THE NARRATIVE WORK OF LUKE

(GOSPEL & ACTS)

(Study Motes)

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By

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a subsidy for any person who would like to be introduced to the narrative "opus" of Luke the evangelist: the Gospel and The Acts of the Apostles which are considered by the biblical scholars as a united work. Here one will find the essential background, general meaning and basic commentary to the text. It is advisable to study the text of the Bible before any other step like meditation, "Lectio Divina", sharing in group or preaching.

The general presentations of the Gospel and the Acts (Number 2 and 4 of the table of contents) are taken from the New American Bible. The division and notes to the text (Number 3 and 5) are compiled by Fr. Lorenzo. Number 6, 7 and 8 are a presentation of the unitarian view of the Narrative Work of Luke by Prof. Giovanni Leonardi, a biblical scholar.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

The Gospel according to Luke is the first **part of a two-volume work** that continues the biblical history of God's dealing with humanity found in the Old Testament, showing how God's promises to Israel have been fulfilled in Jesus and how the salvation promised to Israel and accomplished by Jesus have been extended to the Gentiles.

The stated purpose of the two volume is to provide Theophilus and others like him with certainty – assurance - about earlier instructions they had received. To accomplish this purpose, Luke shows that the preaching and teaching of the representatives of the early church are grounded in the preaching and teaching of Jesus who during his historical ministry, prepared his specially chosen followers and commissioned them to be witnesses of his resurrection and to all else that he did.

This continuity between the historical ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the apostles is Luke's way of guaranteeing the fidelity of the Church's teaching to the teaching of Jesus.

Luke' story of Jesus and of the Church is dominated by a historical perspective. This history is first of all salvation history. God's divine plan for human salvation was accomplished during the period of Jesus, who through the events of his life fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, and this salvation is now extended to all humanity in the period of the Church.

This salvation history moreover, is a part of human history. Luke relates the story of Jesus and the Church to events in contemporary Palestinian and Roman history for, as Paul says in Acts 26:26, "this was not done in a corner".

Finally, Luke relates the story of Jesus and the Church to the life of the church of his time. Luke is concerned with **presenting Christianity as a legitimate form of worship** in the Roman world, a religion that is capable of meeting the needs of a world empire like that of Rome. To this end, Luke depicts the Roman governor Pilate declaring Jesus innocent of any wrong-doing three times.

At the same time, Luke argues in Acts, Christianity is the logical development and proper fulfillment of Judaism and is therefore deserving the same toleration and freedom traditionally accorded to Judaism by Rome.

The prominence given to the period of the church in the story has important consequences for Luke's interpretation of the teaching of Jesus. By presenting the time of the church as a distinct phase of salvation history, Luke accordingly shifts the early Christian emphasis away from the expectation of imminent Second Coming of the Lord to **the day-to-day concerns of the Christian community in the world**. He does this in the gospel by regularly emphasizing the words "each day" in the sayings of Jesus.

Although Luke still believes the *parousia* to be a reality that will come unexpectedly, he is more concerned in presenting the words and deeds of Jesus as guides for the conduct of Christian disciples in the interim period between the Ascension and the Second Coming and with **presenting Jesus himself as the model of Christian life and piety.**

Throughout the gospel, Luke calls upon the Christian disciple to identify with the master Jesus, who is caring and tender toward the poor and lowly, the outcast, the sinner and the afflicted, toward all those who recognize their dependence on God.

But who is severe toward the proud and self-righteous, and particularly toward those who place their material wealth before the service of God and his people. No gospel writer is more concerned than Luke with the mercy and compassion of Jesus. No gospel writer is more concerned with the role of the Spirit in the life of Jesus and of the Christian disciple, with the importance of prayer, or with Jesus' concern for women.

While Jesus calls all humanity to repent, he is particularly demanding of those who would be his disciples. Of them he demands total and absolute detachment from family and material possessions. To all who respond in faith and repentance to the words Jesus preaches, he brings salvation and peace, and life.

Early Christian tradition, from the late second century on, identifies the author of this gospel and The Acts of the Apostles as **Luke**, a **Syrian from Antioch**, who is mentioned in the New Testament in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24 and 2 Timothy 4:11.

The prologue of the gospel makes it clear that **Luke is not part of the first generation** of Christian disciples but is himself dependent on the traditions he received from those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. His two-volume work marks him as someone who was highly literate both in the Old testament traditions according to the Greek versions and in Hellenistic Greek writings.

Because of his dependence on the gospel of Mark and because details in Luke's gospel imply that the author was acquainted with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, the gospel of Luke is dated by most scholars after that date: many propose AD 80-90 as the time of composition. The characteristics of this gospel suggest that Luke was a non-Palestinian writing to a non-Palestinian audience that was largely made up of Gentile Christians. He is traditionally thought to have written his work under the influence of Paul, like Mark of Peter.

DIVISIONS of the Gospel of Luke

- 1. The Prologue (1:1-4)
- 2. The Infancy Narrative (1:5-2:52)
- 3. The Preparation for the Public Ministry (3:1-4:13)
- 4. The Ministry in Galilee (4:14-9:50)
- 5. The Journey to Jerusalem: Luke's Travel Narrative (9:51-19:27)
- 6. The Teaching Ministry in Jerusalem (19:28-21:38)
- 7. The Passion Narrative (22:1-23:56)
- 8. The Resurrection Narrative (24:1-53)

The first two chapters of the gospel of Luke cover the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem and his growing up at Nazareth. But it brings some interesting stories which differ from the Infancy Narrative in the gospel of Matthew. First of all, Luke brings the birth of John the Baptist as the cousin of Jesus and a hint at his growing up to be the stern prophet who prepares the coming of the Messiah.

The annunciation to Zechariah which precedes John's birth is followed by the annunciation to Mary which precedes the account of Jesus' birth: the two stories develop in parallel and are connected by the episode of the visitation of Mary to Elisabeth when the two heroes meet while in the womb of their respective mothers.

The Infancy Narratives in Luke seem to have originated from the testimony of the Blessed Virgin Mary as it appears in the beauty of the detailed narrative of the two stories: the Annunciation and the Nativity. This is hinted by the writer himself when he writes that Mary was keeping all that was happening in her heart and mind.

The details in the story of the birth of John are according to the prophetic fashion and are meant to show that John is a link with the Old Testament. Whereas, the miraculous conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary is unique and corresponds to the Annunciation to Joseph in Matthew's gospel. This proves that Jesus is God with us, the Son of God the Father that God gives to Humanity out of love (CF. John 3:16).

In the presentation of Jesus in the temple and in the episode of Jesus who remained behind in the temple the future mission of Jesus is clearly foretold. In the whole infancy narrative, the protagonists and their stories are presented as the beginning of the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation announced in the promises, prophecies and expectations of the Old Testament. The blessings of Abraham are now starting to be fulfilled and to be extended to all the peoples of the world.

The narrative theology of Luke becomes evident in the three gospel canticles which embellish the infancy narratives: the "Benedictus" of Zechariah, the "Magnificat" of Mama Mary and the "Nunc Dimittis" of the old man Simeon. They all have a part which is biographical and fits the moment in which they are composed. They follow the tradition of the O. T. book of Psalms and they spell out in the form of prayer or hymn the fulfillment of the O. T. promises.

They state the purpose and meaning of the infancy happenings in the context of the understanding of the datum of faith. The canticles are a composition of the evangelist

who interprets the true sentiments of the main characters and expresses them in the fashion of the psalms in the Scriptures.

THE PREPARATION FOR THE PUBLIC MINISTRY (3:1-4:13)

The section starts with a detailed connection with the history of the world and of Palestine (which we can call "civil history"). As in the beginning of ch.2 which deals with Jesus' birth we have the historical connection with Caesar Augustus and the census, here it is Tiberius emperor in Rome... It was then that "the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the desert".

John the Baptist speaks and acts as a prophet. Jesus comes to be baptized and the identity and mission of Jesus is foretold by the theophany. Here Saint Luke tells us that Jesus was 30 years old when he began his public life and puts Jesus' genealogy which is different from the one of Matthew: it starts from Joseph ("who was thought to be the father of Jesus") and goes back not only to Abraham but to Adam and to God. So here Jesus is already called "the son of God" as in the beginning of the gospel of Mark.

THE MINISTRY IN GALILEE (4:14-9:50)

Acceptance and rejection in Nazareth: it is interesting to notice the accuracy which Luke shows in describing the scene in the synagogue in order to emphasize the words of Jesus which are like a program of all his mission and ministry: 4:21: "Today, this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing". This sermon or statement inaugurates the time of fulfillment of the O.T. prophecies. Luke presents the ministry of Jesus as fulfilling O. T. hopes and expectations (7:22). For Luke, even Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection are done in fulfillment of the Scripture (24:25-27; 44-46; Acts 3:18).

The initial acceptance and admiration become soon rejection. Luke joins in this conclusions details that in Mark come later: this is the narrative characteristic of Luke: he likes to conclude the stories, anticipating what in reality happens much later.

Here the rejection of Jesus is a foreshadowing of the whole future ministry of Jesus. Moreover, the rejection of Jesus in his hometown hints at the greater rejection of him by Israel (Acts 13:46).

The vocation of Simon Peter at the beginning of ch. 5 is also a detailed piece of narrative according to the pattern of the vocation stories in the O.T. The Sermon of the Plain (6:20-49) corresponds to Matthew's Sermon of the Mountain. It also starts with the Beatitudes and ends with the parable of the two houses. The beatitudes are only four and are followed by the curses. They represent the original, simpler form of the beatitude which represents a paradox. "The paradox consists in this that the beatitude is declared not because of some good fortune but because of ill fortune: poverty, hunger, sorrow and persecution. Jesus states that in these things men may be happy if they accept them as coming from their Heavenly Father and in the spirit in which Jesus teaches them".

The love for enemy and compassion are stressed in the Sermon of the Plain. The sentence of Jesus in Matthew: "Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect" becomes: "Be merciful...".

The mission of Jesus continues by the Twelve Apostles. Peter confesses Jesus to be the Messiah and Jesus gives the prediction of his Passion and the conditions of discipleship. This section ends with the Theophany of the Transfiguration. In Luke's account, Moses and Elijah are discussing with Jesus about "his exodus which he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem".

THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM: LUKE'S TRAVEL NARRATIVE(9:51-19:27)

This section is organized as a trip to Jerusalem, the city of destiny, where Jesus' exodus (suffering, death, resurrection and ascension) is to take place, where salvation is accomplished and from where the proclamation of God's saving word is to go forth (24:47; Acts 1:8). Much of the material in Luke's "travel narrative" is teaching for the disciples. During the course of this journey, Jesus is preparing his chosen Galilean witnesses for their future role. Verse 9:51 expresses the determination of Jesus to accomplish his destiny: "Days of his taken up" is a reference to the Paschal Mystery in Jerusalem.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37) in the context of the greatest commandment, Jesus illustrates the superiority of love over legalism. The law of love, proclaimed in the Sermon of the Plain (6:27-36) is exemplified by one who is legally impure.

THE EPISODE OF Martha and Mary (10:38-429 emphasizes the importance of listening the words of the teacher and the concern with women in Luke. Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus: it is a typical, remarkable sign of Jesus attributing to a woman the classic position of a disciple at the feet of the master and it reveals a characteristic attitude of Jesus towards women in this gospel.

Ch. 11 is about prayer. The disciples ask Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples. Jesus teaches the "Our Father" in a slightly shorter form. The chapter continues with many teachings for the disciples.

Chapter 13 opens with a call to repentance. Jesus doesn't want to automatically join a particular misfortune to God's punishment but calls to penance and conversion in order to avert the final condemnation (Cf. John 9:2-3 about the man born blind).

Chapter 15 is deservedly famous for the parables of mercy: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son. The last two are only in Luke. Especially the Prodigal Son exemplifies the mercy of God in teaching of Jesus as in no other place in the New Testament.

Chapter 16 contains the parable of the rich man and Lazarus which is found only in Luke. Abraham's saying: "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" emphasizes the importance of the law. The parable illustrates Luke's concern with Jesus' attitude towards the rich and the poor. The reversal of fates between the rich man and Lazarus explains the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon of the Plain (6:20-21; 24-25).

"The kingdom of God is among you": to the question of the Pharisees about the time of the coming of the kingdom Jesus replies: "The kingdom of God is among you". The emphasis has been shifted from an imminent observable coming of the kingdom to something which is already present in Jesus' preaching and healing ministry.

Chapter 19:1-10: the story of the conversion of the tax collector Zacchaeus is unique in this gospel. Zacchaeus' attitude to riches is the opposite of the one of the rich man in the parable. He is ready to give away some of his riches for the sake of justice and goodness. Jusus calls him "a son of Abraham", a true heir of the promises of God in the Old Testament. Underlying Jesus' depiction of Zacchaeus as the descendant of Abraham, the father of the Jews (1:73; 16:22-31) is his recognition of the central place occupied by Israel in the plan of salvation.

THE TEACHING MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM (19:28-21:38)

19:41-44 The lament over Jerusalem is found only in Luke. By not accepting Jesus, the one who mediates peace, Jerusalem will not find peace but will become the victim of devastation.

20:22 Through this question, the agents of the Jerusalem religious leadership hope to force Jesus to take sides on the sensitive issue of paying taxes to the colonizers. The issue of not payment taxes to Rome becomes a reason of the Jewish revolt which provoked the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (A.D. 70).

Ch. 21: The Eschatological Discourse: Luke maintains the belief in the early expectation of the end of the age, but by focusing attention throughout the gospel on the importance of the day-to-day following of Jesus, he has come to terms with what seemed to the early Christian community to be a delay in the *Parousia*. Luke separates the historical destruction of Jerusalem from the signs of the final coming of the Son of man by a period that he refers to as "the times of the Gentiles".

21:8 "The time has come": in Luke the proclamation of the imminent end of the age has itself become a false teaching.

The actual destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70 upon which Luke and his community look back provides the assurance that, just as Jesus' prediction of Jerusalem's destruction was fulfilled, so too will be the announcement of their final redemption (27-28).

THE PASSION NARRATIVE (22:1-23:56)

In Luke we find original narrative ways of touching certain subjects:

- o the Institution of the Eucharist is very detailed and close to Saint Paul's early account in 1 Corinthians 11: 23ff;
- o in the Agony in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus sweats blood;
- o Jesus before Herod;
- o only Luke recounts that "Jesus turned and looked at Peter": this look leads to Peter's crying of repentance;
- o words of Jesus to the women on the way of the cross;
- o the good, penitent thief and Jesus' words to him;

o the last words of Jesus on the cross as he forgives and entrusts himself to the Father (Ps. 31).

THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVE (24:1-54)

The resurrection narrative in Luke contains the Two Disciples of Emmaus, the apparition in the Upper Room and the Ascension: they all happen in one day: the first day of the week: Easter Sunday and in and around Jerusalem. A consistent theme throughout the narrative is that the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus were accomplished in fulfillment of old Testament promises and of Jewish hopes.

In the account of the Ascension, Jesus goes up to heaven blessing the disciples and the world. The account of the Ascension is repeated in the Acts after 40 days of the appearance of the Risen Jesus. The Ascension marks the end of the time of Jesus and signals the beginning of the time of the Church.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Acts of the Apostles, the second volume of Luke's two-volume work, continues Luke's presentation of biblical history, describing how the salvation promised to Israel in the Old Testament and accomplished by Jesus has now under the guidance of the Holy Spirit been extended to the Gentiles.

This was accomplished through the divinely chosen representatives whom Jesus prepared during his historical ministry and commissioned after his resurrection as witnesses of all that he taught.

Luke's preoccupation with the Christian community as the Spirit-guided bearer of the word of salvation rules out of his book detailed histories of the activity of most of the preachers. Only the main lines of the roles of Peter and Paul serve Luke's interest.

Peter was the leading member of the Twelve, a miracle worker like Jesus in the Gospel, the object of divine care and the spokesman of the Christian community, who,

according to Luke, who was largely responsible for the growth of the community in the early days.

Paul eventually joined the community at Antioch, which subsequently commissioned him and Barnabas to undertake the spreading of the Gospel to Asia Minor. The missionary venture generally failed to win the Jews of the *diaspora* to the Gospel but enjoyed success among the Gentiles.

Paul's refusal to impose the Mosaic Law upon his Gentile converts provoked very strong objections among the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem, but both Peter and James supported his position.

Paul's second and third Missionary journey resulted in the same pattern of failure among the Jews generally but of some success among the Gentiles. Paul, like Peter, is presented as a miracle worker and the object of divine care.

In Acts, Luke has provided a broad survey of the church's development, from the resurrection of Jesus to Paul's first Roman imprisonment, the point at which the book ends.

In telling this story, Luke describes the emergence of Christianity from its origin in Judaism to its position as a religion of worldwide status and appeal. Originally, a Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem, the Church was placed in circumstances impelling it to include within its membership people of other cultures: the Samaritans, at first an occasional Gentile, then finally the Gentiles on principle.

Fear on the part of the Jewish people that Christianity, particularly as preached to the Gentiles,, threatened their own cultural heritage caused them to be suspicious of Paul's Gospel.

The inability of Christian missionaries to allay this apprehension inevitably created the situation in which the Gospel was preached more and more to the Gentiles. Towards the end of Paul's career, the Christian communities, with the exception of those of Palestine itself, were mainly of Gentile membership.

In tracing the emergence of Christianity from Judaism, Luke is insistent upon the prominence of Israel in the divine plan of salvation and that the extension of salvation to the Gentiles has been a part of the divine plan from the beginning.

In the development of the Church from a Jewish Christian origin in Jerusalem, with its roots in Jewish religion traditions, to a series of Christian communities among the Gentiles of the Roman empire, Luke perceives the action of God in History, laying open the heart of all humanity to the divine message of salvation.

His approach to the history of the Church is motivated by his theological interests. His history of the apostolic Church is the story of a Spirit-guided community and a Spirit-guided spread of the Word of God. The travels of Peter and Paul are in reality **the travels of the Word of God** as it spread from Jerusalem, the city of destiny for Jesus, to Rome, the capital of the civilized world of Luke's day.

The narrative theology of Luke is evident in the **gospel canticles**: the *Benedictus* of Zecharias, the *Magnificat* of Mary and the *Nunc dimittis* of Simeon. In the Acts it is plain in the several **discourses of Peter and Paul.**

Nonetheless, the historical data he utilizes are of value for the understanding of the Church's early life and development and, as **a general background to the Pauline epistles**. In the interpretation of the Acts, care must be exercised to determine Luke's theological aims and interests and to evaluate his historical data without exaggerating their literal accuracy or underestimating their factual worth.

Finally, an apologetic concern is evident throughout the Acts. By stressing the continuity between Judaism and Christianity, Luke argues that Christianity is deserving the same toleration accorded Judaism by Rome.

Part of Paul's defense before Roman authorities is to show that Christianity is not a disturber of the peace of the Roman empire. Moreover, when he stands before Roman authorities, he is declared innocent of any crime against the empire. Luke tells his story with the hope that Christianity will be treated as fairly.

The main points of Luke's lesson in the Acts:

- 1. The Kerygma: The kingdom of God is now the Gospel of the Christian Mystery: the center of the Kerygma (Announcement) is the person of Jesus Christ. The Messiah's divinity is evident from the many speeches especially those of Peter and later on Paul.
- 2. The proof of Christ's divinity is taken from the Old Testament prophecies: scriptural texts form the foundation of a systematic Christology. This makes sense

because the first objects of their preaching are the Jews, a method that the apostles will continue using consistently throughout the book of Acts. It is only when the Jewish listeners refuse to believe and reject the good news that the apostles turn to the pagans. The apostles are the witnesses of this interpretation of the scriptures confirmed by miracles.

- 3. The most important and urgent problem facing the new Church was the acceptance/admission of the Gentiles. The first part of the Acts ends with the Council of Jerusalem and the victory of the openness to the wider world.
- 4. The life of the first Christian community is described in its essential elements: the 4 pillars (The teaching of the Apostles, The fellowship, the Breaking of Bread The Eucharist and prayer/worship); the initial communion of goods, the forming of leadership...The sacramental life: faith and baptism, the imposition of hands to receive the Holy Spirit and the Breaking of Bread...
- 5. The power/energy moving the Apostles is the Holy Spirit (The Acts is called: the Gospel of the Holy Spirit). The book is full of enthusiasm, spiritual joy and the wonders of God's works.
- 6. The actual information of the territorial expansion of the early church is invaluable and constitutes a framework for the letters. The beginnings are in Jerusalem and the conclusion with Saint Paul in Rome is the fulfillment of the words of Jesus: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The end of the earth is Rome and there the book ends.

DIVISION

- 1. The Preparation for the Christian Mission (1:1-2:13)
- 2. The Mission In Jerusalem (2:14-8:3)
- 3. The Mission in Judea and Samaria (8:4-9:43)
- 4. The Inauguration of the Gentile Mission (10:1-15:35)
- 5. The Mission of Paul to the Ends of the Earth (15:36-28:31)

PREPARATION FOR THE CHRISTIAN MISSION (1:1-2:13)

The second part of Luke's narrative opus (The Acts) is also dedicated to Theophilus.

The account of the Ascension in Acts happens after the 40 days in which the Risen Jesus proved his resurrection and gave instructions to the Eleven for the continuation of his mission after his departure. One instruction is to wait for the "promise of the Father": the Holy Spirit. After Jesus went back to the Father, the Ascension, the Holy Spirit came: the Pentecost. The one event (Cf. St. John's gospel): Resurrection, Ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit: the Paschal Mystery, has been historicized by Luke i.e. arranged in time.

The Ascension marks the end of the apparitions (with the exception of the one to Paul), the end of the time of Jesus and signals the beginning of the time of the Church. Jesus himself, before going up to heaven, gives the indication of the geographical expansion of the Church which is embraced by the book of the Acts (1:8): from Jerusalem to "the ends of the earth" i.e. Rome.

The death of Judas in Peter's account is different from the Gospel (Matthew 27:5): all the same it is sudden and shameful, it looks like a punishment of God: Cf: "2 Maccabees 9:28; Wisdom 4:19.

The choice of Matthias highlights of the number 12: the number of apostles whom Jesus had chosen, signifying universality: the 12 tribes of Israel and in the new Israel, the Church made up of all the peoples of the earth. The one who takes the place of Judas must be a man and a witness i.e. to have had the experience of the public life of Jesus from the baptism to his death and burial (from the beginning to the end) and especially a witness of the resurrection (extraordinary experience).

The Pentecost. "A strong wind": wind and spirit are associated also in John 3:8. "Tongues of fire" like in the theophany at Sinai for the covenant (Exodus 19:18).

"Speaking in tongues" (2:1-11): this sign is not the unintelligible utterances like in other contexts (more common meaning of "speaking in tongues"): each of the foreign groups present understood in his own language: a special sign only for Pentecost: GLOSSOLALIA). It has anyway a symbolic meaning: the calling of all the nations to the Gospel and eventually the gospel message will be announced in all the languages of the world: the reversal of the Tower of Babel: the beginning of the restoration of the unity of humanity as in the hymn: "Defeat our Babel with your Pentecost".

THE MISSION IN JERUSALEM (2:14-8:3)

The speech of Peter represent the kerygma (greek for announcement/proclamation) which is about the Christian Mystery: life, death and Resurrection of Jesus: the Gospel which the listeners are invited to accept by faith and adhere by being baptized in water by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was even called on the baptized by the imposition of the hands (8:14-17). The first speech is followed by other 4 by Peter and the last by Paul (13:16-41). Other speeches are present in the Acts and they develop what is called "narrative theology" in Luke.

2:42 –The early Christian community is built on the 4 pillars: the teaching of the Apostles, the fellowship, the Eucharist and prayer/worship: a priestly people. They used the temple for prayer and as a place to proclaim the Gospel because of the presence of many people, but they offered the Eucharistic sacrifice/meal in their homes. The temple sacrifices are now obsolete and very soon the temple itself will disappear.

They held things in common and they had a good name among the people. The picture of the early Christian community is idyllic, but very soon problems will arise...

4:12 – "There is no other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved"

4:13 – The boldness of Peter= parresia: the strength and courage of the primitive announcement.

Chapter 6: the problem of distributing food to the widows and the complain which arose resolves in the choice of the 7 deacons and their consecration/dedication by the imposition of the hands. The Apostles remarkably give priority to the word of God and prayer. The Deacons (servants) are assigned to distribution of food "serving at tables", but this by no means this is their only task: Philip and Stephen are more dedicated to preaching.

Stephen, the first martyr, gives in his speech an overview of salvation History and dies praying like Jesus. Moreover, in his final moment, he sees Jesus in heaven, standing at the right of God, the Father. This is very important. This is the witness of the New Testament about Jesus, repeated other 18 times: a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy: Mark 14:62: "You will see the Son of Man seated at the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven (reference to Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 110:1.

The death of Jesus brings the first persecution. Saul was active in persecuting the disciple of Jesus. They were forced to run away from Jerusalem.

THE MISSION IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA (8:4-9:43)

Deacon Philip, great missionary to Samaria, he baptizes, but Peter and John impose the hands for the faithful to receive the Holy Spirit and his gifts. The manifestation of extraordinary gifts is linked to the reception of the Holy Spirit, a charismatic experience which doesn't exclude the presence of the grace of the Holy Spirit in the reception of baptism.

The episode of Simon, the magician, is meant to show that the miraculous power of the apostles like Peter is different from magic which is by self-definition self-serving or making use of special powers for selfish purpose.

8:26-38 The conversion of the Ethiopian: Christianity breaks the racial barriers with the exemplary method of missionary Philip.

9:1-19 The Risen Jesus appears to Saul on the way to Damascus. Paul is blinded and introduced to the whole message by Ananias and then baptized. He starts preaching first in Damascus and later on in Jerusalem, stating that Jesus is "the Son of God" and "the Messiah". Paul's experience of Jesus is not a vision but the last of the apparitions of the Risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:8). There are 3 versions of the episode of Saul's encounter with Jesus (9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:2-18), but in all three the words of Jesus are the same: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?". Paul is "a divinely chosen instrument" (9:15).

Another account is in Paul's letter to the Galatians (1:11-2:1-10). It is difficult to harmonize the movements of Paul according to this letter and the Acts, especially the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-35).

THE INAUGURATION OF THE GENTILE MISSION (10:1-15:35)

Saint Peter introduces the first non-Jew to Christianity: the centurion Cornelius and his family. The episode has some remarkable features. Although Saint Paul is the apostles of the Gentiles and has the lion's share in the book of the Acts, Luke gives pre-eminence to Peter's action as it is narrated with many details. The leadership of Peter is undeniable in the Acts.

Cornelius and family already have started praying and receive the vision of the angel of God who gives them instruction to call Peter. Peter is still keeping the rules about eating of the traditional Judaism. The instruction he receives in the dream repeats Christ's lesson about all food to be clean and symbol of the call of all peoples to faith in Jesus and baptism.

The Holy Spirit precedes Baptism, but the baptism by the leader of the community is seen as essential and necessary. The whole episode stresses the initiative of God. Peter's speech contains the sentence: "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation, whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him".

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem are scandalized but they accept the explanation. The "official opening" to the Pagans will need more time and pressure. It will be the result of the Council of Jerusalem (AD 48) and the zeal of Paul and Barnabas, after the experience of Antioch and their First Missionary Journey.

At Antioch of Syria, the follower of Jesus are called for the first time "Christians" (11:14).

Prophet Agabus speaks in Antioch of the famine which is to happen in Judea. Paul and Barnabas are sent to bring help. The new churches are asked to bring help to the poor of Jerusalem, the first original Christian community. Paul is shown in Acts and in 2 Corinthians: 8-9 to be organizing a collection and bringing money to Jerusalem.

Contemporarily, there is persecution against the Christians provoked by Herod Agrippa I and his support for the Pharisaic Judaism. James, John's brother, is the first to suffer martyrdom among the Twelve (AD 42). Agrippa II, his son, with his daughter Bernice will meet St. Paul in chapter 25-26.

Chapter 13-14 cover the first missionary journey of St. Paul to Asia Minor. The Holy Spirit sets apart Paul and Barnabas for this mission. Antioch is now a real center of missionary activity after Jerusalem. They starts form Cyprus, Barnabas' country. John Mark, Barnabas' cousin, is with them. But he decides to leave them and go back to Jerusalem (13:13). Paul is not happy about it. They preach the Gospel first to their fellow Jews in the synagogue, but then they address the Gentiles once the Jews refuse the message. The travel to Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium and Listra. The approach to the pagans, which will expanded by Paul in his speech in Athens, is already present in ch.

14:14-19: the beginning of a Natural Theology or Theodicy. They start Christian communities and on their way back they visit them and appoint "presbyters".

The Council of Jerusalem is of the utmost importance for the acceptance of the Gentiles: it represents a "turning point". The Jerusalem Council marks the official rejection of the rigid view that the Gentile converts were obliged to observe the Mosaic Law completely. The Council, through the intervention of James, the leader of the Jerusalem community, proposes a moderate position still asking to observe some dietary avoidances: meat sacrificed to idols, of strangled animals and blood. Moreover, to abstain from unlawful marriages (*porneya*=fornication). All these practices were abhorrent to Jews. The Jewish practices most essential were: circumcision. The keeping of the Sabbath and the keeping of the dietary prohibitions. From here to the end of the book of the Acts, Paul and the Gentile Mission become the focus of Luke's writing.

THE MISSION OF PAUL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH (15:36-28:31)

15:36-18:22 cover the second missionary journey of Paul: through the old route of Asia Minor to Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea), then to Greece (Athens, Corinth), then through Ephesus back to Antioch of Syria. The trip lasted about three years. Paul and Barnabas split company because of John Mark whom Paul doesn't want any more. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus. Paul continued with the company of Silas and later of his disciple Timothy.

16:4 One of the reasons of Paul's journey and companions was to make known to the new Christian communities the decision of the Council of Jerusalem.

16:10 the first "WE" section where Luke writes as one of Paul's companions. They are here below:

- o 16:10-17 The trip to Europe: Macedonia and Philippi
- o 20:5-15 Trip from Philippi to Miletus
- o 21:1-18 Trip from Miletus to Jerusalem
- O 27:1-28 Trip to Rome via Crete and shipwreck at Malta

At Philippi they convert Lydia who invite them to stay in her house.

17 Paul, Silas and Timothy at Thessalonica and Berea: the only place where the Jews in the synagogue are open to listen to the Gospel of Jesus and many are converted. Paul is sent ahead to Athens to avoid the anger of other Jews.

17:16-34 The famous speech of Paul to the members of the Areopagus: courage of Paul in criticizing the statues of the gods and new arguments from the theology of nature: Theodicy: example of attempt to inculturate the Gospel, interesting even if unsuccessful.

In Paul's appearance in the Areopagus, he preaches to the Gentiles in the cultural center of the ancient world. The speech is more theological than Christological. Paul appeals to the Greek world's belief in divinity as responsible for the origin and the existence of the universe. It criticizes the images. It praises the attempt to find God: a very human instinct. He speaks of God as the Judge of humanity through the prophet Jesus who is risen from the dead...At this point they lose him...

Paul at Corinth. Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish Christians coming from Rome, expelled by emperor Claudius, St. Paul stays with them because they were of the same trade: tent-makers.

18:12 Gallio, the roman proconsul of Achaia who deals with Paul, was proconsul in the years AD 51-52 as we know from another source. The date is important for the chronology of Paul's life and his letters. Gallio was the brother of Seneca, the famous philosopher and tutor of emperor Nero who was forced by Nero to commit suicide.

18:23-21:16 Third missionary journey: it refers to Paul's activity in Ephesus. There is a certain restlessness in Paul and the growing conviction that the Spirit bids him to return to Jerusalem and prepare to go to Rome (19:21).

19:11-12 Paul's miraculous power with clothes that touched his skin reminds us of Peter's shadow falling on mats (5:16).

20:17-38 The speech to the elders (17: "presbyteroi") of Ephesus at Miletus is a masterpiece of pastoral theology and a kind of last will and testament. Remarkably, Paul quotes a saying of Jesus which is not in the Gospels: "It is more blessed to give than to receive". He calls them "episcopoi" (28)whereas we would have expected "presbiteroi" (and in 1Peter 5:1 Peter calls the leaders of churches "presbyteroi" where we would have expected "episcopoi": that means that the terminology of the leadership is still fluid, not yet fixed, but the functions are already clear enough). The speech is highly emotional and provokes the tears of the elders.

21:17-28:31 St. Paul reaches Rome "the end of the earth"

St. Paul in Jerusalem meets the opposition of the Jews.

21:17-26 The opposition to Paul in Jerusalem comes also from the Christians of Jewish origin, not only from the Jews. These Jewish Christians were many and they were joining their faith in Jesus with the observance of the Jewish traditions: "Many thousands of believers there are among the Jews and they are all zealous observers of the

law. They have been informed that you are teaching all the Jews who are living among the Gentiles to abandon Moses and that you are telling them not to circumcise their children or to observe their customary practices". This was not true, since the dispositions of the Council of Jerusalem were for the Gentiles, not for the Jews, but the Jews may have been attracted to be free themselves...

The arrest of Paul and his transfer to Caesarea Maritima (on the shore of the Mediterranean sea) is dramatic and gives Paul the opportunity to make several meaningful speeches, giving again an account of his conversion twice, the last time in the very beautiful speech in front of the procurator Festus and king Agrippa. This speech is again a proclamation of the Christian Mystery (kerygma) like the speeches of Peter in the beginning of the Acts.

Chapters 27-28 Very beautiful and interesting description of the trip to Rome via Crete and with shipwreck in the island of Malta.

28:16 "When he entered Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him".

28:30-31 Although the ending of the Acts may seem to be abrupt, Luke has now completed his story with the establishment of Paul and the proclamation of Christianity in Rome. Paul's confident and unhindered proclamation of the Gospel in Rome forms the climax of the story whose outline was provided in the beginning by Jesus himself: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... and to the end of the earth" (1:8).

Tradition has that Paul was acquitted by the emperor and went to preach the Gospel to Spain. Coming back, he was captured and beheaded at the Tre Fontane, outside the walls of Rome, during the persecution of Nero (around AD 67), at the time when even St. Peter was killed by crucifixion with head down at the Vatican Hill.

THE NARRATIVE WORK OF LUKE

(by Prof. Giovanni Leonardi, biblist)

PROLOGUE AND INTRODUCTION TO THE ENTIRE WORK (Luke 1:1-4:44)

Prologue (1:1-4)

Narrative Introduction (1:5-4:44)

- From Nazareth to Jerusalem and back to Nazareth: Infancy of Jesus, the Messiah and the Son of God in comparison with that of John the Baptist, the Precursor (1:5-2:52)
- From Nazareth to the Jordan and back to Nazareth: Mission of Jesus, Son of god and son of Adam in comparison with the Mission of the Baptist (3:1-4:14)
- Program and praxis of Jesus: at Nazareth: "Evangelize the poor, etc"; at Capernaum and in all the synagogues of Judea (4:15-44)

THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE (Luke 5:-24:53)

Part one: Evangelization of Jesus in Galilee (part of Judea) (4:15-9:50)

Section 1: Call of the first three disciples collaborators and consequent discussions (5.1-6:11)

Section 2: Choice of the twelve apostles and the teaching and miracle-working ministry of Jesus (6:12-8:56)

Section 3: Galilean mission of the Twelve and various instructions (9:1-50)

Part two: Jesus journeying to Jerusalem, a long journey (9:51-19:48)

Section 1: Mission and teaching to the disciples, confrontation with the adversaries, friends and the crowd (9:51-13:23)

Section 2: Dialogue with the people and Pharisees, instructions to the crowds and to the disciples (13:22-17:10)

Section 3: Instructions about the kingdom of God, present and future (17:111-19:27)

Section 4: Jesus arrives at Jerusalem riding a donkey, he chases away the vendors from the temple, and teaches there every day (19:28-48)

Part Three: Jesus at Jerusalem: his teachings, passion, death and resurrection and ascension to heaven (20:1-24:53)

Section 1: Approved by the people, rejected by the Leadership (20:1-21:38)

Section 2: The day of the passion and death at Jerusalem of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and the Servant of Yahweh (22:1-23:56)

Section 3:The first day of the week: angelic announcement of the Resurrection to the women, apparition of Jesus to the two disciples of Emmaus and to the entire group, ascension to heaven (24:1-53)

THE NARRATIVE OF THE ACTS (Acts 1:1-28:31)

Prologue and narrative introduction

Prologue to Theophilus: a second book in continuation with the Gospel (1:1-2)

Narrative introduction: In Jerusalem: transition from Jesus to the Apostles (1:3-26)

Part One: At Jerusalem : birth of the messianic church and its irradiation up to Antioch (2:1-14:28)

Section 1: The birth and expansion of the messianic church at Jerusalem and surrounding area (2:1-8:3)

Section 2: The spreading of the community to Samaria, to the whole of Judea, to Antioch, with the addition of the community of the pagans without the obligation of the Jewish customs ((:4-12:25)

Section 3: First missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul: a constellation of communities with the same style as at Antioch(13:1-14:28)

Central hinge-episode: at Jerusalem, the council approve the new praxis of Antioch towards the pagans (15:1-35)

Part two: The missionary journeys of Paul from Antioch to Europe and Rome (15:36-28:31)

Section 1: The second apostolic journey of Paul from Antioch to Corinth; and the third from Jerusalem to Ephesus (15:36-19:20)

Section 2: The journey of Paul towards Rome, but via Jerusalem, where he is arrested (19:21-23:11)

Section 3: Paul appeals to Caesar and arrives at Rome in chains (23:12-28:16)

Epilogue: At Rome for two years: Paul, in chains, announces the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ: first to the Jews, then to all Jews and Pagans (28:17-31)