St Luke by Eileen Bigg

A sermon given on Sunday 18 October 2026
at St John the Baptist Church, Aldenham

Readings: Isaiah 35:3-6; Luke 10:1-9

Year A, Proper 24, Trinity 20 & St Luke's Day

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head;
One to watch and one to pray,
and two to bear my soul away.
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.

I wonder if anyone remembers that prayer from their childhood.

It is a very old prayer, and has been set to some beautiful music. It was a charm against witchcraft, actually, dating from 1656, but based on an older, Jewish prayer, where the four named angels were Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael, and it in turn goes back to a Babylonian prayer.

Matthew. Mark, Luke and John – the four evangelists. What exactly is an evangelist, you may cry?

An evangelist is someone who brings good news – the *euangellion* – especially the good news contained in the Gospel of Christ.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the four gospels, and Luke went on to write the Acts of the Apostles. Matthew and John were also Jesus' disciples, so witnessed the events about which they wrote – but where did the accounts of Mark and Luke come from?

Well, it is thought that, at the time of Jesus, Mark was a young man, younger than John, the youngest disciple, and possibly a nephew of Barnabas, and as John Mark he went on to travel with Paul and Uncle Barnabas in some of the exploits recounted in the Acts of the Apostles.

But Luke? Who was Luke? As today is St Luke's Day, let's see if we can find out some more about Luke.

He was born in the early years of the first century AD, in the Greek city of Antioch in Syria, and died aged 84. Being a Gentile and not a Jew, Luke has the unusual accolade of being the only Gentile who has written books in the Bible.

We are probably aware that Matthew, a Jew, wrote his gospel to prove that Jesus was the fulfilment of many Jewish prophecies. Because Luke was a Gentile and not writing specifically for Jewish readers, his Gospel

emphasises that Christ's salvation is for all, and this is the only Gospel in which Jesus is referred to as Saviour.

Luke is represented symbolically by a winged ox, a Jewish symbol of sacrifice. The wings of the ox indicate the call to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world.

Luke's Gospel was written in around the year 70AD. We know Luke was a doctor, as he was described as *the beloved physician* in Paul's letter to the Colossians[1].

He is the patron saint of physicians, surgeons, butchers (because of the ox symbol), notaries (through Luke's detailed and historically identifiable account of Jesus' life), glass industry workers, goldsmiths, lace makers, sculptors, painters and artists.

The art connection is because tradition has it that Luke was the first iconographer, that is, he painted icons, or rather, wrote icons, as is the terminology. The expression for producing icons is "hagiography," which means "holy writing." Icons are often referred to as "written" rather than "drawn" or "painted" because they depict theological truths, and serve as a form of visual theology, like a sacred window into the divine, conveying spiritual power and grace.

Luke has been closely associated with Mary, mother of Jesus. According to legend, he painted her portrait, but, alas, this has not survived. As a doctor, Luke very likely

[1] Col 4:14

attended Mary in her later years. Only Luke's gospel tells us of the early life of Jesus, indeed, even of what happened immediately beforehand – the annunciation, Mary meeting with her cousin Elizabeth, the census of Caesar Augustus, the journey to Bethlehem, then Jesus' birth, the adoration of the shepherds, Jesus' circumcision, the words of Simeon, and Jesus at age 12 remaining in the temple in Jerusalem, talking with the doctors of the law, giving his parents considerable cause for concern!

All very personal encounters. So we can easily believe that it was Mary who related all these wondrous events to Luke, perhaps while she had her portrait painted.

Luke was certainly a great artist with words. Scholars can tell by the language and grammatical constructions that he used that he was highly educated.

Luke's Gospel is regarded as the most poetic of the Gospels. He writes with compassion, showing that God's grace extends to all, including marginalised groups such as Samaritans, the poor, lepers, yes, and women and children.

And this theme continues into his second book: from the Book of Acts we can see that Luke suggests that wealth corrupts our relationship with God, as he describes the sharing of money and property amongst the early Christians, *such that there was not a needy person among them*.

A good example to follow.

Although Luke may not have been, initially, a close disciple of Jesus, we understand from early church writings that Luke was included in the 70 sent out, which episode we heard today in our Gospel reading.

Jesus sent out 70 trusted followers into nearby towns, in pairs, so they had with them only a companion – no accompanying paraphernalia, such as bag, purse, or even sandals - they travelled barefoot. They had strict instructions to offer blessings where they visited and to accept hospitality if offered.

Jesus knew it would be dangerous – *See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves*.

The message of peace could have been controversial. These were not peaceful times. There were frequent tribal uprisings – one in point caused by the affronted family of Herod's first wife after he divorced her.

There was tension between the ordinary person and the Temple officials who enforced strict adherence to Jewish law.

There was tension, going back hundreds of years, between the Jews and their neighbours who occupied the land between Galilee and Judea, where Jerusalem was situated – that is, the Samaritans.

There was tension between all in that part of the East Mediterranean and the Romans, who had imposed an

occupying army because of the unrest there. This army was much hated and feared.

So the greeting "Peace be on this house" may have been like a red rag to a bull, if someone was nursing a grievance, or it could have been received with great relief.

If Jesus' messengers were accepted and granted hospitality, they were empowered to offer healing, a sign of God's grace and love. Perhaps Luke found good use for his medical skills and was additionally empowered through the Holy Spirit.

And we learn a few verses after the end of this morning's passage that this mission was successful. *The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'*

Luke's Gospel closes with an account of the Ascension of Jesus, and is the only gospel to feature this event. A similar account begins the book of the Acts of the Apostles. It appears to be an eye witness account, so we can assume that Luke was very involved with the mission of Jesus.

And of course Luke accompanied Paul on his voyages and missions around the eastern Mediterranean. Luke wrote the book the Acts of the Apostles and it is obvious that he shared in these experiences in the latter part of the account.

What must Luke have been like? He noticed things, to be able to write his detailed and accurate reports, and he would have noticed people too, checking for any symptoms of illness, visible or hidden, where he could be of medical assistance.

He would have been kindly, caring, sympathetic, with a listening ear and a gentle touch.

To embark upon travels with Paul, to spread further the Way of Jesus, to tell others of his saving grace, would have required an adventurous spirit, determination, adaptability, courage, resilience, and great faith.

Would that we too could display such properties!

In addition, as a physician, Luke would have been able, as Isaiah prophesied*, to open the eyes of the blind, to unstop the ears of the deaf, to assist the lame to leap like a deer, and to enable the tongue of the speechless to sing for joy.*

How wonderful!

We have already made our intercessions. Perhaps in personal prayer later we can remember before God all those who work to bring about Isaiah's prophecy, not just surgeons, and physicians like Luke, but those who may be overlooked in the medical profession.

Let us pray for the opticians, optometrists, spectacle makers, those who make notices and books in Braille, those who train and care for guide dogs for the blind,

those who enable captions and sub-titles to appear on our screens.

Let us pray for audiologists, hearing aid manufacturers, interpreters for the deaf, those who train and care for hearing dogs for the deaf, technicians who install hearing loops in public spaces and those who, for instance, are responsible for the audible signals in fire alarms and pedestrian crossings.

Let us pray for physiotherapists, occupational therapists, chiropractors, podiatrists, prosthetic limb manufacturers and all who assist those less able.

And, not forgetting the speechless, let us give thanks for all who aid communication and speak up for those unable to do so themselves.

Through Luke's writings we can see how the life and teachings of Jesus had a gradual and wide-reaching effect across the Mediterranean, and how the early church was established through the determination of a faithful few.

It is important that we keep Luke's work in focus, and continue to demonstrate, as far as we can, through our words and deeds, how God's grace extends to all, including the marginalised, those ill, the poor, oppressed, and yes, even the women and children.

Let us go in peace and do likewise.

Amen.