Theophilus would "come to recognize completely the reliability concerning the words by which you have been catechized." Luke's story of the emerging church in Acts continues the initiatory pattern of making disciples, or catechumens, through evangelization, catechesis, Baptism, and Lord's Supper.

As many have observed, the church grew in a dramatic fashion during the Jewish mission in Acts 1–12, with three thousand souls added at Pentecost (Acts 2:41) and another five thousand after Peter's sermon at Solomon's portico (Acts 4:4). These numbers reflect *Jewish converts* who already were catechized in the OT and were waiting for the Messiah to come and complete

[29] I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke,* 43, commenting on Lk 1:4. While Marshall doubts whether all the detailed rigours of the later catechumenate were practiced in the first century, converts to Christianity certainly received careful training in the faith.

God's work of salvation. When they hear that Jesus of Nazareth is *the Messiah/Christ,* their catechesis is complete, and they are baptized and receive the Spirit, which initiates them into the body of Christ. The classic example of a Jewish convert is Paul himself, whose sudden conversion was not preceded by lengthy catechesis, since he was thoroughly educated in the OT. What he lacked was the revelation that it was Jesus who fulfilled the entirety of the OT.

However, with the beginning of the Gentile mission (Acts 13–28), there are no longer any reports of fantastic numbers of quick converts. The church now moves ahead more slowly as it encounters Gentiles who need a great deal of catechesis in the OT so that they might rightly understand the person and work of Jesus in light of the prophetic Word.[30] Thus, Luke innocently reports that when Paul was at Corinth, "he stayed *a year and six months,* teaching the Word of God among them" (Acts 18:11). At Ephesus "he entered the synagogue and *for three months* spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). When he met resistance from the Jews, he "withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued *for two years,* so that all the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:9–10). Paul's lingering in Corinth and Ephesus was to carry on catechesis for Gentile God-fearers and pagans who needed to be informed of the OT and Jesus' fulfillment of it. Already the missionary journeys of Paul reveal that more time must be given to those who are not versed in the OT Scriptures. We are not told whether this catechesis was before or after Baptism—or both, as seems likely. The Didache describes an initiatory process in which extended catechesis precedes Baptism and Supper, but the catechesis of the baptized would continue in the Liturgy of the Word, which includes the hearing of Luke and the other gospels.



Jesus' table fellowship anticipated the table fellowship vision of Peter, the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10, and the agreement between Paul and Barnabas and the Jerusalem church at the apostolic council in Acts 15. It also enlightens the controversy over table fellowship between Paul and Peter at Antioch recorded in Gal 2:11–21. Table fellowship with Gentiles is *table fellowship with sinners,* the very issue addressed by Jesus in his table fellowship in Luke's gospel, and intimately associated with an acceptance or rejection of the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.[e]

(e) E.g., Lk 5:27–39; 7:36–50; 14:15–24; 19:1–10; 22:7–30

The table fellowship of Christians was an important theological and social difference that increasingly separated the church from Judaism. Table fellowship in Acts is a continuation of the hospitality of Jesus in his ministry.[f] For the Jew every meal had religious significance, for all food came from God and was the fruit of his blessing, a gift given day by day from the heavenly Father, a foretaste of the messianic banquet, and so was considered eschatological bread.

(f) Cf. Acts 1:4; 2:42, 46; 10:41; 11:1–18; 16:34; 20:7, 11; 27:35

[30] Cf. Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, both of which begin with a lengthy section on the Ten Commandments from the OT.

The schematic location of the meals in Acts reflects the centrality of early Christian table fellowship. In Acts meals are recorded at the beginning (1:4; 2:42, 46), middle (10:41–11:18; 15:1–35) and end (27:35; cf. 28:23).

The breaking (κλάω, κατακλάω, κλάσις) of bread occurs in Lk 9:16; 22:19; 24:30, 35; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35. Of these passages, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is indicated in Lk 22:19; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7. While the other occasions do not seem to have been celebrations of the Supper, they all occur in the context of events that confirm the Gospel message that Jesus is the Christ: the feeding of the five thousand (Lk 9:16), the Christophany at the Emmaus meal (24:30, 35), the resurrection of Eutychus (Acts 20:11), and St. Paul's prophecy of divine rescue (27:35).

In both Jesus' earthly ministry and the church's ministry, the breaking of the bread is the occasion for instruction concerning the person of Jesus and his death and resurrection. The breaking of the bread as a community meal in Acts has a fixed association with missionary instruction. The teaching about Jesus' passion and destiny and the breaking of the bread belong to Luke's blueprint for the itinerant Christian mission in Acts, where Paul is the prototype. But the religious significance of the breaking of the bread is never explained in Acts. *The trajectory of Luke's gospel indicates that these meals in Acts (2:42, 46; 20:7) go beyond fellowship among believers to include communion with the risen Lord.*[31]

From the Jewish perspective, Jews ate with Gentiles in the Christian community at the price of denying their distinctive identity as Jews, and, therefore they renounced their Jewish faith. Acts suggests that this was a major problem in the spread of Christianity throughout the Jewish diaspora. Luke's community continued the table fellowship practice of Jesus and Paul (contrast Peter in Gal 2:11–21), in which Jewish Christians engaged in table fellowship with Gentile Christians.

The Lord's Supper in Acts is characterized by joy in the midst of eschatological tension. These meals (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7) celebrate the beginning of the messianic age and are a foretaste of its eternal banquet. *The messianic age has dawned, and with it the ongoing feast of the church—the Lord's Supper—which will continue until the whole church now in heaven and on earth reclines at the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6–9).*

The Structure of Luke's Gospel

The Microstructure of Luke's Gospel

Since Luke's gospel was meant to be read in a liturgical community of hearers of the Word, the evangelist adopted and adapted literary principles of the first century to assist his community in hearing the theological significance

[31] In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (XXII 7), the Lutheran confessors acknowledge that Lk 24:35 and other passages that speak of the breaking of the bread (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7) may refer to the Lord's Supper.

of the gospel. Charles Talbert, in his monograph *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts,* was one of the first to recognize the significance of Luke's structure for communicating his theological agenda.[32] Talbert cites three major emphases within the literary environment of the first century:

> (1) … formal patterns or architectonic designs that control the arrangement of the material into larger units. …
>
> (2) … formal patterns that control the organization and give unity to a writing in their relation to the larger cultural context of the document. …
>
> (3) … the employment of such architectural patterns for both aesthetic and didactic ends follows the tenet of modern literary criticism that the connection between form and content in literature is so vital that it is meaningless to consider one of them without constant reference to the other.[33]

Of particular interest to Talbert was Luke's utilization of the *principle of balance,* a common literary practice in Mediterranean culture.[34] The presence of asymmetries is a mark of the principle and avoids monotony. This *principle of balance* is found in Hellenistic, Jewish, and early Christian sources. It serves three functions:

> (a) an assist to the memory of the readers/hearers, that is, a mnemonic device;
>
> (b) an assist to the meaning of the whole or of a section; …
>
> (c) an abstract architectonic principle, a convention, used solely for aesthetic purposes.[35]

As this commentary will observe, Luke uses structure to signal the meaning of a passage. The hearer is encouraged to use structure as a means for discerning meaning and linking that structure with the evangelist's theological intent. This interweaving of structure and theology better enables the hearer to observe Luke's purpose and meaning. It also facilitates memorization of

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[32] Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1974.

[33] C. Talbert, *Literary Patterns,* 5–6.

[34] C. Talbert, *Literary Patterns,* 9, claims that this principle "is so deep-seated in much of Mediterranean culture." Talbert describes this in detail on p. 14, n. 70:

> The principle of balance in antiquity finds expression in at least four major ways symbolized in the following patterns: (1) AB:A'B', (2) AB:B'A', (3) ABCA', (4) ABCD:C'B'A'D'. The first involves the recurrence of some element in natural order. The second is an inverted order. The third involves merely the echo in the last member of a series of the first. The fourth involves the recurrence of all or most of the elements in the first series but in no particular order. These recurrences may be of key terms, themes, sounds or forms. There is no agreed upon vocabulary to describe these four expressions of balance. For example, the first is known to biblical scholars as regular parallelism which may be either synonymous or antithetical depending on the content. The second is known by such names as inverted parallelism, chiasmus, and envelope construction. The third is called by some inclusion, by others ring composition, and by still others a bracketing or framing device. The fourth is called the method of counterpoint or *Zweiheitsgesetz.*

[35] C. Talbert, *Literary Patterns,* 81.

the text and message. Talbert concluded that in Luke-Acts, architectural design serves both theological and aesthetic ends, just as it does in other literary works in Luke's milieu. Luke makes use of techniques that would be familiar to the Mediterranean peoples of his time.

This commentary will note these structures, often called *chiasms,* even though they are usually loose and asymmetric, rather than strict chiasms. Noted too are the frequent *frames,* where a key word or theme is repeated at the beginning and end of a section. For example, Luke's gospel both begins and ends in the temple, providing a frame (Luke 1 and 24). See footnote 34 for more on *chiasm* and *frame* and for alternate terms describing the same phenomena. Many of Talbert's observations have been modified, questioned, and revised, but his book has been formative in many conservative seminaries across this country because it offers a structural analysis of the text that is historically based, culturally aware, and insightful for the church, particularly in homiletics.[36]

A recent book in hermeneutics and homiletics by Sidney Greidanus is appropriately titled *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature.*[37] Greidanus critiques current hermeneutic methods and evaluates them as to their homiletical application. Greidanus values the "rhetorical criticism" launched by James Muilenburg in his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968. Muilenburg was responding to the failure of form-critical methods to promote the Gospel or speak to the needs of the church. He wanted to restore the notion that "form and content are inextricably related. They form an integral whole. The two are one."[38] By returning to the historical and cultural milieu of the text, he called for more focus on the text itself. *The biblical text is a literary work that utilized ancient composition techniques in order to communicate the message to the original audience in a style they understood. Structure and content are part of the beauty of Scripture's literary quality.* As Talbert observed, *repetition* is the basic building block of most structural patterns, and Greidanus shows how observing structural patterns such as repetition, parallelism, chiasm, and inclusio are *valuable to the preacher* because they help him recognize the theme and structure of the text. Greidanus argues that this is the most significant hermeneutical contribution toward constructing a sermon's theme and outline.

Lukan scholarship in the 1970s included the work of many on the literary character of the gospel. The focus began to shift away from the older higher-

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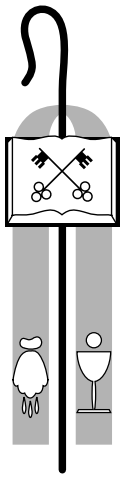
[36] See K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant,* 44–75, in his chapter entitled "Methodology (2): Four Types of Literary Structures in the NT and their Significance for the Interpretation of Parables." Cf. also the groundbreaking work of N. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1942) and more recently, J. Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994).

[37] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988. This paragraph summarizes pp. 58–67.

[38] J. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88/1 (1969) 5.

critical approaches toward literary methods that deal with the actual text, rather than speculation about hypothetical sources or previous forms. *From the perspective of literary analysis, Luke is a skilled author writing excellent first-century history and literature. Luke's literary intentions serve his theological concerns, and the shape of the narrative is an important vehicle for telling the theological story of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*



This commentary will regularly offer the reader a microstructure of a passage. Some of these will be more elaborate than others, but all are intended to assist the reader in discerning the meaning of Luke's text. *For the preacher,* such attention to the text's structure may be the first step toward a sermon outline, since the structure of the evangelist's text may be a proper vehicle for the preacher's message. The search for biblical preaching has led many to suggest letting the structure of the sermon imitate the structure of the text. Thus the logical flow of the text will be the flow of the sermon, combining exposition, interpretation of theological significance, and application as the story of the text unfolds. Instead of a propositional approach in which the text is rearranged into a logical structure, the sermon progresses as naturally as the text does, and it includes the text's idiosyncratic tendencies that are common to human language and speech.

The Macrostructure of Luke's Gospel

The basic plan of the evangelist is to record Jesus' ministry in a pattern that accents Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.[39] This commentary is indebted to J. Fitzmyer's view of the overall structure of Luke's gospel, which is the most reasonable outline. It appears below in modified form:

1:1–4	The Prologue
1:5–2:52	The Infancy Narrative
3:1–4:13	The Preparation for Jesus' Ministry
4:14–9:50	The Galilean Ministry
9:51–19:28	Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem
19:29–21:38	The Jerusalem Ministry
22:1–23:56a	The Passion Narrative
23:56b–24:53	The Resurrection Narrative[40]

The table of contents contains a more detailed outline that shows the specific ways this commentary has divided Luke's text into pericopal form. The majority of these divisions are straightforward and conform to the consensus of most scholars, but there are some differences, particularly in the travel narrative, that offer some theological insights from Luke's structure.

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[39] It seems best to this author to accent the evangelist's *microstructure* and leave debate over his *macrostructure* to others. E.g., K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant,* 79–82, offers a chiastic structure for all of Luke's travel narrative, 9:51–19:48.

[40] See J. Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX,* 134–42, for his outline of the gospel, from which this outline is drawn.

Luke 1:67–80

The Benedictus

Translation

1 [67]And Zechariah his father was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

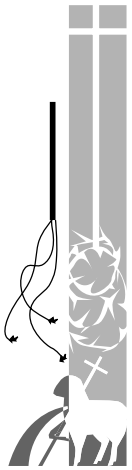
[68]"Blessed the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has visited and made redemption for his people,
[69]and he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,
[70](as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old),
[71]salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,
[72]to do mercy with our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
[73]an oath that he swore to Abraham our father,
[74]to give to us, rescued from the hand of enemies,
to serve him without fear [75]in holiness and righteousness
in his presence all our days.
[76]And you, child, prophet of the Most High you will be called;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
[77]to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
[78]through the merciful compassion of our God,
by which the Dawn will visit us from on high,
[79]to shine on those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death,
to direct our feet in the way of peace."

[80]And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert places until the days of his public presentation to Israel.

Textual Notes

68a. εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ—The Benedictus begins like a typical OT song of blessing and praise. As the first word, εὐλογητός sets the tone for the entire hymn. OT examples include Gen 14:19–20; 24:27; 1 Ki 1:48; Psalm 144; 1 Chr 29:10–19. On such OT blessings, cf. C. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987) 146–60. Also see the comments on the blessing of Lk 1:42.

Here the praise is directed to God with the most significant designation, Yahweh Elohim (κύριος ὁ θεός; see 1:16).



68b–75. These verses are an exposition of 1:68a, and the three main verbs of this section are ἐπεσκέψατο, ἐποίησεν, and ἤγειρεν.

68b. ἐπεσκέψατο καὶ ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν—God is blessed because he has "visited" (ἐπεσκέψατο) his people in Christ's incarnation, and in Christ he has provided atonement as he "made redemption" (ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν) for his people. The opening lines of the Benedictus highlight the two most significant aspects of the mission of Jesus. God's "visiting" in Jesus will be acknowledged again in 1:78 and by the people after Jesus raises the widow's son at Nain (7:16). The noun, "visitation," occurs in 19:44. See comments there on the OT background of God's visitation in both a Law and a Gospel sense.

Redemption is what Anna has been waiting for in the temple and now sees in Jesus (2:38). The Emmaus disciples had hoped to see redemption in Jesus, but their hopes were crushed by his death (24:21).

λαῷ—On this as a term for God's people, see comments at 1:10 and 1:77.

69. ἤγειρεν κέρας σωτηρίας—"This word [κέρας], used for animal horns, is also a symbol of divine or human strength. In the OT it depicts God's power in a prophetic action (1 Kgs. 22:11) and is also a direct term for power (Zech. 2:1 ff [ET 1:18 ff.]). … Lk. 1:69 uses OT terminology when it speaks of God raising up a horn of salvation (cf. Ps. 18:2). God is here the Lord of history putting forth his power to help and bless through his Messiah ('in the house of his servant David')" (W. Foerster, *kéras, TDNT,* Abridged, 428). On "salvation," see 1:47.

70. This verse is parenthetical in the sentence structure but expresses an extremely important thought. It modifies the three verbs in 1:68 and 69 (ἐπεσκέψατο, ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν, and ἤγειρεν) by emphasizing that these events are in continuity with the OT and in fulfillment of Scripture.

71. σωτηρίαν—Salvation stands in apposition to κέρας, summarizing the content of 1:68–70. σωτηρίαν occurs three times in the Benedictus (1:69, 71, 77) and is one of its themes.

72–74. The two infinitives of purpose (ποιῆσαι, μνησθῆναι) are dependent on the three verbs in 1:68 and 69 (ἐπεσκέψατο, ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν, and ἤγειρεν), explicating why God has visited, made redemption, and raised a horn of salvation for his people. The two infinitives also provide the structure for this section.

72. μνησθῆναι—Cf. 1:54.

73. ὅρκον stands in apposition to διαθήκης, "attracted from a genitive of apposition (to διαθήκης) to the case of the relative pronoun" (I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke,* 92). Together, they form the central thought of the Benedictus: God remembers his covenant. This the only occurrence of ὅρκος in Luke, and it occurs only once in Acts (2:30), concerning the oath God made to David that one of his descendents would be king. By using "oath" as a synonym for "covenant," the Benedictus ties together the promise to Abraham, Jeremiah, and David as it is now fulfilled in Christ, the King. See Heb. 6:13–20 on the oath of promise to Abraham.

73–75. These verses explain the content of the covenant/oath. ἀφόβως goes with λατρεύειν, and ῥυσθέντας (the dative would be more expected since it should agree with ἡμῖν) is circumstantial, modifying τοῦ δοῦναι ἡμῖν.

74. λατρεύειν—This is the only present infinitive in this section and suggests continuation, i.e., continual service in the presence of God in vocation in everyday life.

75. ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ—"In his presence." Cf. Lk 1:19.

76a. παιδίον, προφήτης—The startling juxtaposition of "child, prophet" calls to mind some of the greatest OT prophets, such as Samuel (1 Sam 1:24) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:5). This half verse announces John's servant role in salvation history as prophet.

76b–79. These verses are an exposition of 1:76a and describe what John will do as prophet of the Most High. The two infinitives of purpose in this section (ἑτοιμάσαι, τοῦ δοῦναι) are dependent on προπορεύσῃ (cf. 1:72).

76b. ὁδούς—The "way(s)" will be a prominent theme throughout Luke and Acts. It is the way of catechesis; for example, Jesus in truth teaches "the way of God" (20:21). It is also the way that leads to Jerusalem and the cross, so it is part of the journey motif. The word occurs again in 1:79. See further the commentary below.

78. σπλάγχνα ἐλέους—These are essentially synonyms, hence "merciful compassion" instead of the literal "bowels of mercy."

ἐπισκέψεται—The same verb is also used in 1:68b to describe God's gracious visitation in the incarnation. See the comments at 1:68 and, on the OT background, 19:44.

ἀνατολή—This refers to the Messiah. ἀνατολή ("rising") translates צֶמַח ("Branch") in the LXX of Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8, and it alludes to the Star of Jacob (Num 24:17; cf. 1QM 11:6; 4QTestimonia 12).

79. εἰς ὁδόν—This is catechetical language; ὁδός occurs also in Lk 1:76. See commentary below.

80. ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις—This foreshadows the locale of John's teaching in 3:2.

Commentary

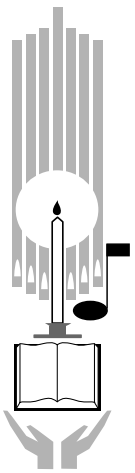
The Benedictus is a magnificent hymn that is divided grammatically into two parts. The first part (1:68–75) is direct discourse dependent on 1:67 and its two main verbs, ἐπλήσθη and ἐπροφήτευσεν. It is a complex sentence with all the main verbs in the aorist, indicating accomplished facts. The second part (1:76–79) is also direct discourse dependent on 1:67, a compound/complex sentence with all main verbs in the future. This simple structure of two strophes may be informed by other patterns within the hymn (see next page).[1]

What Mary proclaimed in the Magnificat in the language of pious faith, Zechariah now articulates in the Benedictus in psalm-like poetry that lends itself to catechesis. The hymn embraces both the OT and the NT by describing

[1] The chiasm on the next page is a conflation of two chiasms from A. Vanhoye, "Structure du 'Benedictus,'" *NTS* 12 (1965–66) 382–89. He breaks down the two strophes of the hymn into chiastic structures, locating at the center of each the means by which the knowledge of the covenant and salvation came first to Israel through the holy prophets (1:70) and then through John the prophet/child (1:76). The center of the whole hymn is the covenant (1:72b) and the oath (1:73).

God's mighty acts of salvation in the past and how John and Jesus will bring these mighty acts to fulfillment.

1:67 Introduction: And Zechariah his father was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,
1:68a–b **A** "*Blessed* the Lord, the **God** of Israel,
because he has **visited**
1:68c–69a **B** and made redemption **for his people,**
and he has raised up a horn of **salvation** for us …
1:70 **C** (as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old),
1:71 **D** **salvation**
from **our enemies**
and from the hand of all who hate us,
1:72a **E** to do mercy with **our fathers**
1:72b **F** and to remember his holy **covenant,**
1:73a **F'** an **oath** that he swore
1:73b **E'** to Abraham **our father,**
1:74 **D'** to give to us, **from the hand**
of enemies
rescued. …
1:76a **C'** And you, child, **prophet** of the Most High you will be called; …
1:77 **B'** to give knowledge of **salvation**
to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,
1:78–79 **A'** through the merciful compassion of our **God,**
by which the Dawn will **visit** us from on high,
to shine on those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death,
to direct our feet in the way of *peace*."
1:80 Conclusion: And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert places until the days of his public presentation to Israel.



The Benedictus is a hymn of praise similar to Psalm 144 and 1 Chr 29:10–19, for example, both of which begin with blessings in praise of God. The hymn contains two strophes. The first strophe deals with "the Lord, the God of Israel" (1:68a) and what God has done for Israel in the past (1:68b–75); the second strophe has Zechariah's prophetic pronouncements based on what God will now do through his son, John the Baptist (1:76–79).[2]

The Lord God of Israel is blessed because he visited, redeemed, and raised up a horn of salvation for his people (the three main verbs in 1:68b–69). This results in salvation in which God does mercy, remembers his covenant to Abraham, and gives rescue from enemies so that his people might serve him (1:71–75). Thus, the motive is God's faithfulness to his promise to visit his people and redeem them from all their enemies. What begins with John, therefore, is the time of salvation, for he will be a prophet and he will go before the Lord to prepare his ways (1:76; note the two futures, κληθήσῃ and προπορεύσῃ). As a prophet of the Most High, John will "give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins" (1:77). The link between

[2] This structure is accented in the metrical version of the Benedictus in the Order of Matins in *The Lutheran Hymna*l (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941) 38–39, which even places the covenant/oath in the center of the canticle (verses 5–6).

salvation and forgiveness is a critical issue in the preparatory instruction or catechesis for baptismal initiation.

Central to this hymn is God's remembrance of his holy covenant (1:72b) and the oath he swore to Abraham (1:73).[3] Surprisingly, διαθήκη ("covenant)" is used in the synoptics only at the institution of the Lord's Supper and here in the Benedictus. "Holy covenant" expresses that it is from God. This is the covenant promised to Abraham, as is confirmed in the next verse by ὅρκον,[4] but it also embraces the Passover, the Sinai covenant, and the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 34. "Remember" (μνησθῆναι) is an OT theme in which either God remembers us for salvation or we remember his saving acts. Here it is the former.[a] Remembrance is an important concept in table fellowship language, both at the Last Supper and in the ongoing Eucharist of the church (cf. Lk 22:19, ἀνάμνησις). It is also part of the hermeneutic of Luke's gospel, as in 24:6, 8, where the women are instructed by the angels to recall Jesus' words in Galilee about his suffering, death, and resurrection.

(a) Cf. Genesis 8; Ex 2:24; 6:5; Lev 26:42; Pss 105:8; 106:45

The occasion of John's circumcision and incorporation into the covenant of Abraham recalls all of OT covenantal history. God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1–3, etc.) began the redemptive history of Israel proper, leading to the Passover deliverance from Egypt and exodus to the Promised Land. God's covenant with Abraham was one of righteousness through faith (Gen 15:6; Romans 4), sealed with a bloody sacrifice in the presence of God (Gen 15:12–21) and entered into by means of circumcision (Gen 17:1–14), which Luther compares favorably to the Sacrament of Baptism.[5]

With the covenant as its central theme, the hymn moves from past to future. The first strophe describes God's saving action in the past, the second strophe God's saving in the future. God has visited in the past and will now visit in the Dawn from on high. The redemption and horn of salvation from his past mighty acts will now give knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jeremiah 31). This redemption came to the people through the holy prophets but now will come through the prophet/child John.

In the center of Zechariah's hymn, the covenant/oath itself is described as salvation, or rescue from our enemies, as mercy to our fathers and to Abraham. God's salvation is central, and this salvation is focused in the covenant of Abra-

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[3] The value of Vanhoye's work (see footnote 1) is evident in his locating "covenant" and "oath" at the center of the chiasm.

[4] Cf. J. Behm, διαθήκη, *TDNT* 2:132–33 on Lk 1:72:

> The context here is so fully in line with the OT and Judaism that there can be no doubt that the word is used in the traditional sense of the declaration of the will of God concerning the future salvation, promise and self–commitment. That the occurrence of the age of salvation is understood as God's mercy to the patriarchs and His remembrance of the διαθήκη bears witness to a powerful sense of the saving will of God in its transcendence over time and history.

[5] LW 3:101–12.

ham that God remembers throughout the history of Israel. This was the content of the very last statement in the Magnificat, the words that link these two great hymns together (1:54–55): "He has come to the aid of Israel his servant, to remember his mercy, just as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever."

The use of "covenant" (διαθήκη) suggests a link between the Benedictus, the series of covenants in the OT, and the Last Supper. The common theme is sacrifice. The covenant with Abraham was a bloody one, sealed by the presence of the Lord in the smoking pot as it passed through the two cut pieces of the animal (Gen 15:17–21). This bloody covenant was applied to each individual male through the circumcision of the foreskin of the flesh. Abraham's covenant of blood signified a right relationship between God and his people. This was a covenant of promise that would be brought to completion in the blood of the Messiah. God's presence in the smoking pot assured that this was true. While the patriarchs offered sacrifices at various times, a major fulfillment of the promise in Abraham's covenant came at the deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. At the Passover, the blood of the sacrificial lamb without blemish was applied to the lintel and doorposts. The covenant promises to Abraham and to Moses are brought together in Ex 6:2–9 and 12:48–49. This covenant is reaffirmed at the foot of Mt. Sinai through another bloody act of sacrifice, where the people promise to hear and heed God's covenant (Ex 24:4–8).[6]

This covenant takes on a new dimension with the prophets, first with the Suffering Servant proclaimed by Isaiah in chapters 42; 49; 50; 52–53. Twice in these songs the Servant is promised to be "a covenant with the people" (Is 42:6; 49:8). Jeremiah elaborates on the theme of the new covenant:

> "Behold, the days are coming," says Yahweh, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband," says Yahweh. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says Yahweh: "I will put my Torah/instruction within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God [cf. Ex 6:6–7], and they will be my people. And no longer will each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know Yahweh,' for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," says Yah-

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[6] Cf. X. León-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The Witness of the New Testament,* trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist, 1987) 145:

> The sacrifice described here [Ex 24:6–8] is par excellence the "communion sacrifice" that unites God and the people. The account of it has no parallel in the Old Testament, since this is the only instance in which the blood is sprinkled not only on the altar but on the people as well. The characteristic traits of a covenant are to be found here: God, who has taken the initiative by calling Moses to the mountain, has stipulated the conditions of the "contract," and the people now bind themselves to observe them.

weh. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:31–34).

The new covenant comes to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who will himself be the fulfillment of the Law and the bearer of the Spirit, and who has as the essence of his messianic task to release Israel from her bondage to sin, sickness, Satan, and death. The new covenant will be one of forgiveness. This is the promise that the Benedictus rehearses through God's mighty acts in the OT and through John's role as the forerunner of Messiah who will "give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins" (Lk 1:77). However, the hearer also knows that the covenant in the center of the Benedictus comes to its complete fulfillment on the night in which Jesus was betrayed and said,"This cup [is] the new covenant in my blood, which is being poured out on behalf of you" (22:20). Luke accents the covenant as new ("the new covenant in my blood"), while Matthew and Mark accent the blood ("my blood of the covenant" [Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24]). According to Luke, then, this new covenant of Jesus' very body and blood subsumes the old blood covenants that anticipated this final covenant. The covenantal sacrifice God made with Abraham, celebrated in the Passover, poured on the people by Moses, and foreseen by Jeremiah is now offered in a cup of the Lord's blood. All the OT covenants are now superceded by the coming of the one for whom John will prepare.

John's mission is to "prepare his ways" (1:76; ἑτοιμάσαι ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ). The "way" is catechetical language from the OT. Moses encourages the Israelites to "remember all the way [τὴν ὁδόν in the LXX] that Yahweh your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness" (Deut 8:2). Then he exhorts them to "keep the commandments of Yahweh your God, by walking in his ways [ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς in the LXX] and by fearing him" (Deut 8:6). The way was both a journey in faith and a catechetical lifestyle, i.e., a path to the Promised Land (on which the Israelites were "catechized" through the Word of God that came to them through Moses and through suffering) and a posture of confession in which they should walk. This journey/catechetical lifestyle motif became formalized in the OT catechetical concept of the "two ways": God's way or people's way. Ps 1:6 is an example: "For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous [ὁδὸν δικαίων in the LXX], but the way of the wicked [ὁδὸς ἀσεβῶν in the LXX] will perish." Proverbs offers many similar examples that contrast the way of wisdom/righteousness/the Lord with the way of folly/iniquity/people. The Didache, an early Christian writing that is highly Semitic, also begins with this kind of catechetical language: "There are two Ways [ὁδοὶ δύο], one of Life and one of Death, and there is a great difference between the two Ways" (τῶν δύο ὁδῶν; Didache 1:1).[7]

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[7] Trans. K. Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers,* vol. 1 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, reprint 1977] 309. The Lord also told Jeremiah to tell his people that in his day, "Thus says Yahweh, 'Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death" (Jer 21:8).

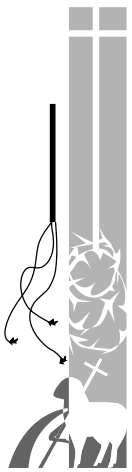
In the Benedictus, Zechariah uses language similar to the catechetical language of the exodus journey. However, John prepares Jesus' way to Jerusalem. Jesus will follow the path Israel could not and did not follow and, by his journey and its bloody end, will accomplish redemption in Jerusalem, the Holy City in the midst of the Promised Land.

The journey/catechesis/way motif will be a recurring theme throughout Luke and Acts.[b] In Luke the theme culminates in the Emmaus narrative, with a recapitulation of Jesus' Jerusalem journey by the Emmaus disciples (24:32, 35). In Acts, as Paul journeys to Damascus, we find that the first name for the Christian church is "the Way" (Acts 9:2), and this name for the church recurs in Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22 (cf. also Acts 2:28; 16:17; 18:25–26).

(b) Lk 1:76, 79; 3:4, 5; [6:20–49]; 7:27; 8:5, 12; 9:3, 57; 10:4, 31; 12:58; 14:23; [18:35; 19:36]; 20:21; 24:32, 35; Acts 2:28; 8:26, 36, 39; 9:2, 17, 27; 13:10; 14:16; 16:17; 18:25–26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; 26:13

John's purpose is to "give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins." "Knowledge" is a Lukan synonym for faith (cf. 1:4); it is drawn from the OT Wisdom literature, like the "two ways" theme just discussed. "Knowledge" is the theme of Proverbs (Prov 1:7) and Ecclesiastes (12:9) and is prominent in many psalms and other passages. Wisdom themes such as "knowledge" and the "two ways" are most frequent in the OT Writings, but they are rooted in the Torah and God's covenant of grace with Israel.[8]

The prepositional phrase "in the forgiveness of their sins" describes the content of salvation. Forgiveness of sins is a Lukan theme that is first announced here. To give salvation to the world is the essence of the ministries of John and Jesus. Salvation's significance is heightened by its association with the forgiveness of sins. The connection is first made by Luke in the ministry of John the Baptist (Lk 3:3–6). The proclamation of forgiveness reaches fulfillment in the messianic ministry of Jesus. It is a major thrust of the programmatic sermon in 4:16–30. Luke's use of "forgiveness" (ἄφεσις) in 4:18 and 24:47 links together the first and last proclaimed words of Jesus in the gospel and shows that forgiveness is essential to Luke's portrayal of the teaching of Jesus as a proclamation of salvation, *"God's* 'liberation' of men *from sin's bondage."*[9]



The final phrase of the hymn (1:79) speaks of the appearing of messianic light "to direct our feet in the way of peace" (εἰς ὁδὸν εἰρήνης). God's goal is to bring peace to his creation and to guide his people to peace. Peace will be a major theme throughout the gospel, e.g., in the angels' announcement at Jesus' birth (2:14), in Simeon's song at Jesus' presentation in the temple (2:29), in the greeting of the seventy(-two) disciples as they go out proclaiming what Jesus proclaimed (10:5–6), in the exclamation of the crowds at Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem (19:38), in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (19:42), and in his final greeting to the apostles after the resurrection (24:36). Since Jesus has gone

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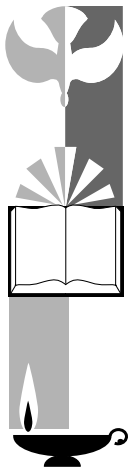
[8] See, e.g., J. Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983).

[9] R. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses,* 136 (emphasis Dillon).

along his path, our way is one of peace. John's catechesis of repentance and forgiveness prepares for the Dawn from on high. Jesus' whole birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension is "the way" and is the basis for Christian catechesis into the way of God, the way of life (cf. 20:21).



Luke provides Jewish Christians with a resource to catechize God-fearers or Gentiles. The Benedictus offers Luke's hearers a magnificent vehicle for rehearsing Israel's covenantal history. Coming at the liturgical moment of John's circumcision, Zechariah's Benedictus connects the OT promises of God's visitation and redemption with the fulfillment of those promises in the Child for whom John prepares. And, appearing just before the report of Jesus' birth, the use of διαθήκη for the important theme of the "covenant" alludes to the ongoing presence of Christ with his church in the Eucharist—the "new covenant" of his body and blood. Lk 1:72 and 22:20 highlight the covenant theme at the beginning and end of the gospel.[10] At this point in Luke's infancy narrative, the entire Gospel has been encapsulated in Mary's Magnificat and Zechariah's Benedictus: both retell God's marvelous saving activity and foreshadow the themes of John's life and Jesus' life.

[10] R. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity I,* 32–38, accents of the "tragic irony" of the Benedictus in light of the rest of Luke's gospel:

> The Benedictus takes on new significance when we understand its relation to the rest of Luke's story. It arouses conflicting emotions: joy and hope but also sorrow and pity. The joy is valid in the context of the total story, for some of the promises are indeed being realized for some people. But Luke's joyful birth story has a hidden lining of sadness. Great expectations contribute to a sense of tragedy if the expected happiness is lost. Part of the function of the birth story is to awaken a lively sense of great expectations so that readers will feel the tragic loss more vividly.

On one level, Tannehill's comments are valid, but he also fails to see that this "tragic irony" is part of the catechesis about the nature of the Eucharist that celebrates Christ's bloody covenant of death. The eschatological consequences of this new covenant are now hidden under the humility of the things of this world. The great expectations of the Benedictus will be crushed if fulfillment is seen only in human terms. But if they are seen eschatologically through the eucharistic life of the church, Luke's hearers will know how his gospel functions as the source of life for his church.