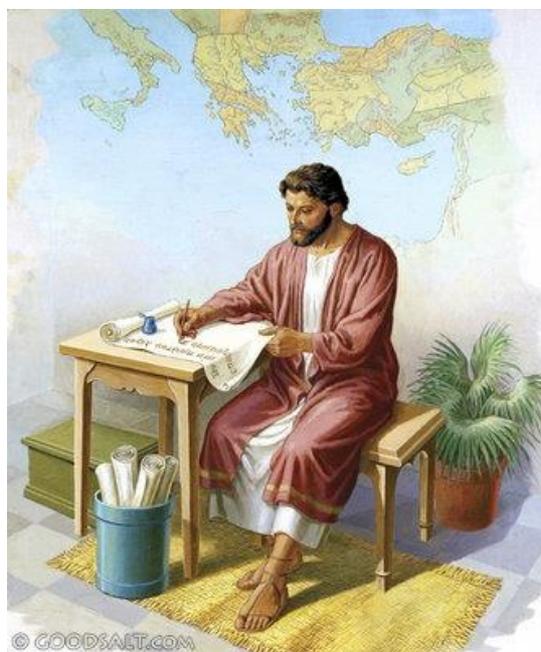


LUKE A SYRIAN

The Gospel for this church year is that according to Luke. He was a Gentile and very likely born in Antioch Syria. Luke was well educated – seen in his style of Greek writing – and it is believed that he wrote the book of Acts. He wrote the Gospel c. 80-85 CE. This gospel begins in Jerusalem, in the temple, with the message of the angel to Zechariah and closes with the disciples of Jesus praying in the same temple. The city of Jerusalem is central – in the gospel moving towards the temple, and in Acts, away from Jerusalem. In his gospel he gives an account of the childhoods of John the Baptist and Jesus and then turns to describing the Kingdom of God. At the close of Luke's two volume work he has Paul proclaiming the kingdom at the centre of the Roman world.

Jesus had come as Messiah of his people and was rejected by them. But the mission had not failed. Jesus had brought salvation.



Luke is a gifted storyteller, see the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. There are many parables in Luke which attest to his careful research – see Luke 1:1-3 – ‘Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us...I too decided...to write an orderly account.’ One of his sources was Mark’s Gospel, written first. The plot in Luke’s Gospel revolves around conflict; the primary one between Jesus and the religious authorities and reaches its culmination on the cross. The setting of the first conflict shows Jesus teaching and many teachers of the law sitting with him. There are more examples of conflict but the resolution is unexpected: resurrection, an act of God, and ascension: Chapter 24.

I love the way Luke rounds off one subject before passing on to another e.g. ‘Mary remained with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to her home.’ He then goes on to write about the birth of John. Later after finishing with John, so to speak, he speaks of Jesus. Dante named Luke the ‘chronicler of Christ’s gentleness of character’.

The softer side of Jesus appealed to Luke. Jesus was open towards 'outcast' Samaritans; he was a friend of sinners and more women are listed positively in Luke than in the others three gospels together. Luke sees Jesus as having a deep concern for Gentiles – no wonder he himself was attracted to him.

Luke describes Jesus as Prophet, Healer and Teacher. A prophet is God's spokesperson; a healer is God's restorer; a teacher is God's instructor. In all these roles another beautiful quality is evident – service. There is no domination. He could tell his disciples, 'I am among you as one who serves.' Luke 22:7. Jesus words were healing, saving words, 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.'

Jesus was a man of prayer and Luke has a special interest in prayer. The Jews took prayer for granted – that is what they did; it alerted their dependence on God. In the other three Gospels Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, after the multiplication of the loaves and after he healed many in Capernaum. Luke speaks of Jesus praying in eight further situations – at his baptism Luke 3:21; when Jesus slips away to a lonely place to pray Luke 5:16; he prays all night before selecting the twelve disciples Luke 6:12; he prayed before Peter's confession of him as Messiah Luke 9:18; later he would tell Peter that he had prayed especially for him Luke 22:32; he prayed at the transfiguration Luke 9:28-29 and it was the sight of him at prayer that moved the disciples to ask him to be teach them how to pray Luke 11:1; he prayed on the cross for all who had engineered his death Luke 23:34 and finally, the surrender of his life to his heavenly Father was a prayer Luke 23:46.

Luke depicts Jesus as a champion of the poor who was not averse to the owning of property provided that social responsibility came with it. He also saw Jesus as the friend of sinners. Luke sees sinners as basically sick people and only the sick need a doctor; sinners are grateful people because only those whose debts have been redeemed can know true thankfulness; and sinners show the nature of God as a loving, forgiving parent. He indicates that sinners are closer to God than the righteous. Another deep concern is Luke's emphasis on repentance. The word occurs more frequently than in Mark or Matthew.

In Luke's passion narrative there is no agitation, only forgiveness and healing. Jesus is serenely in communion with his Father to the very end, 'Father into your hands I commend my spirit.' Later, he indicates that Joseph of Arimathea had not agreed to the Sanhedran's plan and action and is therefore fit to bury Jesus. The road to Emmaus story is a liturgy of the Word – he opened the Scriptures - and a liturgy of the Eucharist as Jesus broke bread with the two travellers. In everything Jesus opens their minds and, hopefully, ours too.

In all, Luke's Gospel is one of great pardons – forgiveness, absolution, mercy and grace. May this year bring these gifts in abundance to each one. AMEN