

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
The Festival of St. Luke, the Evangelist
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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Testify to the certainty of the Scriptures

¹Many have undertaken to compile an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²an account like those handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word from the beginning. ³For this reason, it seemed good to me also, since I followed everything closely from the beginning, to write an orderly account to you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you were taught.

⁴⁴[Jesus] said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶He said to them, “This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.

⁴⁹Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰He led them out as far as the vicinity of Bethany. He lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹And while he was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵²So they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God. Amen.

—Luke 1:1-4; 24:44-53

I am just so happy. I have to say it, “The Milwaukee Brewers are going to the World Series.” Now let me be clear. I also cheer for the Arizona Diamondbacks, but I grew up cheering for the Brewers. It’s been 44 years since they have been to the World Series, and they have never won the World Series. I was almost 6 years old the last time they made it to the World Series. And even though I don’t remember much of the games, I do remember crying when they lost to the St. Louis Cardinals.

But this is the year. I have a hopeful certainty that the Brewers are going to win the World Series. As a fan of the team, I’m excited for the Brewers. I gladly wear my Brewers gear in public. I want people to know that “The Brewers are National League Champions.”

Do we always have that same excitement about Jesus? Why is it that I will gladly tell anyone I meet that my Brewers are going to the World Series, but I hesitate to testify about my Savior Jesus? Do I readily let everybody know that I am a faithful follower of Christ? Do you?

Today we are celebrating the commemoration of St. Luke, the Evangelist. Luke was a man who did not hesitate to testify about Jesus. Now, some people knew him as a doctor. He was a Gentile who became a follower of Christ. Luke actually spent quite a bit of time with the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys. The apostle Paul refers to him as “**the dearly loved doctor**” (Colossians 4:14).

He spent time with Paul on his missionary journeys, and he was with Paul when Paul was getting ready to be executed for his faith. We heard words from Paul’s letter that he wrote to Timothy. This was Paul’s last letter that he wrote before he died. He’s writing to Pastor Timothy and notice what he says, “**Make every effort to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this present world, has forsaken me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me**” (2 Timothy 4:9-11). Paul took great comfort in having his friend and gospel partner Luke with him. And with Paul in a dungeon waiting for his execution, it was certainly beneficial to have Doctor Luke with him.

But we know Luke best as the man God used to write the third Gospel of the New Testament. He was excited and thrilled to share what he had learned about Jesus.

He wrote this Gospel to a man named “Theophilus.” We don’t know too much about Theophilus. Some people speculate that he was a prominent Christian in the early church. He may have been a lawyer or some prominent figure in society. Some have suggested that he may have paid for the parchment on which Luke wrote this Gospel. Others surmise that growing up Luke was a servant in Theophilus’ household. We don’t know for sure. Theophilus means “lover of God,” so maybe he is writing to people who love God.

Even though we don't know exactly who Theophilus is, we know why Luke wrote this Gospel. In the beginning of this letter, Luke writes, **"Many have undertaken to compile an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, an account like those handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word from the beginning. For this reason, it seemed good to me also, since I followed everything closely from the beginning, to write an orderly account to you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you were taught."**

By the time Luke wrote this Gospel, other reports of the life and teachings of Jesus were beginning to circulate. We don't know if Luke had access to Matthew and Mark's Gospels, but Luke wanted to write an orderly account of the life and ministry of Jesus. He writes about things that the other Gospel writers did not include, but his purpose is **"so that you may know the certainty of the things you were taught."**

You see, Doctor Luke was a researcher. He investigated the events of Jesus' life. These are not fables. These are not fairy tales. These are historical, real events about a real person named Jesus. He talked to people who spent time with Jesus. And God used his investigation and inspired him to write these words about Jesus. And these words are written **"so that you may know the certainty of the things you were taught."**

Here's my prayer today. I pray that you are encouraged to **testify to the certainty of the Scriptures**. You see, sometimes we are hesitant to do that. We can spout out without hesitation our joy about our favorite sports teams, but sometimes we're hesitant to share the most important message. God is using Luke today to encourage us and help us **testify to the certainty of the Scriptures**.

If you have the time this week, I would encourage you to read the entire Gospel according to Saint Luke. It is so beautiful. Of course, we have a great portion of this Gospel memorized as we recite the beautiful account of Jesus' birth. Even the little children memorize Luke 2 every year. Many of us know the account, **"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register."** It's just so beautiful how he tells of Jesus' birth.

But there's even more beauty in Luke's Gospel. He writes some of the most beautiful depictions of Christ's life and death. He gives some very picturesque descriptions of what Jesus went through on the cross. He uses beautiful language to describe Jesus' beautiful sacrifice for us.

Sometimes you may see a picture of an ox depicting Luke's Gospel. Over the ages that's the logo they have given him. On the cover of our service folder, you see Luke writing with an ox with wings next to him. Some people have used the imagery of Ezekiel and Revelation to depict the Gospel writers. For example, Matthew is depicted as a winged man because he begins by tracing the human lineage of Christ. Mark is the winged lion because he opens his Gospel with the voice of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness. John is depicted as an eagle because from his Gospel through Revelation, he carries us on eagle's wings to the throne of heaven. And Luke is the winged ox because of his detailed account of the sacrificial death of our Lord. His Gospel has some of the most beautiful and vivid descriptions of Jesus offering himself as the sacrifice for the world.

Just read through this Gospel this week. And keep in mind how Luke focuses on Jesus' compassion and love for the outcasts of society. Remember that Luke is a doctor. He has a special perspective of Jesus as the Great Physician for our souls. Luke's Gospel is so beautifully written, and he writes this Gospel **"so that you may know the certainty of the things you were taught."**

Well, what were you taught? Our reading for today is unique. Here's how. We have the first words of Luke's Gospel and the very last words of his Gospel. It's almost as if we are looking at the bookends of the Gospel according to Saint Luke.

And as we look at the backend of his Gospel, what do we see as his summary of the entire book? I would venture to say that we see the heart and core of what the entire Scriptures are about. You see, Luke at the end of his Gospel writes the words of Jesus. This is the summary of his Gospel. Look at what Jesus says, **"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."**

Whoa! Doesn't that just make you want to reread and restudy the Old Testament Scriptures? Doesn't that just call you to dig deeper into all the Scriptures? All the Scriptures testify about Jesus.

Now, it's worth pointing out that the description Jesus used for God's Word reassures us that the Old Testament of the Bible as we know today hasn't changed. The Jews had the same 39 books that we have today. Of course, they were written in Hebrew, and they were divided differently than they are in our Bibles, but we can be certain that God has preserved his Word for us.

And here's what else you can know for certain. When Jesus left his disciples, as we see in Luke 24, everything written about him was fulfilled. That tells us that Jesus was the one he claimed to be. Fulfilling dozens and dozens of prophecies perfectly leaves us with no uncertainty regarding his identity as the Promised Savior. He wasn't an imposter. He wasn't some political leader who overthrew the government. He is your Savior. He is the Promised Messiah. He fulfilled all the promises that God gave in the Old Testament, and that means you can be certain that he will keep all the predictions and promises that he has given to us regarding our future and this world's future.

So, if you want to be more confident **in testifying to the certainty of the Scriptures**, read the Scriptures. Investigate them. Research them. You will see that the entire Scriptures are centered on Christ.

But as we do that, let's pray that the Lord would **"open up our minds to understand the Scriptures."** Jesus needs to do that. And God the Holy Spirit needs to do that.

Luke continues to testify, **"Then [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He said to them, 'This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'"**

Remember this is the summary of what Luke's Gospel is about. This is the summary of the message that Jesus wants his followers to declare. **"Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations."** When we **testify to the certainty of the Scriptures**, we proclaim law and gospel. The law of God shows us our sins. When I ignore sharing God's truth with people in my life, I sin. When I blend in with the rest of the world and when I am not being the light for the world, I sin.

So, God calls us to repentance. He shows us our sin and our need for a Savior. He calls us to an entirely different mindset. And what changes me is the gospel. The gospel shows me Christ. The gospel testifies to a Savior who was born in Bethlehem. The gospel is about a Savior who willingly offered his life as the payment for the sins of the world, which includes my sins and your sins. The gospel announces to you, "You are forgiven. It is done. Christ accomplished everything for you. He has given you his righteousness so that you are right with God. Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace." You see, that's what Luke shares in his Gospel. And that's what you can share with others.

But there's even more encouragement in this summary of St. Luke. He ends his Gospel and begins his second book, the book of Acts, with the same event. **"[Jesus] led them out as far as the vicinity of Bethany. He lifted up his hands and blessed them. And while he was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven. So they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God."**

There's a lot we could say about the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, but I want to highlight just one word for you today: blessing.

I think this is so neat. **"Jesus lifted up his hands and blessed them."** As the disciples stood in the shadow of his nail-marked hands, Jesus blessed them. We don't know what that blessing was exactly. But we can be confident that what he spoke over them turned out as a blessing for them.

And here's the really cool thing about this. **"While he was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven."** It's not like he gives a blessing and then disappears. He's speaking the blessing as he departs from them.

I love that picture because it's the same thing that happens to you. At the end of the service today, I will lift my hands over you and speak a blessing. But those aren't my words. Those are God's Word. And you can picture your Lord Jesus Christ raising his nail-marked hands over you and speaking his blessing. Jesus is alive and ascended. He continues to speak his blessing over you. And when God blesses us, something happens.

I'll tell you what happened with the disciples as the Lord Jesus blessed them. Well, actually Luke will tell you what happened. **"So they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God."**

There's that word again: blessing. You see, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and continually praised and blessed God. They were testifying to who God is and what he did. They said nice things about their Savior.

The Lord's blessing over you empowers you to do the same. Maybe it's something so simple as bowing your head and giving thanks for your food in your workplace's cafeteria. Maybe it's something so simple as not using

the same foul language that your coworkers use. Maybe it's simply living your life as the light of the world for your friends, relatives, and neighbors to see.

Here's the key. I know who my Savior is, so do you. I know what's he done, so do you. I know what he's given me, so do you. I know what he's made me, so do you.

But unlike my hopeful certainty that the Milwaukee Brewers will win the World Series, I know with certainty that Christ has won the victory, and so do you. I know with certainty that the ascended Lord is with me, and so do you. I know with certainty that he has prepared a place for me in the eternal kingdom of heaven, and so do you.

How do I know? How do you know? We have been given the certainty of the Scriptures. So, testify! Amen.