

My comments are in Lucida Sans Unicode 12 pt.
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IHOP BIBLE STUDY

Topic: Luke 1: 1 - 2: 7 “Affirming Jesus’ Humanity”

The purpose of the Gospel of Luke is told in the opening verses in the first chapter, “. . . it seemed good to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” It is this “orderly account” that provides the organization of our study material.

The reflective studies forming the chart of Luke’s gospel reveals the overall title of “Affirming The Life, Message, and Demonstration of Jesus’ Message.” This theme has three major sections: “Affirming The Life of Jesus Christ” (1:1 – 3:33); “Fourteen Themes of Jesus’ Message (4: 1 – 21:4); “Affirming the Transparent Jesus” (2: 5 – 24: 50). There are 32 lessons in this series.

The uniqueness of Luke’s gospel is discovered in the “Fourteen Themes of Jesus’ Message.” This material encompasses 58 pericopes. A “pericope” can be associated with the subsections titled in the chapters of most bible translations. Sometimes some translations differ, and some leave this titling out altogether.

For our purposes, this material is grouped into fourteen themes. This work was aided by the chart work previously done. This thematic approach is unique and, as you will discover, it is an interesting endeavor. The study of this thematic material begins in session 8.

- I. **Read the assigned reading at one time.**
- II. **Note:** In the Early Church, one of the persistent controversies concerns Jesus’ humanity. Questions of this kind formed the basis for the “Arian” controversy that was not settled until the Council of Nicea in the 4th Century. For the Early Church, the big question concerned the nature of “The Christ” and its relationship to Jesus as a man. At this early stage in which Luke was written, this does not assume the full formation of this controversy. Our reflections note that Luke addressed this concern.

Assignment: Research on the web: Arianism and the Council of Nicea. Write a short paragraph on your findings.

The following can be found at mb-soft.com

[Arianism](#)

[General Information](#)

[Arianism was a 4th-century Christian heresy named for Arius \(c.250–c.336\), a priest in Alexandria. Arius denied the full deity of the preexistent Son of God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. He held that the Son, while divine and like God \("of like substance"\), was created by God as the agent through whom he created the universe. Arius said of the Son, "there was a time when he was not." Arianism became so widespread in the Christian church and resulted in such disunity that the](#)

emperor Constantine convoked a church council at Nicaea in 325 (see Councils of Nicaea).

Led by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, the council condemned Arianism and stated that the Son was consubstantial (of one and the same substance or being) and coeternal with the Father, a belief formulated as homoousios ("of one substance") against the Arian position of homoiousios ("of like substance"). Nonetheless, the conflict continued, aided by the conflicting politics of the empire after the death of Constantine (337).

Three types of Arianism emerged: radical Arianism, which asserted that the Son was "dissimilar" to the Father; homoeanism, which held that the Son was similar to the Father; and semi-Arianism, which shaded off into orthodoxy and held that the Son was similar yet distinct from the Father.

After an initial victory of the homoean party in 357, the semi-Arians joined the ranks of orthodoxy, which finally triumphed except in Teutonic Christianity, where Arianism survived until after the conversion (496) of the Franks. Although much of the dispute about Arianism seems a battle over words (Edward Gibbon scornfully observed that Christianity was split over a single iota, the difference between homoousios and homoiousios), a fundamental issue involving the integrity of the Gospel was at stake: whether God was really in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Reginald H. Fuller

Bibliography

Gregg, R. C., ed., *Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments* (1987); Gwatkin, H. M., *Studies of Arianism*, 2d ed. (1900); Newman, John Henry, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833; repr. 1968).

BELIEVE
Religious
Information
Source
web-site

[Our List of 1,000
Religious Subjects](#)

[E-mail](#)

The following can be found at gospelcom.net

Critical Question for Christians: Is Jesus God?

What a scene!

SOME OF THE BISHOPS who gathered at the meeting hall looked as if they had barely survived a battle field. **One was missing an eye. Another, also with an eye**

gouged out, dragged hamstrung legs. Still another's hands had been scorched. Others wore the scars of scourging beneath their shirts. These victims of torture took their places among hundreds of other bishops. A signal torch was raised. The hall hushed in anticipation.

The most powerful man in the world, the Emperor Constantine, entered, walking on raised heels, his purple gown and silver diadem ablaze with jewels. The first Christian emperor was preparing to address the first ecumenical council. Even two years earlier this meeting would have been unthinkable--a gathering of 312 bishops from throughout the Roman Empire, summoned and financed by the Emperor himself. Only a few years before, these same bishops had been branded criminals by Diocletian. Their gouged eyes, burnt flesh and slashed tendons bore mute witness to the unshakable loyalty they held to the name of Christ. Men in humble garb with twisted bodies waited to hear what their royally garbed and graceful emperor would say.

Constantine spoke. "I rejoice to see you here, yet I should be more pleased to see unity and affection among you." Riots had shattered the peace of the empire-- riots over the doctrine of the nature of Christ. The emperor felt compelled to step in and restore good order. The bishops were expected to resolve their differences and depart in unity.

Arianism Sparks a Fire

Arius, a priest in Alexandria, held that Jesus was a creation of the Father. "There was a time when the Son was not," sang he and his followers, setting their theology to catchy tunes. The first being to be created, Jesus was nonetheless only a creature, according to Arius. He was not eternal. Bishop Alexander of Alexandria had condemned Arius' doctrine, saying that Jesus, the Word, existed eternally with the Father, was divine, and could not be created. Alexander and his aide, Athanasius, believed that by denying Christ's deity, Arianism threatened the core of Christian faith. Alexander had Arius removed from his post. Arius sought and won support from other bishops of the East. The conflict was on! Rioting ensued. Now this council had been called at Nicea to settle the controversy.

No Quick Fix

If Constantine hoped for a swift resolution to the dispute, he was soon disappointed. When Eusebius of Nicomedia deduced "logically" that the Son of God was a creature, he was interrupted with cries of, "Heresy! Blasphemy!" His speech was snatched from his hands and torn to shreds by bishops who would not allow philosophical arguments to supersede Scripture. Men who had suffered for Christ were not about to sit tamely and hear him blasphemed.

From then on the two sides argued fiercely. Finally someone suggested a way to break the impasse: write a creed to which all should subscribe. Six weeks later, several days before the council ended, the statement had been hammered out. The creed affirmed that Jesus was "from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, very God from very God, begotten not made, of the same substance as the Father..." Constantine himself suggested the key word of the creed, homoousius, meaning "of the same substance." Arius preferred the word

homoiousius, meaning "of similar substance." All but three bishops signed the creed. Arius and the others who refused to sign were banished.

In the closing hours of the conference, Constantine, moved by the heroism of those who had suffered for Christ under his pagan predecessors, is said to have caressed their wounds and kissed their empty eye sockets. Their scars bore strong witness that the Nicene creed was sound.

Interference

It seemed the issue was settled. But political winds changed. Constantine drifted toward Arianism and sided with the heretics. For two centuries, whoever held imperial power decided the fortunes of the theological factions.

Athanasius, for example, leader of those who argued for Christ's deity, was exiled five times for his views. This did not alter his staunch support of the creed. He realized the gap between sinful man and a holy God. Only God could bridge it. If Christ were fully God and fully man he could be that bridge but not otherwise. He had to be a man to represent us; he had to be God to overcome the infinite gap.

Ripples

The council of Nicea was important for many reasons. It established a precedent. Six other ecumenical councils would follow (see the box below). Each, like Nicea, tried to settle some thorny church problem by putting difficult questions to the collective wisdom of its bishops. If at the first Nicene council, political pressure was brought to bear and fair play sometimes suffered, at later councils these tendencies were aggravated. Finally, in spite of the power struggle at Nicea and political battles in the years following, the creed of Nicea, with its clear assertion of the deity of Christ, remains fundamental to the Church to this day.

Fascinating Facts. . .

- The Arian view that Jesus was created is taught by Jehovah's Witnesses today.
- Only those councils are called ecumenical which were "worldwide" councils, that is, councils which embraced both the Eastern and Western halves of the Roman Empire.
- On the first day of the Council of Nicea, Emperor Constantine would not immediately seat himself on the carved wooden throne erected for him. Out of respect for those bishops who had been tortured, he stood silent before it until the bishops compelled him to sit.
- Constantine had the Council meet at Nicea because of "the excellent temperature of the air, and in order that I might be present as a spectator and participator."
- The Council opened in June of 325. In the center of the meeting hall on a seat or throne were the four Gospels.
- Three accounts survive reporting on the council, the most lengthy by ancient church historian Eusebius.

In THEIR OWN WORDS. . .FROM the CREED of NICEA

NOTE: This creed is not to be confused with what is now known as the Nicene Creed.

"We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible. And we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from

the Father, only begotten, that is from the Father's substance, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father. Through him were made all things, both in heaven and on earth. For us and for our salvation he came down, was incarnate and became human. He suffered, rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens and is coming to judge the living and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Spirit. But those who say, 'there was once when he was not' and 'before he was begotten he was not,' and that 'he was made out of nothing,' or who affirm that 'the Son is of a different hypostasis or substance,' or that he is mutable or changeable - these the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes."

THE SEVEN ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Number	Place	Year	Action Taken
1	Nicea	325	Refuted Arianism. Adopted Nicene creed: Declared that Jesus is coeternal with the Father.
2	Constantinople	381	Condemned Apollinarian view that Jesus had no human will. Affirmed the deity of the Holy Spirit.
3	Ephesus	431	Condemned Pelagius' claim that man is not totally fallen; Declared Nestorianism heretical; i.e. that Jesus is two persons.
4	Chalcedon	451	Condemned Monophysite heresy that Jesus can't have two natures in one person.
5	Constantinople	553	Condemned Theodore of Mopseustia's and other writings as Nestorian.
6	Constantinople	680	Denied Monothelitism ("one will"). Said instead that Christ had both divine and human wills.
7	Nicea	787	Legitimized veneration of icons.

Theology Is Dirty Business (Editor's Notebook)

I was startled when the young theology doctoral student told me how "theology is really a very dirty business." Further conversation revealed that he did not mean there was anything immoral about it but just that theological questions have often been hammered out in the heat of passionate issues and circumstances. The various advocates see so much at stake, and the pursuit of truth so critical, that the battles can often get ugly. We read in this issue about Nicea, and see how even such a great theological contributor to the church as Athanasius was repeatedly exiled. How we might have preferred that the unfolding of theological understanding over the centuries be done in a more genteel manner. There is probably not one denomination represented by you our readers that was not born in some intense theological controversy and no doubt heated debates continue to rage even now. It used to trouble me to see how the first ecumenical or world wide council at Nicea was convened by a politician, the emperor Constantine. Instinctively it makes you want to sniff around for contamination. But God has seen fit to work out our salvation and growth in Christ in spite of our frailties, flaws and repeated failures. So perhaps it should not surprise us to discover that in the corporate body he works in and through our human limitations, corruption and personality conflicts in the church's ongoing quest to rightly understand and interpret the Word of God.

One final note. Constantine so often takes a beating for corrupting Christianity and making it the official state religion. He did not make it the state religion. That didn't come until some 70 years later in 381 with Emperor Theodosius. Quite the contrary, Constantine may have taken huge political risks in his identification as a Christian, and his assistance to the church, when the rest of the surrounding political power structure was still steeped in paganism.

-- Ken Curtis

III. vss. 1: 5 – 25 – The Birth of John the Baptist

Luke's gospel represents one of the lovely pictures of our Christmas Story. Read carefully this material and note the significance of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Speculate on this significance. Remember, our approach is to use "Gut Trip Analysis." Ask yourself questions concerning the "relationship" of the "experience" of these people." Provide a brief report from this perspective.

From our perspective, the relationship between John the Baptizer and Jesus supports the notion that Luke sets out to establish that Jesus is fully human.

Vss 1: 26 – 38 -- The Birth of Jesus Foretold

The danger we face in studying this material is its familiarity. Why this is a danger is that for 500 years we have made objects of the characters. In this way, we miss the richness of this story because of this objectification. Translate the following words from this section, using "Gut Trip Analysis." Ask, "What is my experience of these terms?"

My first notation, hastily made, was "This is Spiritual Oasis stuff." And, indeed it is. Our experience is that of moving deeply into a sense of wonder and awe; all of these things are associated with the Spiritual Oasis.

1. Angel Gabriel – **Our experience of "the Angel Gabriel" is that of an Awaklening Message, or that of an Awakening Messenger.**
2. Holy Spirit will come upon you -- **The "Holy Spirit" is the experience of our Freedom and fulfillment.**
3. the power of The Most High will overshadow you. **–These words can be translated as "blessed assurance," or the feeling of security and certainty.**
4. the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God -- **Our human experience of these words is that of an intimate relationship. The words "holy one" refers to the activity demonstrating "surrender."**

vss. 1: 39 – 45 -- Mary Visits Elizabeth

This section is both experiential and relational. From these two perspectives what is the HUMAN EXPERIENCE described and how can you relate to this story?

Again, these words provide a picture of nurturing, intimacy, and warmth. All of these words point to the best of our human nature.

Vss, 1: 46 – 56 -- Mary's Song: The Magnificat

This song almost is too beautiful. Certainly, by reading it out loud, it carries us into the Spiritual Oasis. Recall that the Spiritual Oasis is the place God intends we human creatures to live; this is "home." Our human existence is "on vacation." **Your assignment is to read this out loud, and then to reflect on how this exercise was experienced.**

Reading this poetry out loud is the experience of quiet, deep and personal reflection. Mary is moved into a deep place within herself as she invokes praise of God, thanksgiving for tender mercies, she states the idea of a reversal for those suffering now in their earthly existence will later enjoy their riches in the Spiritual Oasis, and an appeal of national history.

The second assignment is to speculate on why Luke includes this material, especially is this poetic form. This is not a good question to for me to answer. An English poetry scholar might add significant information about the use and place of poetry. However, when I use the poetic format, it is to give voice to something that comes out of my deepest struggles. It is assumed that Luke, being a scholar, and a sensitive man, thought likewise.

Vss. 1: 57 –66 -- The Birth of John the Baptist

Speculate on why Luke includes this story in his gospel. How does it contribute to his purpose of "Affirming Who Jesus is?"

This supports the experience of the human relationship between Jesus and John.

Vss. 1: 67 – 80 -- Zechariah's Song

Like "Mary's Song," this also may be too beautiful. **Your assignment is to read it out loud, and then to reflect on how this exercise was experienced.**

As I read this outloud, it struck me that this could be a summary statement for an theological credo: Opening with a statement of praise to God who provides an source for the awakenment of the

Jewish nation; provides a summary of how God provides salvation from spiritual sleep—the real enemy of all of us, and the awakenment to the significance of the covenant in “holiness” (surrender) and “righteousness” (to be balanced between the natural human existence and the Spiritual Oasis. Then, Zechariah names the reality of how this takes place as we move out of “darkeness” into the “rising son.” Zechariah experiences this as God’s “tender mercies.”

Vss. 2: 1 – 7 -- The Birth of Jesus

In light of our introductory comments concerning the issue of (pre) Arianism, speculate on the importance of this bit of faith history.

From our perspective, Luke tells this part of the story from the point of view of politics—Caesar Augustus and the census. The baby’s birth is recounted to support the experience of the human nature of Jesus.

All right folks, talk to me.

Just an encouraging word to those who have asked me about Jesus “divinity.” The material for next week in Luke 2:8 – 4:13 picks up the divine side of our experience of Jesus.

By the way, the Luke Chart is available now on line. However, for those who read things carefully, you’ll notice in the chart the mistake in next weeks assigned scripture lesson: 2:8 to 4: 3, is actually, 2: 8 to 4:13. The chart will be changed later as other minor adjustments are made.

Happy Trails! Pastor Bill