



Morning service 23/11/25

With Morgan Britton

Luke: Good news you can trust
Luke 1: 1 - 4

Luke 1 :1-4: Good news you can trust

I don't know about you, but I often wonder who or what we can truly trust these days. We long for good, reliable news. With that in mind turn with me to Luke's gospel, chapter 1:1-4. Luke's gospel is about Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Messiah.

Luke begins by explaining how he went about writing the biography of Jesus and why. There are four wonderful things we can draw out from the opening four verses: it's real, it's reliable, it's reassuring and it demands a response.

It's real By the time Luke came to write his gospel there was already a fair amount written about Jesus. What's fascinating is that even though, he was a second-generation Christian and not an eyewitness of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Luke wrote persuasively and with certainty of the reality of Jesus. He says, "...the things that have been fulfilled among us". The word fulfilled here points us back to the Old Testament. Jesus is the fulfilment of everything the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets wrote about at this time in real history in a real place called Galilee. The one they all wrote about appeared as a real man! For Luke, Jesus of Nazareth is real! And that's important for us to understand as we begin to walk through Luke's gospel together. We are not engaging with fiction or with allegory as if Jesus' story is just about nice moral lessons, which need to be unlocked. And we are not even engaging with exaggerated accounts based on a real person. We are engaging with a real historical narrative. I'm not sure how familiar you all are with the Star Wars movies. But in Episode 7, the main characters are trying to discover the legends of Luke Skywalker when they encounter Han Solo, one of Luke's old friends, who says, "It's true, the Force, the Jedi, all of it, it's all true". Or in the words of the 18th century hymnwriter, Joseph Hart,

"A Man there is, a real Man,
With wounds still gaping wide,
From which rich streams of blood once ran,
In hands, and feet, and side.
'Tis no wild fancy of our brains,
No metaphor we speak.
The same dear Man in heaven now reigns
That suffered for our sake."

A man so real and important that Western history itself is divided into two: BC and AD; before and after his birth. 2000 years later, there are between 2.26 and 2.6 billion people around the world who profess to follow Jesus as Lord and Saviour and who testify to know his love and forgiveness at work in their lives. Do you? This Jesus really is who Luke claims he is! But we are not called to blind belief! Why? because it's reliable.

It's reliable Verse, 3, Luke claims to have investigated everything carefully from beginning to end and records an orderly account. When you study history as I did the first lesson was always, substantiate your facts with sources and references. The same is true of preaching. That's why it's good practice to have a Bible open so you can check what I'm saying. Credible war historians are good but it's even better to go and read the diary and letters of Private John Jones who actually fought in the war. Luke is saying that these facts were handed down by the first eyewitnesses. You can't get much more reliable than that. One of the key points that evangelical scholars and apologists emphasise is if what Luke wrote is true and it was distributed within 30 years of the events, it means it was written within living memory of those eyewitnesses. And that leads to two important points. Because it was written in living memory, if it was all fabricated, Luke's gospel would have been laid aside. And secondly it meant that any sceptics could interrogate those witnesses. Luke's gospel has stood the test of time. And that should bring reassurance to us.

It's reassuring In verse 3, we see that Luke is writing to Theophilus the same person to whom the book of Acts is addressed. We're not entirely sure who Theophilus was, but he seems to have been a seeker or believer and a person of prominence within the Roman Empire, given that Luke refers to him as "Most Excellent." in Acts 24, when Paul stands before Felix, he also refers to him as "Most Excellent," suggesting this was a title of respect or rank. Theophilus means Lover of God, but he has certainly been taught the Christian gospel,

possibly by Luke himself offering him reassurance, clarity and certainty of the things he has been taught about Jesus. We desire clarity and assurance don't we. Maybe you can think of a time when you were going on holiday and you're about 20 minutes into the journey when you start to wonder whether you turned the water or electricity off. And you're sure you did but you can't get rid of this nagging thought that you might have forgotten. And so, you drive all the way back home just to find that you did indeed turn off the water and electricity, and you set off again reassured. It's a silly picture, but it captures what we are like. If that's how we are in silly matters, then it's certainly true when it comes to the spiritual. When it comes to our beliefs, doubting and forgetfulness cripples us spiritually. And Luke does not want Theophilus to doubt any matter of the faith he has been taught. He's presumably been taught about all that Luke writes about Jesus, the virgin birth, the sinlessness, the healing miracles, the exorcisms, the shutting up of the religious leaders with words of unmatched wisdom, the parables, the immense suffering of the cross, and glorious resurrection and ascension. The fact that he came to seek and to save the lost, to reconcile us to God. Surely, it's all too good to be true. And we like Theophilus need to be reminded of these things we believe. Using Scripture, we can reassure ourselves of what we have been taught and what we believe. The apostle's creed says: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (universal) Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

When doubts grow or when we forget, don't let faith falter. Open the Scriptures. Rehearse what we believe. Remind our souls of the truths God has given us. Luke wrote this Gospel so we could rest securely in Christ. Be confident, friends; our faith is built on solid ground. So, what do we do with all this? If Luke's gospel is real, reliable, and reassuring, it deserves a response! It demands a response.

Response Friends, as we begin our series in Luke's gospel, our prayer is that if you haven't yet believed these things, you would take them to heart. We are reading about a real man, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world who truly lived, truly died, truly rose, and truly lives today. He will return as Judge of the living and the dead. He alone can reconcile us to God. Go home and read the Gospel for yourself. You can read it in one afternoon, or slowly, chapter by chapter. If you don't have a Bible at home let me know, I'm sure I'll be able to find one for you here. If you don't like reading, listen to it. It's even available on YouTube in its entirety. And as you read or listen to it, go in with clear head and open mind. Ask God, "if you're there, speak to me through this." As a church, we believe the Bible is God's words for us, put down on paper by normal men like Luke who followed Jesus. All Scripture is God breathed, as one verse says. And if something puzzles you (there's plenty in the Bible that will do that), reach out to us; we would love to help. As we read Luke's gospel, we are meeting with Jesus! Luke's hope was that any who might read this short book, might turn and trust in Jesus, and be saved. For those who know and love the Lord Jesus already, our prayer for you in the words of JC Ryle is that as we begin Luke's gospel, we will have an "earnest desire to know more of the truth as it is in Jesus and with a hearty determination to do what we can to spread the knowledge of that truth throughout the world." May God use this Gospel to deepen our assurance, strengthen our faith, and help us know Christ more clearly and love Him more dearly. Friends, I am not exhorting us to trust in Jesus of Nazareth, just because he was a real person in history, otherwise I might as well be telling us to put our trust in Henry VIII, Alfred the Great, or even in me. The historical reality of Jesus' existence is an important reason of course but trust in Jesus because he is the Son of God! He has given himself for our sins to mend our broken friendship with God. He has conquered death in his resurrection. He has ascended to heaven. And where he is we can also be one day. And he is returning to earth one day as our judge holding the power of life and death! Do not harden your heart but believe upon him and you will be saved! AMEN