



# LUKE

YOU CAN BE CERTAIN...

## Connect group questions

### Luke 1:1-4 - How?

Welcome back to our connect groups and a huge thank you for those taking on leadership again this year and to those taking it on for the first time. I would urge everyone to be committed to fellow connect group members by praying for them, keeping in touch and looking out for them when they are missing. If you can't make your group one week, please call or text your leader as a matter of courtesy. May the Lord help you to connect more deeply with him, with his Word and with one another through these groups.

1. Review why Mark feels it is hard now to be a Christian in Australia. Would you add anything else to Mark's list?
2. Do you ever have days of doubt like Mark shared where you wonder if any of what you have believed is in fact true? If so, what usually triggers those doubts? How do you normally work through or resolve those doubts?
3. Mark said we need to know *why* we believe for three reasons: (a) so we don't lose confidence in the Lord ourselves; (b) so we can give an answer for the reason we believe (refer 1 Peter 3:15) and (c) so that we can offer a defence for why we believe when we directly attacked.

On a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 is “I really don't know why/what I believe” and 10 is “I'm ready to articulate and defend why I believe”, where would you place yourself at this point? (*Feel free to pass this question of course! – but let's also help one another to move up the scale.*)

We saw that Luke's account is:

#### **Biographical** – read Luke 1:1-4

4. How does this make it so different to the word's well-known religions?
5. Have you ever read one of the Gospels like you would read any other biography – from start to finish? Would you commit to reading Luke that way in the next couple of weeks and bring back your impressions (and questions)?

#### **Historical**

6. Read Luke 3:1f. What is Luke trying to do in his introduction and in other historical references?
7. What is the significance of Luke finishing his research within 20-30 years of Jesus' life?

#### **Biblical**

8. See Luke 4:16-21, Luke 24:25-27 and 24:44. What is the significance of aspects of Jesus' life, *fulfilling* prophetic words uttered centuries earlier? Confused? Read that section of Mark's sermon again.

#### **Personal**

9. Luke wants Theophilus (and everyone who reads this work) to know the *certainty* of the things they have been taught. What did he mean by that and what is the result for living as a Christian?
10. Someone says to you: “that stuff about Jesus is just made up”. How might you respond?

Mark said there are three differences looking at Luke 1:1-4 should make: (a) *certainty in crisis* (b) *confidence in defence* and (c) *challenge if you're not yet a Christian*. Share around the group, how Sunday's message impacted and pray that we will grow more and more certain of what and why we believe and more confident in defending the same.

**Date:** 3rd February 2019  
**Services:** 730, 930 Tewartin (via video) and Peregian  
**Series:** Luke: you can be certain  
**Title:** ...how?  
**Passage:** Luke 1:1-4  
**Outline:** **Christianity is biographical**  
**Christianity is historical**  
**Christianity is Biblical**  
**Christianity is personal**

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*Some of this material was first presented by John Dickson and we are very grateful to him for his permission to use it!*

## INTRODUCTION

- I think it's harder than at any other time in my life, to be a Christian in **Australia**.
- We touched on this last week... when I asked whether sometimes you simply don't feel at home here... and we were excited to remember that we have a **permanent** home in eternity – and God is **pursuing** us with his **goodness** and **love** until we arrive safely **home**...! /
- Why do I think it's **harder** than at any other time in my life?
- Because of the **attacks** on the Christian faith by strident **atheists**
- Because of the rise of **social media** and the **angry response** to anything Christian
- Because of the **risks** regarding **religious freedom**
- Because of the impact of the **Royal Commission**
- Because of the nature of the **same-sex marriage debate**... **LGBTQI** people were **deeply hurt** – and many *Christian* people – **deeply hurt**...
- Because of **postmodernism** – and its claim that there is no such thing as absolute **truth**...
- Because of the way tolerance is now understood... simply **disagreeing** with someone else's position is now seen to be **intolerant**...
- Because religious **violence** is turning people off **ALL** religion
- Because of the perception that **science** and the Christian **faith** are at **odds** with one **another**... //
- It's **hard**!! //
- Are we **stupid** to **continue** *being* **Christian**? /
- Is there **substance** to the **attacks**?
- Have we been **hoodwinked**?
- Is the story of Jesus **made up**?
- Are the **gospels** mere **fiction**? //
- On a **bad** day – I ask some or all of those questions – and **frankly** – as we *all* have invested **so** much our lives in following Jesus – we'd be mad **not** to ask such questions! /
- It was Socrates who famously said 'the unexamined life is not worth living'...
- ... we might adopt or adapt that and say 'the unexamined **FAITH** is not worth **having**! //
- Friends – because of the blatantly anti-Christian context in which we live, we need to know **WHY** we believe... for at least **three** good reasons...
  1. So we don't lose **confidence ourselves** in the Lord Jesus...
  2. so when given the opportunity – we have an **answer** when asked about the reason **we** believe...
  3. So we can offer a **defence** for why we believe when we are directly attacked!

- And *this* friends, is why I want us to look at the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel between now and Easter...
- ...because Luke writes – will you have a look with me – v4 – Luke writes so that you Theophilus – and we – today's readers - **might know the certainty of the things you have been taught...!**
- Brothers and sisters in Christ – and any here are you not yet Christian – I want **you** to know the **certainty** of the things you have been **taught!!** //
- And in particular this morning as we look at just these four opening verses, I want you to know that
- Christianity is:
  1. **Biographical**
  2. **Historical**
  3. **Biblical**
  4. **Personal**

## 1. CHRISTIANITY IS BIOGRAPHICAL

- That is – the whole Christian faith rests on the birth, life, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
- Have a look with me at the first two verses we read –
- *...Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us...*
- He undertakes to present an ordered account of **Jesus**... //
- Christianity is most unusual in revolving around a **person**...
- Compare it to other religions:
- take **Hinduism** – it's about '**eternal wisdom**' because that is what Hindus believe their faith is about – not about a person – but eternal wisdom
- Or take **Islam** – the religion of a large number of people in the world today... the word "Islam" means **submission**. Islam is not about a person – it's about the proper way to **submit to God** as Muslims believe it.
- Or **Buddhism**.. seems at first it might be about someone known as Buddha – but the Buddha himself famously told people not to attach themselves to **him** and in fact, that if you **continue** to hold on to him, he would only hold you back for the rest of the journey! //
- That's about the **opposite** of what Jesus said – we are to be **joined** to him – connected in a **relationship** to him – of **dependence** and **love**.
- That is why Christianity is **unlike any other religion** on the planet and our founding texts are not books of **law** or **philosophy** or **mystery** or **ritual** – they are **biographies** – all about **Jesus**. //
- Susan and I caught up with a woman we know in Vancouver a few years back... she tells the story of how she encountered Jesus somewhere on her second glass of red wine and between chapters 1 and 2 of John's gospel... and now she's a huge fan and devoted follower.... She read one of the **biographies** and was **convinced!!**
- I hope that if you are a visitor with us here this morning and perhaps know very **little** about Christianity – that you may start with a glass of **red** – and a session or two reading one of the biographies of Jesus... //
- ...because first and foremost – Christianity is **biographical**
- Secondly –

## 2. CHRISTIANITY IS HISTORIAL

- Back to our verses – *many have undertaken to draw up an **account** (that word refers to history) of the things have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses** (that’s another historical term)... Therefore (v3) since I have carefully **investigated** everything from the beginning...* (more historical terms!)
- This is **history** he’s writing... not **invented, created, made up!**
- there is **no way** the story of Jesus was ever meant to be read as a **legend** or **parable** or **metaphor** or **spiritual event** that didn’t take place in **time and space...!**
- Note that Luke tells us up front **he** wasn’t an eye-witness – but he’s gone **asked** the **eyewitnesses!**
- ...that tells us that his work was probably finished within 20-30 years of the time of Jesus because after **that** – many of the eyewitnesses would no longer have been around!
- This is fascinating when compared to other works of history which no one ever thinks to question....
- Eg Alexander the Great – had a massive kingdom three centuries before Jesus – 1<sup>st</sup> biographical account doesn’t occur until 140-150 years after Alexander was dead... but the **best** account – regarded as the most significant – is by Arian – **400** years after Alexander is dead.
- Luke by comparison – is **so close** to the events – he personally is aware of and **knows** the **eyewitnesses...**
- Christianity is not based on a **lone spiritual insight** or a **mystical** story of a **dictation** to someone under a **tree** – it is based on **historical events**, in **real time**, recorded by a **multiplicity** of **witnesses** – **close** in time to the **events!**
- So – Christianity is **biographical**, it is **historical** and thirdly

## 3. CHRISTIANITY IS BIBLICAL

- You may think that’s a pretty weird thing to say that Christianity is “Biblical”
- But what I mean is actually pretty simple – that all that the biographies tell us about Jesus is not simply a series of interesting historical events... but the **turning point** of a **long history** of God’s dealing with **humankind...**
- Luke says – if you recall – *many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things **that have been FULFILLED among us....***
- He understands that the history of Jesus is part of a **bigger** story – a **larger history...**
- ...that it in fact, fits with this (hold up the OLD TESTAMENT) part of the Bible
- This is crucial to understanding where Jesus fits – **crucial** to understanding Christianity – and you will find it all the way through Luke’s gospel.
- When Jesus gets up in Luke 4:20 to give his first sermon – he reads from the scroll of one of the Old Testament prophets named Isaiah – a passage that pre-dates Jesus by centuries - and his opening words of the sermon are ‘these words are *fulfilled* in your hearing’.
- And at the end of the gospel, Jesus’ last words to the disciples – after his resurrection – are ‘this is what I told you when I was with you – that everything must be *fulfilled* that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’
- You won’t properly understand the story of Jesus – until you get the **back** story.
- For example – the **sacrifice** of Jesus on the **cross** – makes all the more sense when you know the Old Testament which says again and again that sacrifice for sin is how we are **forgiven...**
- ...so when Jesus turns up and is described as the “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” – we understand that his turning up is part of God’s **big picture plans** for us from the **beginning** of **time!**
- This is important – because it signals that something **HUGE** is happening when Jesus turns up!
- It’s **massive** – it’s the **turning point** of **history** – the **centre piece** of God’s **plans...** //

- ...we need to understand the history of Jesus, on a bigger **canvass** than what just happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. //

- So.... Christianity is **biographical**, Christianity is **historical**, Christianity is **Biblical**; finally -

#### 4. CHRISTIANITY IS PERSONAL

- Did you notice what Luke says in the opening verses to a guy named Theophilus?
- I've carefully investigated everything from the beginning... I've written this orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus - *so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*
- Now - we don't know who this Theophilus is - it was a fairly common name in the ancient world - and was also pretty common to dedicate historical works to some honoured person... he may have been a local **governor** or someone significant in the **community** who had expressed interest in Christianity.
- But note that Luke wants Theophilus to know the **certainty** of the things he has been **taught**
- ... The **certainty** of that which he has heard **rumours** about or of which he has just the **beginnings** of understanding - that's the sense of the word Luke uses
- And **CERTAINTY** - the particular word Luke uses means security, dependability, certainty, stability: the idea of something that is really solid... (in fact we get our word **asphalt** from this word!)
- So Luke wants Theophilus to know there's something **solid - dependable - certain** - about the account of Jesus he's about to give. Here is something **solid** just for **him** - that he can **depend** on, **connect** with... **count** on. //
- And friend - here in Luke's Gospel - is something solid for YOU! - and you can depend on, connect with and count on!
- I shared in the reading notes this week that very early on in my time here - in the first three weeks, someone asked 'do you mean to say that Jesus was a real person who walked this earth?'
- And I answered with absolute joy and conviction - that's **absolutely** what I'm saying!

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- What have we seen this morning?

- That Luke's Gospel is

1. **Biographical** - first and foremost about a person
2. **Historical** - from eyewitnesses and grounded in places and times we can place and validate from other historical sources
3. **Biblical** - it fits with the whole pattern of the Bible and God's plans and purposes from and for all time
4. And Luke and his message is **Personal**. It's for you - that you may have certainty about Jesus and therefore connect with him in a real and personal way.

- What difference will this make for you this week? //

- Some of us are facing **massive challenges**...

- **Children** who have lost their **way**

- Medical **diagnosis** which means a **long road ahead** until life will seem normal again

- **Personal depression** or **anxiety** where some days you're not sure you can **carry on**... /

- All of this may well cause you to ask - well - **where is God?** What's he **doing?** Can I **trust** him? Why is this **happening?** Do I really **believe** this stuff anyway?

- And I want you to know that even though the **way** is **hard** and the **days** are **dark**... you can be **certain** of the things you have been taught...

- ...because Luke has done the hard work of **research** and **interviewing eye-witnesses**... and we can know that **2000** years ago God **stepped** into this **world** in the person of **Jesus of Nazareth**, to **reveal himself**, show us how to **live**, and then by Jesus' **death and resurrection**, **reconcile** us to **himself**...
- Yes, **God** is for **real**
- Yes, he **loves you**
- Yes, he's **here** for you
- Yes, he'll light up your **darkness**
- Yes, he'll show you the **way**
- Yes, you can **trust** him...! //
- Second - for those having dark days - and those among us who **aren't**...
- ...I want you to have **confidence**, that we have in the Christian message, something we can **defend**...
- That is, when challenged you don't have to go all **coy** and **silent** like you've been discovered to be a complete **idiot** for being **Christian** - though that is how some people make you **feel**...
- No - we can know for **certain** the things we have been taught - so become more and more **familiar** with **why** and **how**!! - be a little more **informed** so when someone infers or even says straight out "you're a fool" // you can **expose their** ignorance and the foolishness of their **argument**!!! //
- Someone at Susan's work was claiming that the gospels were all written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and therefore were completely unreliable as a source of information about Jesus... Susan was able to call that "argument" for what it is... because Susan was **confident** in what she knew about the **origins** of the **gospels**... // Equip **yourselves** brothers and sisters so **you** can defend the faith and **stand up for what you believe!**
- **Third**, there may be some people here today who have been around church... or you've known a **little** about Jesus but not a **lot**...
- ...but you have a hunch there's **more** to **life** than meets the eye
- That there's **more** to **life** than what you've **achieved**
- More to life than **fun** in the **sun** in **Noosa**
- More to life than your **career** and **investments**... //
- I want **YOU** to know the certainty of what you've heard about in **Jesus**...
- I want you to know it's for **real**
- Christianity is **personal** - it's for **YOU**
- If Jesus is for real - if he's **God** turned up on **earth** - then that *has* to mean he's lot more important than the occasional **thought most Australians give him**!!! ///
- If this **true** - it's the most important piece of information we have to make **sense** of life and the **universe**
- Will you **test** the **history** of **Jesus**?
- Will you at least be open to the possibility that this may just be a lot more significant than what you have considered so far? //
- *I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*