

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*



small parts. BIG STORY

Luke 1:1–80

Introduction: Trailers

If you've got a Netflix subscription like me, you might know that one of the menu items says, '*Trailers you've watched.*' When I flick through the trailers I've watched, I realise I've probably only gone on to watch, a maximum of one in five of the actual shows. Trailers are like the forward, or an executive summary on the back of a book; we look at trailers or we read executive summaries to see if it's worth our time watching or reading whatever we're looking at, because they give us a glimpse of all that is to come.

Today we begin a new series where over the next 18 months, in four blocks, we'll walk through the Gospel of Luke together; we'll land this series at Easter 2027. Our series is called **King and Kingdom Come**, and it's introduced to us in a trailer that gives us a peek into all the big themes that follow.

As we start our journey today, we're looking at the trailer that is called Luke Chapter 1, the chapter that gives us every indication that the rest of the story is going to be worth reading, worth studying, worth thinking deeply about, and best of all, it gives us an indication that the

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

Gospel of Luke has some significant value in applying what it says to the way we live our lives for those of us who are, of perhaps for those who are thinking about becoming, followers of Jesus.

So, let's dive in by noting the unique way that the author, Luke, starts his Gospel account. In **Luke Chapter 1 Verses 1-4** we read, *"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."*

These four verses give us an insight into why all that follows is going to be so gripping; four verses with some big claims about why what Luke is writing to the gentile (i.e. non-Jewish) Theophilus, should be trusted. While Theophilus was the initial recipient, the bigger audience was always going to be those who hear the Good News of Jesus as it starts to inch away from its home in Jerusalem, into Judea, and Samaria, and onto the ends of the earth. In these opening four verses Luke wanted people wide-and far to know two significant things:

- **Firstly, because of everything he had heard and read, especially from accounts that have been handed down from eyewitnesses, he says, *"I myself have carefully investigated everything."***

I love this. Luke has taken a long and careful look at everything he is about to tell us. This is undoubtedly why there is so much fresh material in his Gospel, which is why it's long and why it's going to take us a while to get through it! In fact, about 35% of this Gospel is fresh material, not found in the other Gospels, including:

- **The infancy narratives** that describe the birth and childhood of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- **Various parables** including The Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Parable of the Rich Fool.

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

- **Miracles** such as the raising of the widow's son at Nain, the healing of the woman with an 18-year illness, and the healing of the ten lepers.
- **Teachings** such as Jesus' sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth and his weeping over Jerusalem.
- **Events** like the mission of the seventy disciples, the penitent thief on the cross, and Jesus' ascension to heaven, which only Luke mentions.

Collectively, all this unique material significantly highlights the compassionate ministry of Jesus towards marginalised groups such as the poor, women, or anyone that's on the edges. That's why this Gospel is known as the social gospel or the gospel of mercy - it's directed at real people going through real life at the margins – and with Jesus as the centrepiece, it's the gospel that challenges us, more than any other, about how put our faith into action.

- **Secondly, and this is why Chapter 1 is so profound, not only has “*he himself carefully investigated everything,*”** Luke has also looked at all of that “*from the beginning.*”

One of the significantly unique things about Luke's Gospel is the early introduction of John the Baptist, the forerunner who points to Jesus. In the other gospels he's introduced as an adult. In Matthew Chapter 3 Verse 1, “*Preaching in the Desert of Judea.*” In Mark, Chapter 1 Verse 4, John's introduced, “*Baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*” In the Gospel of John, Chapter 1 Verse 6, we read, “*There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so through him all people might believe.*” And yet for Luke, we go right back to the beginning of John's unlikely conception with his parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, long before his preaching and baptism ministry. Luke wants his listeners to be enticed into the bigger story.

So, unique to Luke, the pairing of the conception narratives of John and Jesus presents a powerful theological trailer about both men - John's conception is miraculous, although natural. The conception of Jesus, by dramatic contrast, is miraculous and somewhat unnatural,

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary, a young unmarried virgin. By detailing these two early conception narratives, Luke is making a powerful introduction that Jesus is the prophesied true Son of God, and the ultimate Spirit-filled preacher of the Father's message – and even the preborn John recognises this as divine and **“leaps in his mother's womb”** when visited by the pregnant Mary - a remarkable coffee date for Elizabeth and Mary! Luke goes further back than anyone else to show that the fulfilment of prophecy from hundreds of years ago is on the way!

These opening verses help us see that God's big plan is unfolding and introduces us to themes we'll see right through the Gospel. That's why Luke doesn't just drop us in at Jesus' birth like the other gospel writers. He gives us a full opening trailer in 80 verses: angels, elderly parents, miraculous pregnancies, prophetic songs, and a baby called John who was a Baptist who later grows up to wear camels' hair and snacks on locusts and wild honey.

The themes in Luke 1:5-80

In Verses 5-80 [that we won't read], we see classic stories that we know so well, but stories nonetheless that are only told by Luke. The angel Gabriel announces to the priest Zechariah that his elderly wife Elizabeth would miraculously bear a son who they would call John, who would prepare the way for Jesus, the “Lord.” Zechariah doubts that this is possible because his wife is **“well along in years”** (a very diplomatic statement if ever there is one on that subject!), so he's struck mute until the promise is fulfilled.

We see Gabriel then appearing to Mary, announcing that she would conceive Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and Mary, unlike Zechariah, responds with faith and praise, declaring her feelings in a famous song today as The Magnificat ... **“My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!”**

The chapter closes with the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah's voice returns as he prophesies God's salvation in a song that is today called, The Benedictus, which is the Latin name derived from its opening words meaning, “Blessed.” John is then described as **“growing and becoming**

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

strong in spirit, living in the desert until he appears publicly to Israel” which is where the other three Gospel writers begin their narratives of John.

As a trailer to all that follows, these 80 verses cover a lot of unique ground, and here are where the major themes come in that will become very familiar in our journey through the rest of Luke. Let me introduce these themes to you:

- Firstly, theme No. 1 is that **GOD WORKS WITH THE ORDINARY**

When the angel Gabriel shows up to Zechariah in Verse 11, it’s the first time that God has spoken since we finished in the last Old Testament prophetic book of Malachi, some 400 years ago (or the context of our preaching schedule here at Windsor Park, four weeks ago!). It’s kind of like a dormant volcano that starts to show signs of life – things are starting to heat up. But they’re heating up with someone we haven’t heard of before. Zechariah could be described as someone very ... ordinary. While coming from a line of priests, this wasn’t entirely uncommon in his lineage, and being in the temple was really the luck of the draw which perhaps felt like that for Zechariah because he self-described himself as being an old man, so perhaps old is like ... 56 (because I’m 55 and that’s not old!). Whatever the age, Zechariah and Elizabeth were well beyond the age where children were naturally considered possible, and no doubt they carried the grief of that in a society where having children was a sign of God’s blessing.

What this story shows us is that when God decides to break 400 years of silence, he doesn’t go to Caesar, he doesn’t even go to Herod. He shows up in the temple to an *ordinary old priest* and his wife. God takes their small story of longing and folds it into his big story of salvation, and this is a classic theme that Luke will retell time-and-time again. God loves to use the ordinary; he delights in working through people who think, “*Surely not me.*”

At the beginning of this in-depth reading of Luke, don’t think that this is for those who you might considered to be “super spiritual”; you know the ones you’re thinking of, the ones who wake up at 4am to pray, fast twice a week, and can quote Leviticus backwards. No, in this Gospel you

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

will see that God uses people like you and me. People who burn toast, people who forget anniversaries, and sometimes ... occasionally ... those who lose their sanctification on the Northern Motorway. Don't disqualify yourself from being used by God because Luke goes to great pains to show you otherwise. Your ordinary life may be the very place God chooses to do something extraordinary.

- The second theme we'll see is that **GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES**

If you highlight it as you go along, you'll notice that Luke 1 is dripping with Old Testament references:

- The words that we hear the angel Gabriel saying to Zechariah about Elizabeth having a baby in Verse 13 echo the words that we see God saying to Abraham about Sarah having a baby in Genesis 17.
- The lyrics of the song that we see Mary reciting in Verses 46-55 echo the lyrics of the song that Hannah sings in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Centuries apart, an expectant Mary responds to God in the same way that Hannah responds when both are surprised by their pregnancies, Hannah because she has been waiting for so long and Mary because she hasn't waited at all, but both women find delight in what has taken place as they see God at work in and through them.
- The lyrics of Zechariah's song in Verse 68-79 are basically a remix of God's promises to David, Abraham, and to the prophets throughout the Old Testament.

Luke wants us to see in his trailer to the gospel that God is not making it up as He goes along. Jesus is not Plan B. He is the fulfilment of a story that's been building for centuries. If he promises it, he delivers. Full stop. Luke Chapter 1 tells us that the God who acted then, still keeps his word now. So, when God says his promises to us, "*You are forgiven,*" or "*I'll never leave you,*" or "*My grace is sufficient for you,*" or "*You are loved and have value,*" those are not empty words. Luke is going to remind us that God keeps his promises over-and-over again.

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

- The third theme that we can see is that **GOD'S PLANS ARE BIGGER THAN WE THINK**
We might think that Luke Chapter 1 is just setting us up for Christmas next week, the birth of Jesus. Perhaps this chapter is like an Advent sermon, preparation for a silent night when joy came to the world. But when Mary sings her song, she's not just celebrating a baby, Mary's song isn't just talking about an impending birth, it's so much bigger than that – she's singing of a global revolution where in Verse 50 we see that God's mercy extends from generation to generation, where in Verse 51 we see that the proud are scattered, where in Verse 52 we see that the humble are lifted up, where in Verse 53 we see that the hungry are filled with good things and the rich are sent away empty. Revolutionary!

Zechariah's song is similar: it's not just about one baby, it's about the tender mercy of God reaching every generation, salvation shining like the dawn to those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, a mercy to guide our feet into the path of peace (Verse 79). And doesn't the world need that today more than ever?!

These two songs show us that God's plan is not just about personal spirituality. Luke 1 blows that apart and shows us that God's plan is about renewing the whole world. Justice. Mercy. Salvation. God's plan is cosmic. He's turning the world upside down, so if we follow the Jesus that Luke goes on to show us, we're part of something much bigger than these few moments in church.

Practical Application

So, what do we do with these big themes as we see them previewed for us?

1. With the theme of **GOD WORKING WITH THE ORDINARY**, I'd encourage to be open to God using you. Don't write yourself off as too ordinary. God delights in ordinary.
2. With the theme of **GOD KEEPING HIS PROMISES**, I'd encourage you to trust God's promises. Even when you don't see it yet, hold on. His word never fails.

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*

3. With the theme of knowing that **GOD'S PLANS ARE BIGGER THAN WE THINK**, let's think about how Mary and Zechariah sang. They sang before the promises were fully visible. What song of faith do you need to sing this week?

You're in the script

Luke 1 is the trailer of the Gospel, the Good News, of Luke. It says: *Here's what's coming. Here's how God's promises are lining up. Here's why you can trust the story of Jesus.*

But the beautiful thing is, we're not just spectators watching a trailer. We're written into the story. God is still speaking, still surprising, still faithful, still turning the world upside down through ordinary people like you and me. If God can use an old priest who doubted, and a teenage girl who said yes, then he can use us, right here, right now.

So, as we begin this journey through Luke, may we be a people who believe God still works with the ordinary, who trust that he keeps his promises, and who live as though his plans are bigger than we can imagine.

The trailer's been played. The story is unfolding. Ordinary people, faithful promises, extraordinary plans. Let's step into it together.

Amen.

Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.



Reflecting on Sunday 14th September 2025: Last week Grant introduced a message on mission talking about how our lives could be a walking review of Jesus, as we rely heavily on reviews these days for all parts of our lives. Did you write a Google review for Windsor Park this week, or take a step toward being part of the solution if your experience hasn't been positive?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. Luke says he ***“carefully investigated everything.”*** How does that shape your confidence in the gospel story? How do you investigate things to make sure they have credibility?
2. God works through “ordinary” people like Zechariah and Mary. Where might God be using your ordinary life for his purposes?
3. Mary and Zechariah sang songs of faith before promises were fully visible. What “song of faith” could you sing this week? What worship song is on repeat in your head?
4. Luke 1 shows God keeps his promises across generations. Which of God’s promises do you most need to hold onto right now?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed.**

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 21st September 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*



Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. There are so many valuable resources for you add to your toolbox about the Book of Luke. One of our favourite producers of content is **The Bible Project**. They have an excellent series on **The Gospel of Luke**, so to get some other perspectives and voices, click here: <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-luke/>
2. Click here (<https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/in-what-ways-is-lukes-gospel-distinctive/>) to read an article called, **In what ways is Luke's gospel distinctive?** to gain some perspectives on the uniqueness of the Gospel of Luke.
3. The **YouVersion Bible App** is the world's leading app to not only read the Bible on, but to see a range of other useful resources. Download the app and create your own account and then set Windsor Park Baptist Church as 'My Church.' Each week we recommend a short devotional plan (you'll get a notification about a new plan each week). This week we'll recommend **God's Extraordinary Lessons in Ordinary Things**, which encourages us to be alert to our surroundings: everyday appearances of people, places, and things that are signs of God working and speaking to us.