

St. Luke, Evangelist

St. Luke 1:1-4

October 18, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oft-cited is the ~~dictum~~ ^{assertion} from Karl Marx, “Religion is the opium of the people.” It’s part of his larger point that man invents religion to ease his suffering. So, religion is useful; it provides a comforting illusion that pushes back the horrors of reality. The usefulness of religion, though, is an enemy to the socialist project of revolution. Only when people confront their oppression will they rise up and overthrow the oppressors.

Twentieth-century America embraced religion’s usefulness. The Prohibition movement and the Salvation Army sought to improve humanity through liberation from liquor and social action to feed, clothe, and educate the poor. Norman Vincent Peale and the Power of Positive Thinking movement used religion as a means to self-improvement. As a child I went to Sunday school with kids whose parents just dropped them off. They wanted their kids to learn some morals while they went out for breakfast. It really didn’t matter if it was true, as long as it helped you behave.

But St. Luke, whose feast we celebrate today, won’t allow that. Luke says he is writing his Gospel **“that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”**

Karl Marx said, “Man makes religion, religion does not make man.” St. Luke says he has eyewitnesses to the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Those two worldviews are incompatible.

There’s so much going on, I wouldn’t blame you if you hadn’t noticed, but ... there’s an election coming up. As usual, all sides engage in apocalyptic rhetoric, this is the most important election ever. From my point of view, there’s a completely different struggle going on that transcends American

politics, although you can see it at work throughout the ruins of Western Christendom. Last Karl Marx quote, from the same paragraph as the “Opium of the people” quote: “The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.” That’s the battle raging in the world all around us. It begins with the philosophers, and ends with fire in the streets.

But there is no need whatsoever to despair. St. Luke’s Gospel does not arm us with political propaganda. St. Luke’s Gospel does not comfort us with mere platitudes. St. Luke’s Gospel gives us the one thing we need: the truth. Listen to how He begins the record of Jesus:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

Many people have written about Jesus, Luke says. But it seems good to him to also write about Jesus, because Luke has a *perfect understanding*. I don’t like the translation; it sounds boastful. But Luke, a physician, is also a historian, and a better rendering of it would be, “having carefully investigated [the history].” And like a good scientist, he wants to put that history into *an orderly account*.

How did he do that? He tells us he spoke to the eyewitnesses. Luke seems to have interviewed Mary, the blessed mother of Jesus; it’s his Gospel that gives us on-the-ground details like, “When we got to Bethlehem there was nowhere to stay, and that’s when I went into labor,” and, “Then the craziest thing happened, these shepherds showed up, worshipped the baby, and told us they’d seen angels.” And then, completely from the mother’s viewpoint is the story about when they lost the 12-year old Jesus, and found Him in the temple.

St. Luke puts it all together with literary skill. It's Luke who gives us some of the most compelling stories Jesus told, like the parable of the Good Samaritan, or the Prodigal Son.

One atheist was converted to Christianity when he set out to disprove the geographic details in *The Acts of the Apostles*, Luke's sequel to his Gospel. It turns out Luke is painstakingly accurate in the details, just what you'd want from a physician.

Well, that's all very interesting, but Luke isn't just trying to write a good book. He dedicates it to a man named *Theophilus*. That's probably a nickname or a pseudonym; it means "Lover of God." By using this word, Luke wants to ^{write} ~~include~~ you to explore all the details about Jesus. Why? **"That you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed."** *Instructed* is the translation for *κατηχήθης*, *catechesis*, which literally means "to cause to ring in the ears."

What rings in your ears? What's clamoring for your attention? Are you still being catechized by the *Catechism*, by the Scriptures ... or by the world? Are the world's priorities and anxieties ringing in your ears?

Put in, as it were, some noise-cancelling headphones, and tune in to St. Luke's Gospel:

Glory be to God on high, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men. That's from Luke's Gospel.

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word. Notice how Luke keeps God's Word of peace recurring?

At the end of His Gospel, the risen Jesus appears and says, **"Peace to you."** Then He forgives their sins and sends the Apostles out as eyewitnesses to the resurrection. They have His peace, and are now

unafraid of beatings, persecution, crosses, and beheadings. They have the resurrection. What more do you need?

you You who are baptized into this Jesus, you who are recipients of this peace, cannot be defeated by any revolution, any persecution, any cultural dissolution. You are baptized into Jesus, who trampled down death by His death. Be not anxious! Be at peace! +INJ+

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts in Christ Jesus.

*Christopher S. Esget, Pastor
Immanuel Evangelical-Lutheran Church, Alexandria, Virginia*

*need no
opium.
no delusion
regarding
this
world's
corruption.*