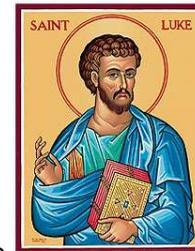


AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Luke's gospel is the longest of all four of the gospels yet it is only the first part of Luke's writings as the Acts of the Apostles also comes from his pen. Together these two books comprise over a quarter of the New Testament. It combines Luke's account of the life of Jesus as well as that of the early church. As the gospel was written some 20 years after Mark and he clearly uses Mark as a source as well as a text known by biblical scholars as "Q". We first need to realise that all the gospels are not so much concerned with biographical history as a theological presentation and it is interesting to note that the number of writings on the theology of Luke's gospel is astounding. Part of the theology is the way the Gospel story of Jesus prepares for what happens in Acts especially to Peter, Stephen and Paul.

The three Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke are often referred to as the synoptic gospels. The word "synoptic means literally "with the same eyes" or "from the same perspective." Luke in fact uses almost 60 percent of Mark's Gospel but he gives those stories a different emphasis by changing some of the words and the order they are presented. It is these changes that enable theologians to understand more fully the theological message that Luke is trying to communicate. Drawing from their studies we can come to a greater understanding of the text and its context in the time and culture around the year 80 to 85 or 90. From this we have to take the next step to ask what it may mean for us in the context of our lives here in our culture and twenty-

first century. So although we know quite a bit about Luke's theology we really don't know where he lived and wrote. Neither do we know where the community for whom wrote was located. We can say though that when Mark was writing the Christians weren't sure where Judaism left off and Christianity began. However by Luke's time there was a clear cut division theologically, politically and culturally and they were clearly two different religions.

Let us identify some characteristics of Luke's gospel:

Missionary Luke's community seems very concerned about evangelisation and were probably sending out missionary teams to the surrounding towns.

Universal Luke is anxious to communicate a Christ who is universal and all inclusive. It is not directed at the Jews alone but to people of all races. He communicates a Jesus who is life-giving and unifying for all peoples of the world.

Forgiveness Luke's gospel is the most broad minded and the most forgiving. Luke so often has Jesus forgiving people. It seems likely that even at this early stage of Christianity there were those who were beginning to depict a Jesus as a very legalistic and narrow provincial kind of messiah available only to the Jews.

Merciful Luke presents a God who is generous and merciful much more than Matthew or Mark. He emphasises Jesus ministry to the social outcasts, to gentiles and the poor. There seems to be no limit to God's generosity and forgiveness.

Women More than any other Gospel Luke brings women into the life of Jesus. He always portrays them in a good light. The culture of that time saw women as uneducated and whose opinions were of little value, Luke on the other hand portrays them as competent, sensible and valuable.

The Long Haul By Luke's day the church was changing from seeing the time for the return of Jesus as being very soon to becoming more aware that it was probably going to be a long time in the future.

Holy Spirit More than any other Gospel Luke focuses attention on the work of the Holy Spirit. This culminates in him writing Acts which is sometimes called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. For Luke the Holy Spirit is behind everything.

The Kingdom Now For Luke the Second Coming is already a present reality. The Kingdom is already here as a lived reality now. The Kingdom of God is in you and among you. So we are to rejoice and live it not worrying about the final days.

Renunciation For Luke to be a disciple one has to let go of everything, possessions, prestige and all self-centred concerns. He epitomises the saying "the first shall be last."

New Social Relationships Jesus in Luke advocates a whole new social pattern. It is an egalitarian pattern rather than a hierarchical one. He will have nothing to do with exploitation or domination. By teaching people how they can work together on an equal basis Luke's Jesus was certainly a real threat to the social pattern of the day.

Nonviolence Jesus' death is shown to be the way to overcome evil by nonviolence and Luke presents this way as being normative for all who follow Jesus.

The Absolute Reign of God Because we are created in the image of God Jesus points out that whatever has God's image stamped on it belongs totally to God and owes no allegiance to anyone or anything else.

During this year of Luke we will explore the Gospel together and perhaps notice in our weekend Masses and in our own personal reading of the gospel how these different characteristics are worked out in the Gospel and how they apply to our lives today.